

PD DR. Hans Gerald Hödl, University of Vienna, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Institute for
the Study of Religions

**Afro-American Religions. Introductory Course. Overview & focussing on afro-
Caribbean Religion (Santería, Vodun, Shango, Spiritual Baptists, Rastafarianism)**

Course given at the University of Szeged (October/November 2004) and at the Masaryk-
University of Brno (March/April 2006)

Attention: This text was written with the only aim of providing material for the students who
have attended this course in order to prepare for the exam. It does not meet the standards of a
text ready to be published. There is a bibliography at the end of the text, but there are no
footnotes to tell which passages of these books and essays have been worked into this text or
cited.

Furthermore, the chapter on the history of Santería has been explained in the lecture given at
Brno in more detail, as some other chapters, too. For that, please consult the PPP of the
lecture, also featured at the network of Masaryk-University. Nevertheless, the exam will only
cover data featured in this course-book.

For pictures of objects related to the cult, maps and the like please also consult the PPP.

0. Introduction, Overview

This course deals with Afro-American Religions. These are religions that have developed in
the Americas among the (descendants of the) slaves brought from Africa to the Americas.
One can roughly distinguish five groups:

1. Religions that have preserved and transformed the autochthonous African religions,
mainly of West African (Gold & Ivory Coast), but also of Central African origin (Bantu-
traditions).
2. Christian Churches or denominations characterised by elements of African spirituality
(„Black Churches“)
3. Religious-political movements (many of them sharing a millenarian worldview or a
„Back-to-Africa“ – approach).
4. Specific forms of Catholicism amongst the Afro-American people (Black Catholicism)
5. Specific forms of Islam among these people (Black Muslims).

The course will give a short overview on history and development of these religious
movements and focus mainly on the first form, also getting a short grip on group #2 & 3.
Geographically, according to the circumstances of transatlantic slave trade there have been 2
main places of origin of Afro-American religions with a strong foundation in the African
heritage (group #1), Bahia in Brazil and the Caribbean islands. Nowadays these religions (the
main ones being Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil, Vodun and Santería on the West Indian
islands) have not only spread all over the Americas, but have also found adepts in other parts
of the world. This process brings with it a vivid development of cultural transformation. The
course will give an introduction to this field of study in 4 parts:

- 1) Overview on the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the history of preserving and
transforming the West-African heritage under the circumstances of slavery in the
Caribbean.

- 2) Worldview and ritual in Cuban Santería (regla ocha) compared to traditions of the Yorùbá in West-Africa, which this religion stems from.
- 3) Worldview and ritual among the followers of Haitian Vodou (Voodoo), compared to Ewe and Fon traditions of West Africa, which are the main sources for this religion (religious cults). Short description of the other religions mentioned.
- 4) Material culture and „syncretism“: systematic interpretation of cultural change; evaluation of the theories brought forth by diverse scholars seeking to explain the role of Christian elements in Afro-American religions.

1. The transatlantic slave-trade.

1.1. A few sketches of West-African History

1.1.1. Overview on early history of West-Africa

West-Africa is, amongst others, one of the places in Africa, where rich cultural traditions have developed long before there was contact with European conquerors. It is said to be one of the seven places on earth, where urban culture has developed on its own, without being stimulated by contact from already existing urban cultures. In other words, the West-Africans managed the transformation of pre-urban society to urban society. According to Paul Wheatly (cited by David Carrasco), the seven places where we can find **primary urban generation**, are China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, West-Africa (the place, where we find Nigeria on the maps of our time), the Andes (the place of today's Peru) and Mesoamerica (México). One remarkable feature of this basic kind of cultural transformation lies in the fact, that in each of the places we find important ritual and religious centres, such as temples, pagodas, pyramids, shrines or other forms of religious places separated from everyday world.

Normally, we define cultural progress in terms of techniques of civilisation. Therefore, we divide, according to the use of tools, the cultural history of mankind into stone-age (kőkorszak), bronze-age ((bronzekor) and iron-age (vaskorszak); in different parts of the world the techniques of using tools made out of stone or produced by the method of melting metal and shaping it into different forms, apt for special purposes like cultivating the land, have developed in different times. Special achievements of culture and civilisation are said to be linked to these periods. For example, according to Gordon Childe, in late stone age, the period called Neolithicum in Latin (literally meaning: new stone age, but, what one would call "old" stone age is called "early stone age in English), the so called Neolithic revolution took place. This cultural turn consisted in the establishing of settlements linked to the new cultural technique of raising plants systematically, making the step from hunting and gathering to cultivating the land. Because iron is a relatively hard metal, the invention of iron tools brings with it a progress in cultivation and, on the other hand, in making arms. Therefore, in many societies, we can find myths concerning cultural heroes who are considered as the inventors of

the techniques of forging iron and become Gods of iron, like it is the case in West-African religion. We will talk about that later. In many cultures, smiths are considered as somewhat holy or magic persons for that reason. There is a book by Mircea Eliade on this theme [Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition, 1978)].

Be that as it may, for the sake of the radiocarbon method of dating finds, we do know nowadays, that the West–African iron-age dates around 700-500 bc. (and not as late as 300 bc., which was the old dating). And, if that is right, it cannot be the case, that it has been stimulated by the East-African iron age of Meroe, but has to be looked at as a development of its own.

The first iron-age-culture of the West-African region is called “Nok-culture”, named after a little village in the central part of Nigeria. It is famous for the finds of little terracotta figures, that show human faces in a significant style. It is also important for our field of study, since there are suggestions, that Yorùbá culture may have been influenced by Nok-culture.

During the first millennium a.c. urban development took place in West–Africa, kingdoms where founded and later, through Trans-Saharan trading after 700 a.c. relatively stable contact with Muslim culture and religion was to be established. In this context, the kingdoms of Gana, Mali and Songhay have to be mentioned. There had been contact across the Sahara long before that time, as we know from rock-paintings found in the Saharan desert, showing horses and carriages. It has to be mentioned here, that the Saharan desert has grown since the 3rd millennium b. c. We also know about contact with Sub-Saharan Africa from the time of Old Egypt, where accounts had been made on expeditions to the Yams-country (Yams is an African nodule, similar to the potato; it has been cultivated in Africa since the days of old). Trade with Sub-Saharan Africa centred around the exchange of salt, brought by Northern traders for gold, which is abundant in West-Africa and plays the main role in the trading connections with West-Africa during the first millennium a.c. We know about gold coins made out of West-African gold from around 200 a. c. Trade-routes lead from North-Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt) to the first African kingdoms Ghana and Mali. The older one of these two, Ghana, can be traced back to 300 a. c., approximately.

1.1.2. The kingdom of Gana

In the *Tariq-As-Sudan*, an Arab history-book, which was written around 1650 in Timbuktu, 22 emperors of Gana are mentioned before Muslim times and 22 after the beginning of the Muslim calendar. If that was right, we could trace the kingdom of Gana back to 300 a. c. The

kingdom of Gana first is mentioned in historical sources in the year 773. It was founded by the Soninke, a people speaking a language of the Mande-group of the Niger-Kongo languages. One of the main reasons for coming into existence for that kingdom may have been trade with Berbers. Gana is the title of the kings of that kingdom, which was named Wagadu by its inhabitants. The King was in charge of exerting control over trade, but he was also looked at as the representative of the ancestors, being the religious leader of his people. Al Bakri, a Spanish Arab, gives a description of the Gana Tunka Manin in the year of 1065. He writes, that Tunka Manin allowed the Muslim Berbers to build a city of their own, but stayed truthful to his native religion himself. The importance of Gana lay in its function as a trade-center between the North-African Traders and the inhabitants of the so-called “Gold-Coast” in the South, who were producing gold and ivory.

Around the year 1000 a pious and strict Muslim, Abdullah Ibn Yasin, started a movement among the Mauretanian Berbers called the Almoravids (from: Al-Murabethin, the people of the hermitage), who, in 1056 not only expanded to the north, to Morocco and, later on, Spain, but also to the south, to Gana. Normally, history books have it, that in 1076 the capital of Gana was taken by the Almoravids; we cannot even be really sure, that at this time the capital had been Kumbi Saleh. Nevertheless, this seems plausible, and, what we do know, is that, with the beginning of the 13th century, the kingdom destabilises and it ends around 1240.

1.1.3. The kingdom of Mali

The kingdom of Mali should not be looked at as a new power that took over control in the region after the decline of Gana, but rather as a shifting of the centre of power within the same region. The first king of Mali, Barmandana, ruled around 1050. He became a Muslim and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Mali took over the control of the Trans-Saharan-Trade, in a way an heir to the function of Gana within that region. Between 1235 and 1400 it was at the height of its power, with those outstanding rulers:

- Sundiata (1235-1260), who is looked at as the founder of the empire
- Mansa Sukuru (1298-1308), of whom Ibn Khaldoun, a North-African historian, has written: “Under his powerful government, the power of Mali became mighty. All the nations of the Sudan stood in awe of mali, and the merchants of North Africa travelled to his country”.
- Mansa Kankan Musa and Mansa Suleyman (1312-1360)

The emperor’s title was Mansa, and the emperors were Muslims, but they did not prohibit the traditional religion of the Mandinka. He made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca, bringing back

with him a number of learned men from Egypt, among them As-Saheli, who built new Mosques in Gao and Timbuktu. With his reign and the reign of Suleyman, mali was at the height of it's power, exerting control over a large region producing many important goods, such as gold, kola-nuts, and ivory. Around 1400 the empire began to decline.

1.1.4. The empire of Songhay (to be pronounced as “Son-r-ay”)

Songhay is the name of a people from the middle region of the Niger, of nowadays approximately 600.000 people. During the 16th century, Songhay was the most powerful empire in West-Africa. It's rise to power began with the reign of Sunni Ali (Ali Ber, Shi), who is still remembered as a legendary personality among today's Songhay. In the conflicts of religion, customs and law, that arose through the coming of Islam to Western Sudan, Sunni Ali tried to make concession to Islam without turning against traditional religion at the same time. His son, Sunni Baru turned against Islam, which led to a revolt under Muhammed Turay, who was to become Askia the Great after gaining power. He was the first Askia (title of the emperor) of Songhay. Until the 17th century, there have been 10 Askias, during whose rule Timbuktu and Jenne became important centres of trade. After the Portuguese had been defeated in the battle of Al-Ksar-Al-Kabir by Moroccan Muslims, Morocco became a strong military power under Mulay Ahmed and expanded towards south. Finally, an army, mostly consisting of Spanish Muslims and Portuguese and Spanish prisoners managed to take Timbuktu and Goa. After they had lost these cities, the Songhay engaged in a kind of guerilla-warfare, but the end of the empire already was at hand.

1.1.5. Conclusions

Concerning the topic of Trans-Atlantic slave trade, we should keep in mind, that in Muslim times, most of the emperors of the West-African kingdoms converted to Islam and the people in the cities, too. People living in the country remained within their traditional religions. But, due to the fact, that Muslim contact was focused on the cities, we do not know much about these religions at this time, since they are very sparsely mentioned in the sources we have on African history from Muslim writers. But, there was a tradition of slavery both within Muslim societies as well as in the traditional West-African kingdoms. Captives of war were held or sold as slaves, and slavery was also a part of the penitential system.

1.2. The transatlantic slave-trade

So, we have to correct the commonly held image, that slavery in West-Africa had begun about 1441, when the Portuguese sailor Antam Gonçalves captured an African prince and princess on the west coast of the Sahara and gave them as a present to his emperor Prince Henry. In the 15th century, the Portuguese were successful in sailing around the West-African coastal area, so that they did not have to rely on the Trans-Sahara-Routes of merchandising or on the slave- and gold-markets in the coastal region of Senegambia, that stood under the control of the Moors and the Wolof (a West-African people). Instead, they achieved direct access to the gold found on the so called Gold-Coast of West-Africa and to the bight of Benin, in an area dominated to that time by the Akan. In exchange for the gold they sold firearms to the Akan, which was soon restricted by the pope, out of fear, that Muslims could get into possession of this powerful arms. The expanding kingdom of Benin then was in possession of many captives of war, which they Portuguese bought to trade them for gold to the Akan. After Benin had stopped exporting enslaved people, the Portuguese headed for new slave-markets further east, such as the Delta of the river Niger, Igboland and the kingdom of Congo. The latter's emperor, King Afonso Mbemba Nzinga, who became closely linked to Christianity, like his father before him, soon made restrictions on the slave-trade. In reaction to this the Portuguese founded a trade centre called Luanda. In the beginnings, slaves that were not resold on the African continent, were being brought to the Capverde Islands, to the Iberian Peninsula, to Madeira and the Canaries, from where they were brought to the Americas. In 1532, Portuguese merchants started to export slaves from Africa directly to America. As we have seen, this Form of slave trade can be looked at as a continuation of former existing traditions caused by new demands. These demands had their origin in the discovery of America and in the need of the European emperors for Gold and other riches linked to the conquest and colonisation of the newly discovered continent. In the West Indies, the original population soon had been nearly eradicated, and so the need for strong and resistant labourers rose, that were used to hard work under the circumstances of a tropical climate. Although the Portuguese had already established a clandestine form of slave-trade with the West Indies before, it was in the year 1517, that the 350 years of Trans-Atlantic slave trade had its "official" starting point. In that year, a number of catholic priests, among them Bartholomé de las Casas, the Spanish Jesuit who became famous as an early defender of indigenous Indian's rights, had made a petition to the Pope, concerning the rights and the situation of the Indians. Among their suggestions was, that Indian labourers should be replaced by African slaves, who

were more apt to the hard working conditions one had to face as a worker for the Spanish settlers in the Caribbean. Later, de las Casas regretted this suggestion. But it actually gave birth to what was called the triangular trade. This form of commercial relationships between Europe, Africa and the New World consisted in trading European industrial goods to the Africans, exporting slaves from Africa to America in exchange, and finally bringing colonial produce from America to Europe. Due to this structure of the triangular trade, the transport of the slaves from Africa to America was called the „Middle Passage“. The enslaved men and women, who stemmed from different nations and cultures, and therefore were speaking various languages, were brought to the trade-centres by armed men, tied together with chains. Often they had no clear picture of the destination of their journey. For instance, since many of them had never seen sailing ships before, they conceived of the Europeans as a kind of cannibalistic sea-monsters, who drank the blood of Africans (what they thought that red wine was) and wore their skin (what they thought that the black leather-shoes were made of). Many of them died before they middle passage had even begun. The conditions on the slave-ship, where they had extremely little space for each person (less than half a square-meter) gave rise to all kinds of diseases. More than 50% of the enslaved died before reaching the destination of the journey.

The bad situation of the enslaved people was not the only disadvantage that Africa and Africans had to face as an outcome of this form of commercial exchange. Furthermore, the slave trade helped to spread war and disorder in West Africa, and weakened the region. Internal conflicts were nourished, that set apart the various peoples. Finally, these conflicts resulted in a divided and weakened region, so that it was easy for the Europeans to invade the countries and build their African colonies during the 19th century and after the end of the Atlantic slave-trade.

But it also resulted in an Afro-American population in most parts of America. The Africans brought with them their religious traditions, which they did preserve to a certain degree or which were being transformed due to the circumstances of slavery.

Until the end of the 17th century, African slaves were mainly shipped by Portuguese merchants to Brazil, where the region of Salvador de Bahia on the northern coast was the main trading centre for slaves. After conquering regions in the north of Brazil, the Dutch entered into the transatlantic slave-trade and sold slaves to the sugar-plantations in the British and French colonies in the Caribbean. The first African slaves had been brought to these islands as early as 1510, but with the beginning of producing sugar in greater style during the 17th century and as an effect of the so called sugar-boom in Europe during the 18th century, the

need for labourers from Africa increased enormously. In the following period French and English merchants took part in the slave trade themselves.

During the 18th century the slave-trade reached its highest extension. The main part of the slaves was brought to Brazil and the West-Indies. Estimated 42% of the slaves were brought to the Caribbean and estimated 38% to Brazil. It is in these regions, that the Afro-American religions in the strict sense of the word were shaped as a consequence of the triangular trade. Significantly, those religions of the African slaves in America that have a strong foundation in their African heritage came to being among the catholic colonies. We will later try to explain this circumstance.

The main African influences are West-African, mainly the religions of the Yorùbá, the Ewe and Fon. We will discuss the reasons for that later, too. But there is also a certain amount of Central-African impact on these religions, mainly of Congolese and Angolan origin. From these regions slaves were brought to the Americas during the whole period of approximately 350 years, for which the transatlantic slave-trade did last. Britain prohibited slave-trade in 1807, but, although British ships used to bring up the ships of slave-traders, it took a long time until slavery was abolished. In Brazil it was not abolished before 1888. But during these 80 years of diminishing exports of slaves, one can find an increasing tendency to change the traditional attitude towards the slaves, which had preferred to let the slaves work themselves to death and recruit new ones from Africa. So this could be one of the reasons, why traditions of peoples whose members were enslaved at the end of the slave-trade-period had a stronger impact on Afro-American religions.

1.3. The situation of slaves of Yorùbá origin in Cuba

In the late 18th and the early 19th century, the kingdom of Oyo, which had been dominating the area for the last period, began to disintegrate. Within this process of disintegration, several wars between Yorùbá peoples and between Yorùbá and their neighbouring ethnic groups, like the Fulani and the Fon, some of them vassals of Oyo, led to the enslavement of a great number of Yorùbá people, who were brought to Brazil and the Caribbean, mainly Cuba. Between 1800 and 1840 the main part of the exported slaves from the Bight of Benin were of Yorùbá origin. Because of the English troops occupying of Havana for one year in 1762, Cuba opened up for foreign markets, aside its traditional connection to Spain, by which it had been colonised. Meanwhile, the so called sugar-boom, based on the new obsession of Europeans with sugared food, had increased European demands for sugar. In 1792, the Haitian slaves led a successful revolt against their masters and made themselves the rulers of

their country. Therefore, Cuban sugar-industry evolved with the help of the infusion of foreign capital and Cuba's economy changed from being dominated by farming and harbouring to one of the leading sugar-industries in the world. The hard work and the cruel conditions in the sugar-mills, accompanied by the greed of the owners made it impossible to employ contract workers for the job. Out of that reason the need for slaves in Cuba had increased enormously, exactly during the period of increased enslavement of Yorùbá people.

The slaves were organised as members of the church in so called *cabildos*, according to their *naciones*, their true, or constructed African ethnic origin. *Cabildo* literally means "town council". They were structured in a hierarchical way, with titles borrowed from Spanish institutions. As there was a social difference between so called "negros de nación", which meant African-born Africans and the so-called "negros criollos", people of African origin born in Cuba, they were not socially organised in the same institutions. The *cabildos de nación* were headed by hereditary or elected rulers. They had special houses as meeting places and were dedicated to a specific catholic saint, who functioned as their official patron. The *cabildos* provided help to their members and organised dances and feast on the official festival days and Sundays. Church and state tried to use them as a means to exert social control over their members, and they were, from time to time, subject of missionary attempts of the churches. One could detect a kind of "divide and rule"-attitude in decrees of state authority like the one by de governor of Santiago de Cuba in 1843, who called for separation of the different groups of inhabitants of his town, demanding, that whites should not join the gatherings of the blacks, black creoles should not join with the Africans (*botales*, the newly arrived). But instead, those of each nation should have their own *cabildos*. The governor said: "A careful government should foment the principle of disunion, better through efficacious and indirect methods". What we do know as the outcome of this policy, is that social niches or frameworks for the building of neo-African groups emerged, that acted as places, where cultural knowledge could be preserved and transmitted between the generations. They also gave the Africans the opportunity, to stick to their African religious tradition under the disguise of Catholic cult of the saints. This was the case especially in the grand street processions on epiphany, the 6th of January, a festival dedicated to the three holy kings in catholic countries, *el día de reyes* in Spanish. The favour of the enslaved Africans for this festival has been ascribed to the fact, that, iconographically, one of the three kings – the wise men or Magi from the east of biblical tradition (Mat 2) – was depicted as a black king, Melchior. The heads of the *cabildos* also were black kings, in a way. After 1792, the *cabildos* had their place outside the city-walls of Havana. The procession of the members of the

different cabildos came from the outside of the city into the inside. In a way, they took possession of the city. It is said, that bourgeois white families indeed stayed at home at this occasion. One description of their procession by the American physician J.G.F. Wurdemann has it as follows:

“el dia de reyes, almost unlimited liberty was given to the negroes. Each tribe, having elected its king, and queen, paraded the streets with a flag, having its name, and the words *viva Isabella* painted on it. Their majesties were dressed in the extreme of the fashion, and were very ceremoniously waited on by the ladies and gentlemen of the court, one of the ladies holding an umbrella over the head of the queen. They bore their honours with that dignity which the Negro loves so much to assume, which they, moreover, preserved in the presence of the whites. The whole gang was under the command of a Negro Marshall, who, with a drawn sword, having a small piece of sugar-cane stuck on its point, was continually on the move to preserve order in the ranks. But the chief object of the group was an athletic Negro, with a fantastic straw helmet, an immensely thick girdle of strips of palm-leaves and other uncouth articles of dress. Whenever they stopped, this frightful figure would commence a devil’s dance, which was the signal for all his courts to join a general fandango.”

We can learn a lot from this depiction of what supposedly has been the adaptation of an African danced religion in the new context of slavery. The ritual of turning down the established order of society could be described in terms of what Victor Turner has called a liminal experience. The event resembles African traditions in a new social context, African forms of balancing power in a society, the typical confrontation of various cult-groups, are performed in the setting of colonial slave-holder society. Within the framework of Spanish government, “multiple miniature monarchies” are unfolding, as David Brown puts it. In a way, the slaves are using the symbol-system of their oppressors to balance power in the way they are used to. On the other hand, for the white spectator, this black performance clearly goes way out of the boundaries set by civil and religious establishment for the slaves. In his eyes, the dignity, chieftom and royalty are only *assumed* by those he calls the “Negroes”. The dance of the central figure of one cult-group can only be looked at as “devilish”, the athletic figure is described as frightful. In other words, one has to have fear. Now we can better understand the “divide and rule”- attitude towards the building of social groups among the slaves. We can also find a double symbolism of tension between the world within the city-walls and the outside world. From the point of view of the slave-holder, slaves represent a power, on which society rests, since the fundamental economic exchange is based on their labour. But, conscience of this dependence has to be kept out of the city. On the other hand,

intruding the city from the outside is some way of taking over control. It must be mentioned here, that during the 19th century, there have been reportedly 9 uprisings of slaves in Cuba, but, in contrast to Haiti, they have not been successful.

In another description of the *día de reyes*, from 1830, the differences between the ethnic groups in their behaviour are stressed:

“there marched in perfect order Congos and Lucumis with their great sombreros of feathers [...] Araras with their cheeks covered with scars [...] bedecked with shells and teeth of dogs and alligators [...] Mandingas very elegant with their wide trousers [...]” They would march on to the palace of the captain and, until the end of day, dance their way back through the streets of the town.”

What we can say, is, that the carnival dances, connected to the veneration of the saints, gave an opportunity to the African slaves to perform their rites within the framework of Cuban society, showing that they were members of this very society. There has been a discussion about the role of the *cabildos* for the shaping of Afro-Cuban religions. One has to admit, that in urban society, there were free Africans, due to the institution of *coartación*, the legal process by which a slave could purchase his freedom in a notarised exchange. The freed Africans, called “*gente de color*”, coloured citizens, played an important role in establishing Afro-Cuban religion, too. As I already have mentioned, Yorùbá people came in large numbers to Cuba and Brazil during the final period of the slave trade in the 19th century. It was in the cities that Yorùbá slaves, who came from a culture with an old tradition of urbanism, met with freed Africans, providing support to their countrymen. And they came to a country, in which serious attempts were made by the Catholic Church to integrate them into Christianity. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish the protestant attitude towards Christianising the enslaved Africans from the Catholic by their different concepts of conversion. Whilst in protestant thought the stress is put on the personal experience of conversion, in catholic thought we can find a more “ritualistic” approach. But in Catholicism, we also can find a differing way of conducting this more formal kind of conversion. For example, in the first half of the 17th century, the Jesuit Pedro Claver is said to have baptised more than 300.000 slaves. His methods in teaching them the truth of the gospel and central Christian doctrines is described as follows:

“He taught them, too, with pictures, and especially with one: a representation of Christ on the Cross, with his blood being gathered by a priest below, who, in turn, poured it over Negro neophytes. On one side of the picture were the happy Negroes who had accepted baptism; on the other the miserable ones who had refused it.”

This may seem strange to us, imagining what kind of idea the so baptised may have built in their minds about Christian doctrine. But one has to attest that this was a kind of humanistic approach to converting slaves, compared to another description of baptism of newly arrived slaves given by Ralph Korngold:

“A hundred or so Negroes freshly arrived from Africa would be herded into a church, whips cracked and they were ordered to kneel. A priest followed by the acolytes and carrying a basin of holy water walked slowly down the aisle, and with vigorous swings of the aspergillum, scattered water over the heads of the crowd, chanting in Latin. The whips cracked again, the slaves rose from their knees and emerged into the light, converts to Christianity.”

We can see, that baptism was thought of as a vehicle, which, by the power of the sacrament, automatically turned the heathens into Christians, whatever their spiritual disposition might have been. The process of acculturation, which protestant baptism required, was not found in the catholic way of “converting” the slaves. It seems that one of the main targets of this procedure was the integration of the slaves into the structure of Cuban society. But there were attempts being made to strengthen the Christian mind of the slaves, too. Whilst the general attitude towards the cabildos was to leave them on their own, as an outlet for the slaves and freed men not causing too much harm to Cuban society, for example the 18th century bishop Pedro Augustin Morel de Santa Cruz went to each of them personally to administer the sacrament of confirmation and to pray the rosary with the slaves before an image of Saint Mary. He left them the image, with the aim that they should continue with their worship and devotion before that image. Furthermore, he installed a specific priest who should come to the cabildos on Sundays and on the Holy Days to instruct the slaves in Christian doctrine. He also gave a particular virgin to each cabildo that should be venerated by their members. There are different places of veneration to the virgin mother of Christ, and different names given to her. So the adoration of Mary leads to a multiplicity of virgins or Ladies, like the “caridad de cobre” or the Lady of Regla, which have been associated with different Yorùbá deities during the evolution of Santería in Cuba. In the folkloristic Catholicism of Cuba the main part of religious attention was paid to the adoration of Saints. God was thought of as somewhat remote, and much veneration was given to his intermediaries, the saints, whose statues and pictures were housed in special shrines and kept at home. In the churches much ornamental work was done, like robes for the statues or flowering and the like. Candles were burnt before the statues and pictures of the saints, the believers kneeling down before them to pray. As Joseph M. Murphy has stated, this rich ritualistic and symbolic form of religiosity provided

opportunities for practitioners of Yorùbá religion to adapt its symbolism and its ritual forms to their needs. So we have to take a look at Yorùbá religion, first.

2. The religion of the Yorùbá and Cuban Santería

2.1 The religion of the Yorùbá in Africa

The religion of the Yorùbá of West-Africa is very well documented and has been subject to a great amount of scholarly work. It proves to be a sophisticated system of thought of much refinement, which is worth to be studied in detail. The reasons for our good knowledge of Yorùbá religion are mainly its influence on Afro-American Religion and the rich cultural tradition of Yorùbá city-states. It has also to be mentioned, that from the very beginning of Yorùbá-studies there has been a strong participation of scholars of Yorùbá origin in this research, which is not the rule in African studies.

I will give an outline of Yorùbá-religion, being the basic worldview for Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian cults and playing an important role in recent tendencies of Re-Africanising among Afro-Americans. As this outline is based on relatively recent field-work (not my own), it has to be taken into account, that in Nigeria, there has been social, political and religious change in the last centuries, that will have had an impact on the form of traditional religious worship.

2.1.1.

A brief history of Yorùbá culture:

Yorùbá culture originates from around the 8th - 9th century of the first millennium a.c. All the kingdoms of the Yorùbá (their traditional number is 16) trace themselves back to their mythical city of origin, Ifé (Ile Ifé). In the cosmogonic myths of the Yorùbá people, this town is looked at as the place where mankind came to existence or the task of ordering the cosmos and bringing the world into its present-day shape has been fulfilled. Other tales have it, that Odùduwà, a cultural hero and the progenitor of all the Yorùbá kings, being the first king of Ifé, had come to this territory from a remote country in the east and settled in Ile-Ifé. His sons came to be the kings of the different kingdoms of the Yorùbá people. The name Yorùbá is a name given by outsiders to these people, who prefer to call themselves after the kingdoms they inhabit, like Oyo, Ekiti, Ijebu, Owo and so on. Today, the common opinion is, that there might have been two groups of immigrants who mixed with the people who already had

inhabited the territory. One of the groups settled around Ekiti, Ife and Ijebu, a tropical landscape characterised by dense rainforest, the other settled around Oyo, a more open land north to the rainforest. The early culture of the Yorùbá, centring around Ilé-Ifé, has become famous for its fine terracotta-figures and its artful bronze-statues. They came to our knowledge through archaeological fieldwork, that had begun at the end of the 19th century. There are hypotheses, that Yorùbá culture stems in some way from the early iron-age culture called the Nok-Culture (around 500 b.c.) that flourished in a territory north of the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue. Because of the mastery of bronze-melting with the method of the lost wax, some scholars have thought of an Egyptian influence on Yorùbá culture. Indeed, Yorùbá sculptors are famous for having used a special alloying which reduced the amount of tin in the bronze to a minimum. The language of the Yorùbá belongs to the Niger-Congo stratum of African languages (the Kwa-subgroup), and it seems to have originated some millennia ago. Most likely, the Yorùbá are immigrants from northern Sudan and were being influenced by the cultures of the Nile-valley.

They have become important for West-African history through their urban cultures and their systems of government. They had a great variety of forms of settlements, villages, small settlements, little towns, but their big cities (*ilú aládé*) became outstanding places where powerful kings were ruling. The general name of these kings was *oba*, and they all traced themselves back to the first king of Ifé. Odùduwà, as we have already mentioned. Only 16 kings had the right to wear the classical and typical conical crown ornamented with beaded strings. Each king had his own title, too, f. e. the Alafin of Oyo or the Òóni of Ifé. The old system of government was called “*ebi-system*”. A kingdom was being looked at as a kind of a wider family, the unified land was seen as a union of kingdoms, whose kings were all members of one kinship or lineage. Supremacy was linked with the age of the kingdoms, therefor Ifé was the place of supreme power.

2.1.2. Yorùbá Cosmology

The Yorùbá conceive of the world as divided into two spheres that tightly fit together. This is very often exemplified with the symbol of the calabash, that has an upper and a lower half. The upper half is òrun, the invisible spiritual realm of the ancestors, gods, and spirits, while the bottom half symbolises aye, the visible, tangible world of the living. Yorùbá spiritual precepts conceive of existence as a cyclical trajectory, of life as a journey. The central concept in Yorùbá cosmology is the concept of *àṣe*. This term means the power of life, that is given by *Olódùmarè*, the highest divinity and which is possessed by every individual in its own way.

All things have *aṣe*, the gods, ancestors, spirits, men, animals, plants, stones and even words like songs, prayers, curses, and everyday conversation as well. *Aṣe* is at the centre of Yorùbá religious activity, being conceived of as a performative power, increasing with activity and diminishing with passivity. This is why religious activity, prayers and sacrifices are of high importance, because without it the gods would become merely idle idols. One has to feed them, or they will die. The place to meet the gods is the shrine. At the shrine, there are many objects to be found, most of them not portraits of the gods, but rather objects relating to them and objects that show the ones who venerate the gods and what it means to be related to a certain god. Those who venerate the gods, kneeling before them and giving sacrifice, are strengthened by the gods.

2.1.3. Olódùmarè

The emperor of Òrun is Olódùmarè (also named Ọlorun, Odumare, Èléda, Èlémi), who is the deity of creation, a “*deus otiosus*” (this means, after having set the world into motion, being the one principally responsible for its creation, he retired and went to some place far away, without interacting directly with the world). Olódùmarè has no definite gender, he does not care about worldly or heavenly affairs, but he is the one who gives the breath of life to mankind. There is no certainty on the etymology of his name:

Apparently, it is a composition of the prefix *ol* (from *oni*) and the two words “*odù*” (or: *odú*) and “*maré*”

- **ol**, from **oní**, is a prefix, that denotes the possessor of a certain thing or ability. **Ol** is generated from *oní* by elision of the vowel „i“ before the vowel „o“. This leads, according to Yorùbá phonology, to the alteration of the “n” to “l”. For example, **olóko** is composed out of *oni* & *óko* („farm“), so the word means the possessor of the farm, the farmer; in the same way, (without vowel change because of linking two identical vowels) **onile** stems from *oni* & *ilé* (house, home, building), the word for the housekeeper.
- So it is made clear, that **olódù** is a name for the owner of **ódù**.
- Unfortunately, the second part of “*olódù*” might have been the word **odù** or **òdù**; in composing with “*oni*”, its first vowel has changed its pitch (Yorùbá being a tonal language, pitch has a definite semantic value in the language):
 - **odù** (with middle tone on o) means a chapter (in the corpus of Ifá-divination, we will deal with that later), or an emperor, authority or the sceptre.

- **òdù** (with low tone on the o) signifies a big and deep pot; it also stands for the cell in a game called ayo, a board game similar to Backgammon. It is played by two players who try to fill their cell with seeds (stones, beads, beans, shells or other objects the like), that are distributed at the beginning among the 12 little cells of the board. Metaphorically, by saying that someone has “a filled òdù” (òdù-kàri), you mean that he is blessed in abundance, that he is doing fine.
- So, there are two possible meanings of **olódù**:
 - **the one, who owns supremacy in power, the owner of the sceptre and authority**
 - **the one who contains fullness and perfection, a perfect being.**
- There are several ways of explaining the meaning of **maré**
 - Maybe the word stems from **òmòrè** literally meaning “the offspring of the Boa” This has to do with a myth concerning the rainbow. In Yorùbá traditional myth, the rainbow is said to be produced by a very large boa, which brings forth a sulphureous matter out of its inside. This matter produces a reflection that is the rainbow (oşúmarè). The substance causing the rainbow is considered to have the power to make people prosperous and wealthy. The problem with it is, that one cannot easily get into possession of it, because on the one side, the boa swallows it up again, on the other side, the one who would approach the spot, where it is, runs into danger of being destroyed immediately. This myth has to do with the name of the highest being, Olódú, the offspring of the primordial Boa. In his early years, Olódú already proved to be a person of high prowess and goodness. He became such an excellent being, that the earth (aye) could no longer contain him, and so, he went to the sky (orun). There he went on prospering and acquiring good qualities. Nevertheless, before leaving he entered into a covenant with his progenitor, the boa. The covenant said, that they would never forget each other and that they would communicate with each other from time to time. The rainbow is the sign of this covenant. In the bible, we also find, that the rainbow serves as a sign of a covenant (Gen. 9, 8-17).
 - **marè** could also be a negated imperative, if we divide it into two words: *má rè*; *rè* means to go, *má* before a verb denotes a ban, so that *má rè* would correctly be translated with the imperative: „do not go!“; it could also be translated as a descriptive sentence, meaning the one, that does not go, move or change; in other words: the one that remains.
 - **m’árè** („m“ derived from *mó*) could also mean a combination with *àrè*; in that case, Ol-odù-m’árè would be the one combining *odù* and *arè*, *arè* being the special sign

featured on the crown of the *Ọni* of Ifè. It is not found on any other crown throughout Yorùbáland, and only the *Ọni* of Ifè is allowed to wear that crown. Therefore, it is the sign of supremacy and spiritual leadership of Ifè.

- There is yet another theory on the name of the highest God of the Yorùbá, looking at it as deriving from a combination of *oni* and *odù-kàrì*. As we have already seen, *odù-kàrì* signifies a filled cell in the game called *ayo*. Thus, it is a sign of perfection; a filled *odù* is perfect, its perfection would not only be disturbed by taking away one element, but also by adding another one. This state of perfection is called *kàrì*.
- To sum up our etymological reflections, we can thus distinguish between four possible meanings of the name *Olódùmarè*:
 - (1) *Olódù*, the offspring of the boa.
 - (2) *Olódù*, the one that does not move or change, the one that remains.
 - (3) The one combing the sceptre and the crown.
 - (4) *Ol-odù-kàrì*, a name for the in possession of the highest state of perfection.

Other names given to *Olódùmarè* are:

- *Olórun*: the owner of *órun*, derived from *oni* and *órun*, with the typical elision of the vowel and the change from *n* to *l* mentioned above.
- *Eléda*: the creator and progenitor
- *Elémi*: the one who gives *émi*, the breath of life (one of the components of the human person in Yorùbá system of thought, which we will take a look on later).

2.1.4. Communicating between *aye* and *òrun*

In a way, Yorùbá religion deals with communication between *aye* and *orun* in its main part.

Principally, there are 3 main ways of communicating between *aye* and *orun*:

2. Directly with a certain *òrìṣà* through possession-trance.
3. By using the *Ifá*-divination system
4. Through ancestor-worship: *egungun*

2.1.4.1. The *òrìṣà*

But it is not *Olódùmarè* who stands in the centre of Yorùbá religious activity. As we have heard, he is thought of as a “*deus otiosus*”, a remote Godhead not caring too much about everyday life of the inhabitants of the cosmos he created. The spiritual beings really important for Yorùbá religion and therefore for Yorùbá-derived Afro-American religions are called *òrìṣà*. This word is pronounced like *orisha*, in the Brazilian version it is written *orixa*, in

Spanish it is known as Oricha, but it is always pronounced like orisha (like a Hungarian word written “orisa” or a German word “orisha”). It is not easy to give a short-hand definition of what an òrìṣà actually is. It is best to talk about spiritual beings, that integrate various aspects of spiritual power on the one hand and represent the different forces that are acting in the universe. Thus, a given òrìṣà can be a deified natural force, a deified cultural hero or a prominent ancestor. But one could not divide the group of òrìṣà neatly into these sub-groups. For example, the main òrìṣà of Oyo, Ṣàngó, combines all these elements. He is the God of Thunder and lightning on the one hand, a historical person on the other, being the fourth Alafin of Oyo, and he is a cultural hero, known for his experiments with fire and electricity. Òrìṣà literally could mean *ohun-tí-a-rìṣà* „(what was found and gathered“, we will relate to a myth about Obàtálà later on, explaining that aspect) or it could be derived from the words *orí* („head“) and *ṣẹ̀* („start“) meaning the „source of orí“ (we will describe the meaning of orí in Yorùbá thought later on, too).

With respect to Ṣàngó, there have been some attempts to clarify the way, in which this òrìṣà came to combine these different aspects in one person or figure: how did the “cosmic” Ṣàngó mingle with an emperor of Oyo to one òrìṣà? *C. L. Adeoye* distinguishes between two Ṣàngó, making his starting point from the idea, that, initially, there have been 2 kinds of spiritual beings that later were brought together in the concept of òrìṣà: **irunmole** (spirits directly descended from òrun) and **òrìṣà** (deified human beings). Other scholars, as E.B. Idowu, R. Dennet or R. Canizares take into consideration, that the deified king Ṣàngó, in the course of his growing cult, might have been syncretized with an older òrìṣà named Jàkùúta, the thunder deity, whose qualities he attracted. An argument for that version is, that in the New World Yorùbá-derived religions, mainly in north.american nordamerikanischen Candomblés, Ṣàngó is named Ṣàngó-Jakuta or Xango-Djacuta. The priests of Ṣàngó in Oyo still celebrate the day dedicated to Jàkùúta, but linked to revering Ṣàngó

2.1.4.1.1 The multiplicity of òrìṣà

Another important feature of the òrìṣà is, that there are so many of them. And there are even varying numbers of them given, ranging from hundreds to thousands. Scholars of Christian background, like Idowu (an Anglican bishop of Yorùbá origin) tend to label the belief-system of the Yorùbá as „polytheistic“ and to explain this polytheism as a derivation from an initial monotheistic religion, that centred around Olódùmarè, the òrìṣà being the “ministers” of the supreme divinity. Another approach looks at the òrìṣà as the different aspects of the deity, or of reality. This theory is fostered by a traditional myth narrated by Yorùbá people, that Ulli

Beier has written down: it deals with Oriṣànlá (this means: the great òriṣà, another name for Obàtálá):

“In the beginning there was Orisha. Orisha lived alone in a little hut which was at the foot of a huge rock. He had a faithful slave, who cooked his food and looked after him in every way.

Orisha loved this slave, but the slave secretly hated Orisha and decided to destroy him.

One day the slave waylaid Orisha. He waited for him at the top of the rock, and when he saw Orisha return home from his farm, he rolled a huge boulder onto the hut. Orisha was crushed into hundreds of pieces and they were scattered throughout the world.

Then Orunmila arrived and he wondered whether he could not save Orisha. He wandered all over the world and gathered the pieces together. He found many – but hard as he tried, he could not gather all.

Orunmila put all the pieces he had collected into a large calabash which he called Orisha Nla, or Orishanla, and deposited them in a shrine in Ifè.

But hundreds of fragments are still scattered throughout the world today. And this is why Orishanla is the most important of them.”

This tale illustrates, that the different òriṣà are different aspects of the one reality man experiences. These aspects are “beyond good and evil“, since the òriṣà do not only symbolise the “good”, comfortable and sympathetic sides of reality. Since Òrunmilà is the òriṣà of the Ifá-divination, being a main tool to communicate with òrun, we see, that this figure is not introduced to that myth deliberately. Rather, it shows, that Ifá is a pre-eminent way of gathering deeper knowledge of the forces at work in the universe.

2.1.4.1.2 òriṣà funfun and òriṣà gbigbona

Not only the hierarchy of the òriṣà differs from town to town, but also their character and their family relationships. Therefore, trying to give an overall system of the òriṣà in form of a pantheon will always lead to contradictions. For instance, Yemoja (Yemoo) is looked at as the wife of Obàtálá in Ifè, but in Ayede she is revered as the wife of the òriṣà Oko, the òriṣà of farming. The same òriṣà can even differ in sex (gender) from town to town. Despite of that, many scholars are trying to give a division of the òriṣà into groups, more or less establishing a fixed pantheon. Without doing the latter, we can make some basic distinctions between the main òriṣà that are revered throughout Yorùbàland. One can divide the òriṣà into two groups, the cool (white) and the hot (red), according to their temperament and character.

The most important of the òriṣà funfun, which is the Yorùbá name for the cool or white òriṣà, is Obàtálá (Òriṣànlá). He is closely linked to the first king of Ifè, Odùduwà, and to the

creation myth, in which he plays a central role as well as in the political (hi)story of Ifè, as it is rendered in the cities founding myth. Another important òriṣà among those who are considered to be “cool” is Òrunmilà, who was the founder of the Ifà divination system, according to Yorùbá tradition. It will be treated in more detail later on. The name Òrunmilà can be read as a contraction of *Òrun-l'-o-mo-à-ti-lá*: “only òrun knows the way of salvation” or of *Òrun-mo-óòlà*: “only òrun can bring deliverance”. He is also called Ifá, his wife is Odù, which is, as we might remember, the name of the chapters of the texts referring to the Ifá oracle. The two most important òriṣà among those considered to be hot or red (òriṣà gbigbona) are the trickster-deity Eṣù and Ṣàngó. Eṣù is the divine interpreter, translating between the òriṣà, between aye and òrun, the lord of the crossroads, also in charge of bringing sacrifice to the gods and an intermediary in the divination system.

Another hot-tempered òriṣà, Ògún, is of major importance throughout Yorùbáland and also to the Afro-American religions derived from Yorùbá world-view. He is the God of iron and warfare, whose veneration is most widely spread among Yorùbá societies. Oral traditions have it, that he is one of the oldest òriṣà, among those òriṣà who fulfilled the principal tasks of ordering the world after its creation and principal structuring. On their way they came to a place called “no way”, where they could not go on any more. Obàtálá tried to make way with his sword, but since it was of plumb, it was not apt for that task. It was only Ògún who was in possession of an appropriate tool in that situation. Before solving the problem, he asked for a reward, which the other òriṣà promised him to give him. After he had successfully cut a way through the dense wood, and they all had arrived in Ilé Ifè, they handed out the only crown that they had brought with them to Ògún. Some of his priests are convinced, that he is the true king among the òriṣà. The wide-spread cult of Ògún led to several different local traditions, so that the opinion arose, that there were several, namely seven Ògún, among them Ògún of the blacksmiths, the warriors, the hunters or Ògún Onire. The latter name has to do with a town called Ire (onire obviously meaning: Emperor/ruler of Ire) in Yorùbáland, where Ògún is said to have led a group of warriors into battle. Driven by furious wrath he had fought successfully against a great number of enemies and then had sunken to the ground. Another tale has it, that Ògún could not integrate into society because of his wild and furious character, and therefore he went to live on a remote place called Ori-Òkè, „up on the hill”. There he lived as a hunter, a warrior and a conqueror. When this kind of life began to bore him, he sought for a town where he could live, but his fiery looks (he was dressed in fire and blood) made it impossible for him to enter a settlement. So he borrowed the leaves of the palm (they play an important role in the veneration of many òriṣà, being used to decorate their shrines). Dressed in palm-

leaves he entered Irè and immediately was declared king of Irè, Oni-Irè. Since that time, he is Ògún On'Irè, Ògún, the king of Irè. Ògún is the „patron“ and master of forging, and because of his mastery in this cultural technique he is also the òriṣà of the hunters and warriors, whose tasks are closely linked to forging as they depend on the quality of their tools used. One of the meanings of the story about the place called “no way” is to express this relationship. Today he is the òriṣà for all those who have to do with iron, steel and metal like smiths, mechanics and even taxi-drivers.

We can also name Oya, the wife of Sàngó and the òriṣà of the tempest and Obaluaye, the òiṣà of smallpox, whose realm is the earth. Another name of his is Ṣòpóná¹, which corresponds to the name of the Vodun of the earth „Sakpatè“ in Gê (Ewe). In the context of Afro-American religions he is also called Omolu (a name of Yorùbá origin) or Shopona, in Cuban Santería his name is Babalu Ayé. The latter obviously is derived from *Oba- 'lu'aye* (also: Olùwa Ayé or, shortened: Olùwa), meaning the king, who is the ruler of the earth.

The òriṣà come to the world through possession-trance (mediumistic trance). The media for the òriṣà have been trained through a time of initiation, and in trance, the òriṣà are talking through them. No really coherent theory of that state of mind has been brought forth to our days. In traditional Yorùbá religion, a person cannot choose deliberately to become an adept of a certain òriṣà. She will be called by an òriṣà, this “call” manifesting itself, for example, through the means of a life-crisis. The oracle will find out, which òriṣà she has been called by. Ifá and Eṣu (who is also called Elegba) are the òriṣà that stand at the frontier between the two realms of reality, òrun and aye, who are mediating communication between these realms. Ifá is the name of a system of divination, that has been installed by the òriṣà Òrunmilà, who is also called Ifá. His wife is Odu, that name also being the name for the whole of the ifá-„texts“ as well as for their chapters and the signs in Ifá-oracle (we will look at that in more detail later on). There are really many odu, texts handed down from one generation of babaláwo (priest of the Ifá-oracle) to the next by oral tradition. Eṣu, the trickster deity and lord of the crossroads, who brings sacrifice to the òriṣà and watches ritual, also guarantees communication in Ifá-ritual. Therefore his face is carved into the divination trays and not that of Òrunmilà.

2.1.4.1.3. Ṣàngó and Obátálá

Ṣàngó and Obátálá are the main òriṣà of Oyo and Ifè. A hot tempered and a cool òriṣà, they are interrelated in a way, that illustrates the world-view of the Yorùbá people, who look at the

¹ Ṣòpóná (das o jeweils mit Tiefton; leider habe ich keinen Weg gefunden, dies graphisch darzustellen).

universe as a place of relationships of power. The forces active in the cosmos have to be balanced in order to achieve fulfilment in life and a smooth order of things.

One Yorùbá myth expresses this relationship:

- The Myth of Obàtálá and Şàngó:

“Obatala decided one day to visit his friend Shango, whom he had not seen for many years. Before undertaking the journey, he went to consult the *babaláwo* (priest of the Ifá-oracle). The *babaláwo* consulted the Ifa oracle and declared that the journey should not be undertaken, for it would result in Obatala’s death. But Obatala longed to see his friend and he asked whether there were not any sacrifices he could bring to make the journey possible.

The *babaláwo* finally agreed that Obatala could undertake the journey without risking death, but that in any case it would turn out a disastrous journey, in which much suffering would come to Obatala’s way. The only way to avoid death would be never to complain about anything, never to refuse a service, never to retaliate. He would have to carry three white garments, black soap and shea butter. Obatala set out. He walked slowly, because he was old and he supported himself on his pewter staff. After some time. He met Eshu, sitting by the road. He had at his side a large pot of palm oil. Eshu asked Obatala to help him lift on his head. Obatala did so, and Eshu poured the red oil over Obatalas head.

But Obatala remembered the *babaláwo*’s advice. He did not complain, went to the river, had a bath, rubbed his body with shea butter and put on a clean gown. He resumed his journey, but eshu played the same trick on him twice more. First he poured charcoal over him, and then palm-nut oil. Again Obatala tolerated Eshu’s mocking laughter without complaint, took his bath, donned his new robe and walked on.

Finally he arrived in Shango’s kingdom. Shango’s horse had run away on that day. Obatala recognised the royal horse-strap and he caught the horse. Just as he was feeding it some ears of corn, Shango’s servants appeared and they accused him of stealing the horse. They dragged Obatala into the city and threw him into prison.

Seven years of misfortune followed in Oyo. Drought was ruining the crops. Epidemics killed off the domestic animals. The women were barren. Shango finally consulted Ifa and was told that the cause of all this was that an old man had been wrongly imprisoned. He investigated and finally Obatala was brought before him. Shango immediately recognised his friend. There was a joyful reconciliation. Shango ordered his servants to go and wash Obatala, observing absolute silence as a sign of respect. He dressed him in white robes and sent him home with rich gifts.”

- Interpretation of theMyth:

Historically seen, this myth could symbolise the tension between the two main cities of Yorùbáland, Ilé Ifè, and Old Oyo: Oyo was the leading military power during the time, when the Yorùbá were dominating the region, but it had to accept the spiritual leadership of Ifè.

On another level, the myth is concerned with the different personalities of Obàtálá and Sàngó, the first being patient and humble, triumphing in the end through his patience, the latter being furious, impatient and quick-tempered like the servants in this story, who quickly throw a man into prison without further investigation. But, as this tale shows, Sàngó is also a generous character, ready to see a mistake and to reconcile. The two are seen as opposites by the Yorùbá worshipper. Because of their complete opposition, they also attract each other. They have to go their separate ways, but when they meet, exciting adventures arise. On yet another level, this story explains, that, as òriṣà, both of them are constituents of reality: the patient Obàtálá is imprisoned, and the world goes down the drain with the hegemony of Sàngó alone; on the other side, Obàtálá's humbleness causes the trouble, too: he could have identified himself to the servants of Sàngó to avoid imprisonment. So neither of the two forces they represent should dominate the world, but they both are essential to an balanced cosmos. But there is a third òriṣà playing a prominent role in this little narrative, Eṣu. His character as a trickster deity is clearly depicted in this myth. Ironically, he is the one who mediates in the process of Ifá-divination, too, so he is the one who has brought the initial messages, when Obàtálá was consulting Ifá. And it is him who acts as the transmitter of the problem's solution when the latter was consulting Ifà, too. In a way, he causes all the trouble, too. Furthermore, this story also illustrates the central role of Ifá-divination in Yorùbá religion.

The myth is situated in-between the position of the two òriṣà as kings of their respective city-states and their role as cosmic forces. It can be read on either level. There are other tales about them, that are more or less restricted to one of these planes of existence.

- Civil myths on Obàtálá and Sàngó

The “secular” or “civil” myths about both of them are both dealing with a story of defeat and triumph. The historic person Sàngó is said to have been the fourth Alafin of Oyo, and Obàtálá is said to have been the fourth Òóni of Ifè. Despite of his central role in creation myth (more on that later), Obàtálá was not the first king of Ilé-Ifè, but Odùduwà. Obàtálá, who only was an officer in the army of Odùduwà, started an uprising, but failed and was driven out of the town. He went to exile to a friend of his with the name Obawinni, and he and his people (called the Igbo, not to be confused with the Igbo people that live in south-eastern part of Nigeria) tried to bring the town under control by raiding it in the night-time, giving the impression of being ghost from the bush. Finally, through mediation of a woman who saw through the trick, peace was won and Obàtálá and his people came back to town. Obàtálá managed to become the fourth king of Ifè, thus achieving a successful age and fulfilling his

plans through sticking to them patiently and not giving in after being defeated. This myth (to which there are more details) is re-enacted in the yearly festival of Obátálá, held in Ifè. Šàngó, the historic person is the 4th ruler of Oyo, and the “civil” myth with respect to him says that he was a grandson of Odùduwà and followed his brother Ajaka, who was a weak ruler whose weakness everybody took advantage of. Šàngó was quite another kind of emperor, brave-hearted, tough and strong as ruler. The myth has it, that he was experimenting with fire and electricity and that in the end his palace burnt down. After that, he fell in disgrace and had to leave the town. After his favourite wife Oya had left him on their way to exile, he hung himself. His enemies were shouting: “Šàngó ƚo” (Šàngó hangs), whilst his friends and followers were claiming that: Šàngó ko ƚo (Šàngó does not hang). In Trinidad Šàngó is now revered under the camouflage of the catholic saint John, and is called St. John Abakuso which is derived from Oba ko ƚo (the king does not hang). Other versions of the myth describe Oya as a faithful wife, going with Šàngó to exile and starting the revering of Šàngó. Be that as it may, as a matter of fact the cult of Šàngó, originally located at Oyo, did spread all over Yorùbáland. The „orthodox“ priests of Šàngó, who belong to the priestly house of kòšo (!!)

in Oyo do not believe that Šàngó killed himself. According to them, Šàngó got angry because of adverse circumstances (two of his wives were always quarrelling, people complained about his way of ruling). So he mounted his horse and rode into the wood. After he had not returned for a long time, the people of Oyo decided to search for him. During their search they called out: “King, where are you? Did you hang yourself?” and he shouted back from a long distance: “no, I did not hang myself”. But he did not want to go back and so he went to òrun climbing up a chain. And there he lives now, ruling with thunderbolts and lightning.

- Šàngó as òrišà of thunder and lightning

This is a nice explanation of how king Šàngó came to be a god of atmospheric phenomena. In this respect, Oya is looked at as his wife, too, and the atmospheric phenomenon that she is in charge of is the wind. There are stories about that relationship between the two. One of them tells us about a kind of contest between Šàngó and Oya, in the course of which she proves to be the stronger one. She manages to hinder Šàngó to come down to earth by driving away the clouds that he piles up in the sky with the power of the wind. Another story deals with a powerful medicine that Šàngó once possessed, with the help of which he could let come out fire from his mouth. Oya, who should keep the medicine for him, took a portion of it for her own purposes, and Šàngó grew really angry with her. So she had to flee him, and he went

after her. Although he forgave her in the end, she still keeps fleeing Şàngó every time that he goes after an enemy. This is why Oya (the storm) always precedes Şàngó (the thunderstorm).

- The role of Obàtálá in creating men

Obàtálá, in his aspect as an òrìṣà that has descended from òrun in the beginning of creation, is closely linked to the process of ordering the world as such. In the beginning, when Olódùmarè decided to create a structured cosmos, he sent 16 òrìṣà from òrun to aye (which consisted of an amorphous watery plane at that time). Each of them had his special task to fulfill in the process of creation. Among them we find Odùduwà and Obàtálá, together with Olókun and Yemoja, who became their wives later on. Obàtálá was the one to create the land and mankind. He brought with him earth and a cock with five toes. In the region that now is Ilé-Ifé the òrìṣà climbed down on a chain. Still on that chain, Obàtálá took an amount of earth and put it on the water. He then put the rooster on that island and the animal started to scratch the earth, so that it was scattered all over the surface of the sea. In this way, the land widened. An etymology connected to this myth accordingly reads Ile-Ifé as Ilè yi fè: this land is widening. The other òrìṣà climbed down the chain and began to fulfil their respective tasks. Obàtálá formed human beings out of the rest of the earth he had brought with him. After having formed the bodies, he brought them to Olódùmarè, who breathed life into them, giving them their soul, èmi (as we might remember, one of the names of Olódumàré is Elémi, the one who owns émi. But it was hard day's work for Obàtálá who became thirsty and started to drink, but instead of water he drank palm-wine, which he was not used to drink so much of, and so he got drunken. As an outcome of that, his abilities as a craftsman diminished, and he formed strange figures like albinos, cripples and hunchbacks. He could not concentrate on his work anymore and fell asleep. Odùduwà continued his work and completed it according to the commandment of Olódùmarè. The people of Obàtálá became the Ìgbò, the ones formed by Odùduwà became the Ifè. The story has a social meaning as well: handicapped or "strange" people (like albinos) were made by Obàtálá, (one of) the main òrìṣà. They are under his shelter, insulting or hurting them means to insult Obàtálá.

2.1.4.2. Ifá-Divination

2.1.4.2.1. Yorùbá anthropology

So, we have seen, that Obàtálá is the one responsible for the body, the material part of a person, and that there is a soul, èmi, that is given by Olódùmarè . There is a third component to the human being in Yorùbá thought, ori. Ori literally means head, but it can also mean the “inner head” of a person, something like the destiny, that a given person has. Yorùbá myth has it, that a human being, formed by Obàtálá and having received a soul (which can be a part of an ancestor or a newly given soul), before coming down to earth to be born, goes to the house of the potter of Ori (whose name is Ajala) and chooses his or her ori. This is, roughly speaking, the part of the person, that is its individual destiny. Destiny is not looked at in a fatalistic manner in Yorùbá thought, so this choice does determine a person in his or her entirety. It is rather a kind of individual character, that one is in dialogue with throughout the course of life. Depending on ori, one has to manage certain things in life in a certain way in order to prosper and live a successful life. Now, how can one find out about his ori? This is one of the main tasks of the Yorùbá diviners, the priests of Orunmila (or Ifá), the babaláwo.

2.1.4.2.2.

First, let's take a brief look at the technical side of this divination system. In the Ifá-corpus of texts, there are 256 main chapters (odu), each of them including a variety of texts, interpretations and verses. The babaláwo knows them by heart, since there are no written sources on that tradition (nowadays, there are some, mostly written down by scholars of Yorùbá world view).

As a system to memorise these texts and as a clue to divination, the babaláwo uses a binary code. A binary code rests on two possibilities (e.g., “yes” or “no” “I” or “2” “black” or “white”) that can be the outcome of or the program for any operation within the code. In reducing every operation to a series of this simple decision, one can create complex programs for complex operations, like computer-technology that also rests on a binary code. Depending on the number of possible positions in a code (e.g. 4, 6, 8 and the like) one theoretically can achieve an infinite number of combinations of I and II. We have already seen, that the number 16 has some significance in Yorùbá thought (there are 16 kings, 16 òriṣà came to earth in creation process). There are 16 possibilities of combining I and II in a series of 4. Within the Ifá-divination system, they are used to mark the 16 main Odu:

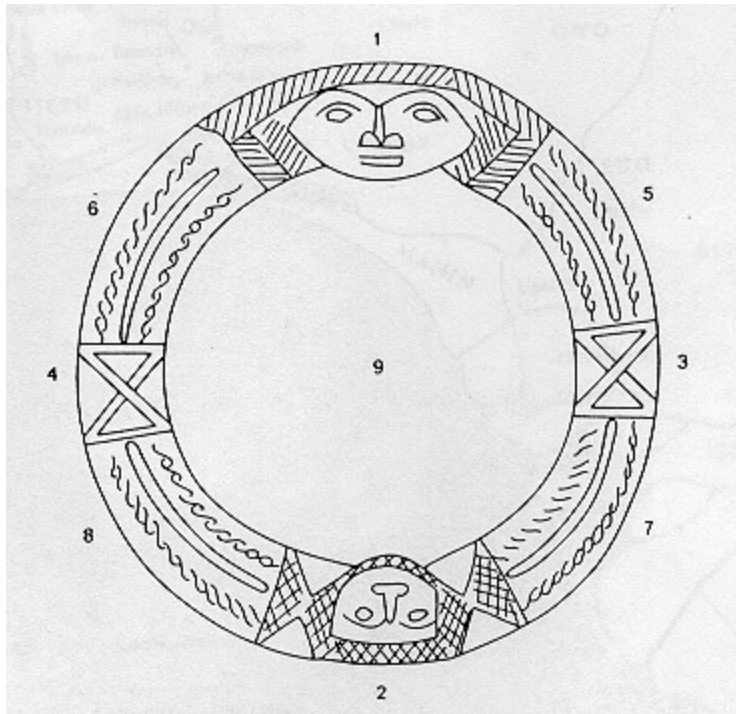
Eji Ogbe	Oyeku Meji	Iwori Meji	Edi Meji	Irosun Meji	Oworin Meji	Obara Meji	Okanran Meji
I I	II II	II II	I I	I I	II II	I I	II II
I I	II II	I I	II II	I I	II II	II II	II II
I I	II II	I I	II II	II II	I I	II II	II II
I I	II II	II II	I I	II II	I I	II II	I I
Ogunda Meji	Osa Meji	Ika Meji	Oturupon Meji	Otura Meji	Irete Meji	Oşe Meji	Ofun Meji
I I	II II	II II	II II	I I	I I	I I	II II
I I	I I	I I	II II	II II	I I	II II	I I
I I	I I	II II	I I	I I	II II	I I	II II
II II	I I	II II	II II	I I	I I	II II	I I

Please note, that there are regional differences in the names given to the respective odu. Meji means “two times”. As you can see, all the odu are written down two times. In combining two Odu, you get 16^2 possibilities, which is the same as 256 or the number of possibilities one has to write down a row of 8 using just “I” and “II”. So, if you get, for instance, 4 times “I” and than 4 times “II” you have a figure called “Eji Oyeku”. So, with remembering not more than 16 names and the figure they are represented by, a babaláwo knows the names for 256 different possibilities. The odu given above are the “main” or “major” odu, the 16 possibilities that result in a symmetrical figure when written down in the above way.

In a given situation, the babaláwo finds out the odu referring to that situation by “casting Ifá” and than he interprets the texts found out by that process in order to give advice to the client. There are different ways to do that. The most prominent and elaborate of these is using a device called upon ifá (a divination tray) with the ikin (sacred palm nuts).

- upon ifá

the upon ifá is a wooden divination tray, in most cases it is round, although there are some square upon ifá to be found, too. It has two main areas: the centre being the place, where the result of the divination process is marked on a special powder, that is dispersed on the surface at the beginning of a divination ritual, and the border area (the edge), that is carved with figures and ornaments. They do not have a strict iconography, but represent the forces active in the world, among them often animals that live in different areas (e.g. amphibious animals), symbolising the passage between òrun and aye made in Ifá-divination.



It is divided into 9 sections, the most important being the “head” (1), opposite to the diviner, the foot (2) next to the diviner and the center (9), that “holds the crown”. There is always at least one face of Eṣu (at the top or head) carved into the border, being the òriṣà, who manages the transgression between the realms of the universe.

- The ikin

The diviner uses 16 palm nuts (ikin) which he rapidly moves between his hands, until two or one nuts are left (if two are left, he writes down one and if one, two – because you can’t trust Eṣu). One Yorùbá myth has it, that in older days Orunmila moved easily between aye and orun. But this boundary became a nearly impassable after he retired to òrun. While on earth, Orunmila had had eight children, the youngest of whom, Olowo, became king of the Yorùbá city-state of Owo. Orunmila's omniscience made him uniquely qualified to serve as a wise counsel to his children, and, in return, he expected to be honoured by them. Olowo rebelled against doing so, precipitating Orunmila's departure for òrun. After he abandoned his children, they petitioned him to return. Instead, Orunmila provided each one of them with sixteen palm nuts as a means of addressing questions to him. Since that time, the ikin have facilitated dialogues between Orunmila and individuals seeking to clarify their destiny.

- The iroke ifà (divination tapper)



The divination tapper (iroke Ifa) is an essential tool for Yoruba diviners, used to initiate the Ifa divination ritual by invoking the god of fate, Orunmila. At the beginning of a consultation, the priest gently taps the divination tray with the iroke Ifa as a form of greeting. By attracting Orunmila's attention through this action and through the tapper's pleasing visual form, he opens the necessary channels of communication with the spirit world.

Ifa tappers are sometimes made of copper alloy or wood, but are usually carved out of ivory. Most of them are composed of three distinct sections: a middle section that frequently features a sculpted image of a human figure, in contrast to the pointed and hollow ends, which feature animal images or geometric patterns, or may be without any exterior design or decoration at all

Kneeling women can be found in the middle section of the Iroke ifa and in agere ifá (the receptacles for the ikin), on opon-ifá (or Şàngó dance-wands as well). Images of women in attitudes of reverence are believed to act as ideal intermediaries with òrişà, since women are regarded as being receptacles for life force (aşe). Representations of nude female figures in a kneeling position are conceived of as women praying and serve as a visual metaphor for all suppliants who seek Orunmila's wisdom in order to clarify their understanding of their personal destinies. The figure's nakedness suggests the state in which one communicates with the Creator. This is reinforced by the fact that kneeling in deference is associated with the beginning of a person's existence, when he or she kneels when receiving his or her personal destiny—an action that is subsequently repeated in consultations throughout that individual's lifetime to obtain guidance in fulfilling that destiny. As an appropriate attitude for saluting the òrişà, the kneeling position is also associated with childbirth and the procreative power of women, on which all human life depends

- agere ifá (receptacle for ikin)

These are used to keep the ikin. Mostly, they are made of wood, but there are some of ivory, too.



- Other devices for Ifá divination:

The odu can also be found out using the *opele* (a chain with eight stones, that have “I” or ”II” craved in on each side, or the *(merin)dilogun*, 16 cowrie shells, that have a “male” and a “female” side. The sixteen main odu are related to the possibilities 1 to 16 “female” sides up. If there is no female side up, the cast is “Opira”. Opele are only used by babaláwos, cowrie shells are only used by initiated priests. Another device are *obi*, cola-nuts split into four parts, which one can use to find out the odu or for simpler divination processes, that seek an answer for a question that can be answered with “yes” or “no”. In New World Yorùbá-derived religions, coconut shells (sometimes with cowries fixed on them) are used for that purpose.

- Use of the Ifá-divination

Although Ifá can be consulted in every situation of daily life (for example, before undertaking a journey or the like), there are three main rituals linked to the use of Ifá-divination, that have to do with the building of the personality of a given person. They are initiation-rituals, performed at the time of birth, a few months after birth, and as a puberty-rite:

- Ikoṣe w’aye: centring in the world
- Imori: knowing the ori
- Itefa:: establishing the self

The first two are performed for girls and boys the like, the third only for males. There has been a puberty rite for girls as well, but it is scarcely performed today, if ever. For more details on these rituals see the book by Margaret Thompson Drewal listed in the bibliography

or my (german) text for the course “Afrikanische Religionen II Einführung in die Religion der Yorùbá“.

2.1.4.3. Ancestor-worship:

The worship of egungun has historically been linked with family lineages. These Egungun function either individually in the interest of their particular families or collectively in the interest of the community. When they function collectively they transcend family and lineage alignments. Egungun are invoked individually or collectively either:

- On the graves of ancestors
- The family shrines
- The community grove

The masquerade societies called egungun society (or ara orun: inhabitants of orun) served the purpose for bringing down the ancestors to aye, this means, they visit the earth physically through masquerade. The masquerade of the egungun works with masques that cover the entire body. This has some relationship to the construction of gender in Yorùbá society, as the members of egungun-societies are male, men being conceived of as the contained, whilst female power is thought of containing. So men are the ones to mask, whilst women become the mediums of the spirits. Men becoming mediums of the spirits are referred to as “wives” of the spirits/deities. On the other hand, there is some cross-dressing to be found in Yorùbá ritual, as men as women in their respective roles can portray male and female powers/entities.

2.2. Santería in Cuba

We have already taken a look at the history of the African slaves in Cuba, so that we now can start with describing the religion of Santería on its own. Usually, one distinguishes between two main lines of Santería, the regla de mayombé, in which the Nganga (ancestor) cult of Congolese people is of greater importance and the Yorùbá-derived regla de ocha (from: regla de oricha). The term “regla” refers to the naciones mentioned above. I will focus my attention on the regla de ocha.

The main features of Yorùbá religion can be seen in 1. The cult of the orisha, 2. The Ifá-divination system and 3. The cult of the ancestors, egungun

2.2.1. Ancestor cults

There is some discussion, whether the cult of the ancestors has survived in Cuba- Joseph M. Murphy, in his “Santería. An African Religion in America” denies that. But, we should rather say, that it survived, although going through significant changes. On the one hand, a community-wide cult of the ancestors ceased. Ancestor cult became a merely domestic affair. So, in a way it is right to say, that the egungun cult, as a public cult in Yorùbá society, did not survive. On the other hand, veneration of ancestors was widened in Cuban Santería. One of the sad effects for Africans being brought to the Americas, is, that, as a rule, the linking bond with the kinship, bearing such great importance in African systems of thought, was interrupted. But, most Africans share in the idea of the importance of kinship and are convinced, that the lineage stretches back into the remote past and forward into the future, despite differences in their world-view. So, even Yorùbá people living alone and separated from other Yorùbá would have taken part in some kind of ancestral ritual. The orisha cults in Brazil and Cuba gave less importance to the ancestor, cults, that became less elaborated and of lesser significance. What was of great importance in these groups, was mutual aid, co-operative work and communal authority. These features, a public affair in Yorùbáland now became restricted to the cult-group. The idea of ritual kinship blended with ancestral worship, so that, in addition to the bodily ancestors, now ancestor worship was directed towards the “ritual ancestors”, too. These are at first hand, the “padrinos” (fathers) who had been the “godfathers” in the initiation process of a given person into the cult and those who had been the “padrinos” in initiating these, looked at as spiritual “grandfathers” and so on. There is a certain reluctance among the followers of Santería to call ritualistic activity directed towards the ancestors “ancestor worship” or to speak of an “ancestral cult” or “ancestor veneration”, respectively. They rather prefer to call these activities “honouring the ancestors”. When we compare this, for example to European attitudes towards the departed, there is no general difference between ritual libation (spilling of drinks or parts of the drink in honour to the ancestors) and decorating graves with flowers. In every society we can find patterns of remembering those, who once belonged to that society and on whose work and lives the present state of the society still rests, although they are no more amongst us. African traditional societies normally pay a big amount of attention to their ancestors, considering any given community still being linked with those who have gone to the netherworld. We have seen this, for instance, in the way that Yorùbá people conceive of the individual as being partly determined in its essence by some impact from an ancestor. We will see the, later on, in the concept of the person, that traditional Fon thought holds, too.

As a matter of fact, in Cuba the egungun cult ceased to be exercised by the santeros during the 19th century, for various reasons, as it seems. But coincidentally, at the same time, Spiritism began to spread around the world and it came to Latin-America, too, in a specific form, called Kardecism which is still being exercised in Latin-American countries in our days, namely in Brasil and Puerto Rico. Aside of being a religio-philosophical tradition on its own, it has also played an important part in shaping Afro-American religions.

2.2.1.1. Kardecism

Hyppolite Rivail (1804-69), was a French academic with a background in many fields of studies. He founded his own form of spiritualism in the 1850ies and 60ies, after having come into contact with spiritualistic circles and practices. He adopted the name “Allen Kardec”, the name of a Gaelic druid of which he thought of to have been an incarnation of the same spirit that he himself was. In many books he gave a systematic outline of a spiritualistic world-view. His main works are written in a dialogical style: in numbered paragraphs spirits give the answers to more or less fundamental questions concerning world-view. The latter can be described as follows:

There are souls, or spirits, who are capable of communicating with the living by the means of mediumistic phenomena. They belong to an invisible but natural world. Kardec does not discuss concepts like magic, miracles, or the nature of the supernatural in his works. Rather, he gives an outline of the universe of being a place with different planes or levels of existence, where spirits incarnate due to their karmic energy. He divides the world into the visible world of everyday phenomena and the invisible world. The latter is part of the natural world and can be investigated like the former, but, in difference to this visible world, it is thought of as eternal, intrinsically good and pre-existent. It is, therefore, the place of goodness, wisdom and purity. Kardec describes a spiritual hierarchy reaching from the material plane on the one side to the plane of perfect spiritual fullness on the other. There is a God, who is the primary cause of all that is to be found in the world. The general law within this world is that of universal progress. The main actors in this world are the spirits, who are brought forth initially by God, but, despite of being submitted to the law of universal progress, are endowed with a free will. In terms of the spiritual world, progress means constant evolution towards a higher spiritual perfection. This progress unfolds in a series of incarnations, but due to bad karmic energy, one given spirit can also be drawn back to a lower level of existence. Earth is not the only place where this is thought of to take place, but there

are several planets in the universe that are filled with incarnated spirits, being places of different grades of perfection.

Kardec apparently adopts the Indian conviction, that existence is influenced by so called karmic energies to his world-view. But, in significant difference to Indian thought, Kardecism rests on the concept of continuous progress, a central idea of the philosophy of Enlightenment. For example, within the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, we find that there is no theoretical proof brought forth for the eternal existence of the soul. Kant renounces the idea, that such a proof for an indestructible part of the human being can be brought forth. Rather, he prefers to look at the idea of the “soul” as to, what he calls a “regulative idea”, one that has to be set according to our way of constructing a consistent world-view, but cannot, exactly for this role of founding a world view, be looked at as an object inside this world. But, practical reasoning forces us to postulate the existence of such a soul that is not destroyed in its entirety by death, in order, that the idea of approaching the goal of moral perfection as fundamental to practical reason has not be given up in the face of the human world’s injustices and moral imperfection. If we take out that idea of its Kantian context and bear in mind the speculations about life on other planets widely undertaken by key-thinkers of Enlightenment, we see, that Kardecism is clearly to be judged as a spiritualistic version of this European period’s favourite philosophical trend.

During the 19th century also Indian thought was introduced to Western Europe’s higher educated classes through the work of romantic scholars like the Schlegel Brothers and Schopenhauer, by Friedrich Max Müller, one of the founders of the scholarly study of religions, and others. Now Kardec takes the idea of Karma out of its original context in Indian thought and situates it within his framework of reincarnation, that differs significantly from the concept held in Indian thought. Roughly speaking, the concept of Karma means, that a given existence is fundamentally determined by the moral quality of deeds fulfilled in a former life, out of that the being in question results in some way:

- This may be done by transferring an indestructible (and in fact, essential) part of the being through death from one existence to the other, a process called metempsychosis.
- It can also be thought of as a kind of impulse that stems from the former existence and determines the latter, without being conceived as a kind of transferring an “essence”, which is, roughly spoken, the Buddhist version.
- African thinking (at least traditional Yorùbá philosophy, to which I stick here - but one can say, that the idea of [parts of] ancestral souls that play a role in the formation of a given individual is widely shared in traditional African systems of thought) hold to a

concept of “reincarnation” that differs in two main points from the ones so far given.

Firstly, what is “reincarnated” is **a part of an ancestor**. The contribution to the shaping of an individual by an ancestor can be conceived rather as a stimulus than a transferring of its “essence”, because a) the ancestor is thought of as existing for himself in Orun and b) there can be more than one individual that has received the “emi” of a given ancestor. Then, there is no such idea as that the moral quality of a former life determines a given existence.

- In Kardecism, the idea obviously deals with incarnations of basically spiritual entities, that, due to their moral decisions, are bound to different planes of existence, more or less mingling with the material plane. Kardec, being trained in the natural sciences of his days, applies the law of cause and effect to his conception of spiritual development. In this sense he introduces the idea of karmic energy to his system of Spiritualism.

So he can be looked at as a forerunner of parapsychology, as far as he is convinced, that the supernatural is subject to natural laws and therefore can be investigated with methods similar to those used in the natural sciences. Thus, the law of cause and effect explains human happiness or misfortune as a consequence of the good and bad deeds exercised during a former existence. Christian charity is the highest value in Kardec’s system. Christ is considered to be the most elevated spirit that has ever incarnated. Charity is the main means for spiritual evolution. Kardec only holds wisdom in a similar high esteem. The social world being the place, where the morally free spirits are striving for development and also the product of their evolution at a certain stage, can thus, despite of its injustices and inequalities, be looked at as intrinsically just. So Kardec also solves the problem of theodicy within his system.

Kardecism rapidly spread to Latin-America and became very popular up to our days, namely in Brazil, in Cuba and in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, one can distinguish between two forms of Spiritism: Kardecism on the one side, and a form called “espiritismo popular” (popular Spiritism) on the other side, that is sometimes claimed to be of autochthonous origin, but has also integrated some elements from Kardecism, and from Santería as well. In Brazil, Kardecism has a place of its own in the religious stratum of society, but has also had impact on the Afro-American Religions, in which veneration of the ancestors plays an important role. Not only ancestors of the practitioners, but, for example, also those of the Indians, who once owned this territory, are included in the rites for the ancestors.

2.2.1.3. Kardecism and Santería in Cuba

In the second half of the 19th century Kardecian seances were being held by members of the upper classes in Cuba. This coincided with the loss of the egungun traditions among the population of Yorùbá origin. When Lucumi house-servants were watching these seances, they noticed that their white masters were communicating with the spirits of the deceased. So Santeros appropriated the technical and mechanical aspects of Espiritismo, namely prayers, paraphernalia and invocations, to their cultic needs. Kardecism still exists in Cuba as a tradition of its own, whilst in Santería its philosophical background is ignored.

In modern Cuban Santería, the deceased are honoured through the catholic mass that is held 9 days after the dying day, but through a *misa espiritual* as well. This *misa espiritual* (spiritual mass) is basically a Kardecian *séance*. The focus of attention to the ancestors can be found in the *bóveda espiritual*, an altar made by covering a table with a white cloth and placing a number of clear glasses of water on top of it, each glass representing an ancestor or a spiritual guide. Also a crucifix and a portray of the deceased will be placed on that altar. Spiritual guides can be Lucumi or Congo spirits, but also spirits of plains Indians or gypsies.

For a typical *misa*, a *bóveda* would be set up at the home of a medium as the focus of the gathering. Mediums and visitors, dressed in white, sit in chairs that have been placed in that way, that all of the participants can see the glasses on top of the *bóveda*. Holy water from a catholic church, herbal water and eau de cologne will be used as spiritual cleansers for the attendants' bodies, in order to get rid of negative vibrations, preparing to receive spirits of the dead. After opening prayers are read, the spirits begin to possess the mediums. Elevated spirits give advice, while the spirits of the deceased are supported by the prayers and incantations of the participants.

2.2.2. The four ways of Santerian ritual.

Besides the cult of the dead, we can distinguish four ways of ritual in Santería,

- Divination – *ifá*
- Initiation – *hacer el santo, hacer ifá*
- Trance – receiving an *òriṣà*
- Sacrifice - *ebbo*

2.2.2.1. Divination in Santería

The divination system is of great importance in Cuban Santería. As we have already taken a more or less close look at it, we do not have to say much more about it. There must have been master *babaláwos*, who were shipped from Africa to Cuba and who kept the tradition alive.

They must have found communities to support them and passed on their knowledge through time. Ifá divination is widely used in Santería nowadays. The diviners are still called babalaos and have to be initiated. When one has mastered the knowledge of Ifá, he gets handed out the fundamental tools of Ifá-divination we already know, the opon ifa, ikin, opele and so on. Then he has made Ifá. Sometimes it is said, that there are tensions between orisha-worship and ifá-centered religious practice in Afro-American religions. Namely, in the USA forms of Santería are emerging, that are “babaláwo-free”, where the priests of “lower initiation”, the santeros and santeras, do work, that is restricted to the babalao in traditional Cuban Santería. Ifá-divination is looked at as one of the ways to communicate with the orisha.

In Santería, the Obi, the Meridilogun (dilogun), the casting of cowrie shells and Ifá-divination with opon-Ifá and ikin are used. Ifá-divination is restricted to the “high-priest” of Santería, the babaláwo.

- The Obi-Oracle

In Santería, instead of parts of kola-nuts, as in Yorùbáland, coconut-shells are used for Obi-divination. There are five basic figures to the Obi-oracle:

All white	Alafia	Yes; cast again: Alafia, Etawe or Eyife in the second cast mean: definitely yes
3 white / 1 dark	Etawe	Maybe yes; it is possible; cast again
2 white / 2 dark	Eyife	Best case; definitely yes, balance of powers in the world is perfect
1 white / 3 dark	Okana Sorde	No
All dark	Oyekun	No, meaning danger; a dead person may be calling the person who put the question

Simple yes/no questions can für example be used within rituals to find out, whether everything has be done perfectly, or if the orisha concerned would ask for something else to be done. Or, to find out, whether a sacrifice has been received by an orisha. If the answer was no, it could be recommended to make another sacrifice and afterwards ask again. A negative answer could also lead to a new question to find out what had been done wrongly or what ingredient of ritual was missing. But the obi-oracle can also be used for putting questions about the life of the questioner, even to certain orisha.

- The pataki about the origin of obi

Pataki is the name for the legends or myths about the life of the oricha in Santería. To a certain degree, the differ from the myths told in Yorùbáland, although some of them have their counterparts in traditional Yorùbá mythology. The pataki about Obi gives an explanation

for the use of Coconuts within New World Orisha-cult. It tells the story of the orisha obi, who is thought to be the orisha of the obi-oracle. To my knowledge, there is no such orisha in Yorùbáland. According to the pataki, Obi was one of the sons or mortal creations of Obatala, a prince all white, full of perfection, so that he shone in clear white. After a certain amount of time, he became proud and snobbish, chasing away beggars from the door of his palace. In one version, he does not give entrance to Ellegua, dressed as a pauper, to a feast at his palace. In another version of the pataki, he sends away mendicants from the door of Olofi's palace, where a feast is held. According to the first version, Ellegua goes to tell Obatala, and after Obi has resented to give entrance to both Ellegua and Obatala, Obatala shows him whom he has rejected. In the other version, it is Olofi, whom he finally rejects. Both versions agree in the outcome, that Obi from that day on has to wear his whiteness inside and to be covered by brown, filthy stuff, to fall down from the coconut-tree to the earth and to be split into pieces, no longer adored, but used as the simplest of all oracles.

- The story of Yemaya & the diloggun

There is also a pataki to explain the use of the diloggun by adherents not babaláwos, especially by women. According to that story, Yemaya once was married to Orula (Orunmila, the Orisha of the Ifá-oracle). When he was away, she tried out the oracle, and soon became an expert diviner. Once, when Orula returned home sooner as Yemaya had expected, he found her practising the oracle, and, according to one version, cried out: "Stop!". This version explains, why normal adherents can only divine up to the 12th basic figure of the diloggun, whilst the last four are reserved for babalawos. Another version only tells about the anger of Orula, who now goes to invent a new oracle (the Ifa-divination with ikin and opon-ifá) which cannot be used by everyone, because, after Yemaya has used the diloggun, they have become somewhat like public domain. There are two related stories in Yorùbáland. According to the first, Oshun once was married to Orunmila and received the Merindilogun from Orunmila. Practitioners of the Merindilogun (male or female) are thought to be wives (!) of Oshun, who has received power from her husband. There are also female practitioners of the Ifá-oracle among the Yorùbá in West-Africa. Whilst the itéfa-initiation-ritual, which one has to have passed as a necessary prerequisite to becoming a babaláwo, is restricted to men, there are also female Ifá- diviners, as a rule, women or daughters of babaláwo. A story from the Ifá-corpus explains that through mentioning a twin-pair of children (of both sexes) of Orunmila, who both became diviners. It says:

“So long as Orunmila's firstborn child
Who is female studied Ifa

From then on women

Have studied Ifa” (from Eji-Ogbe)

In Santería, the Ifá-oracle is traditionally only used by babaláwos.

Divination, essential to all ritual, opens ways for ashe, the divine power. So it is commonly used to solve problems of either spiritual or physical nature. Problems in life are interpreted in Santería as signs that show, that the orí, the inner head of a person, is in trouble or confused.

Divination, as the art of finding out the meaning of random events, provides followers of Santería with information on the spiritual plane of life and the linking of their everyday problems to this spiritual plane. For example, if they are the result of enemies, of confusion in ones own life or simply God-sent to learn. The casting of Ifá gives the santero knowledge of his or her destiny and of specific models to handle it. Destiny is something that I can take advantage of, if handling it the right way, in Santerían thought.

Like sacrifice, divination is not only a ritual on its own, but also used in other contexts, be it to find out, what kind of ritual has to be conducted, or as a part of initiation rituals.

2.2.2.2. Initiation rituals in Santería

Initiation is central to Santería. To become a follower of Santería, one has to be initiated step by step, slowly moving from the outside of the religion and an outside view on the religion to the inside.

According to Raul Canizares, we can find a hierarchy in Santería that starts with outsiders:

- Interested observers, that can be scholars of religion, but remain outside the framework of Santería proper.
- Occasional clients, that seek help for their psychological or bodily problems, just as they would consult a physician. They often are unaware of the distinction between Santería and Catholicism.
- Habitual clients, who are aware of this distinction, but do not consider themselves part of Santería. It is said, that many prominent figures in Cuban life would not make a step without consulting a Santero.
- Amulet recipients- people who has been given an amulet to by a Santero (in most cases, they bought it), in order to achieve certain goals, like improving ones situation, must have a certain amount of commitment to Santería, because amulets or other physical objects have to be treated ritually from time to time in order to be “filled” with ashe.

Next to that circle of person loosely linked to Santería, we find three groups of initiates, that are not to be considered as priests:

- Ellegua initiates. Ellegua is the name of the Yorùbá orisha Eshu in Santería. Because he is the guardian of the crossroads, the divine messenger, the one who has control over people's destinies, he is the first orisha to be revered. A figure of Eleggua, is conferred to guerrero initiates (next) but it is often given alone. It is mostly a head made out of clay or cement with mouth, eyes and nose made of cowrie-shells. It is kept inside a small cabinet behind the houses main doorway. It can be conferred by a Santero or a Babalao; some people think, that only the Ellegua conferred by a Babalao is appropriate. A person that an Eleggua has been given to, cannot consider him/herself as a occasional participant in Santería. It is crucial, that Ellegua be propitiated every Monday, hat special offerings are given to him. The orisha will open the doors for those, who do this the right way, and close the door for those, who fail to propitiate him responsibly.
- Guerrero Initiates. Certain orishas are known as the guerreros, Ellegua, Ogun, Ochosi, the lord of the hunt, and Osun, a minor oricha, a protective deity warning people when in danger, associated with Osain, the oricha of herbs. These are able to protect a person. Guerrero initiation and collares initiation are the two most important before becoming a Santero. Apart from the function of being defended against spiritual and all other enemies by these powerful warrior-gods, guerrero-initiation is the first initiation on the way to become a Santero. In traditional Cuban Santería, it takes a Babalao to do this. 3 objects are given to the initiate, a pot with the iron tools of Ogun, iron items symbolising the arms of Ochosi, the Oirsha of hunting, and a chalice with a rooster symbolising Osun, a "little" Orisha who is a guardian spirit. These warriors are, like Eleggua, propitiated on Mondays.
- Collares Initiates: this is an important initiation, because by wearing the necklaces given to the initiate in this ceremony, the collares or **ileke or elekes**, a person shows to be a follower of Santería. It is a complex ritual, where the initiate is bathed, prayers of African origin are made, the necklaces are washed and prepared ritually. The string must be of material able to absorb sacrificial blood and keeping its ashé this way. The necklaces are given one after the other. Whilst the *guerreros* have to be given by a man (the *padrino* of the Initiate), the *eleke* are given by a woman (the *madrina* of the initiate). They are each dedicated to a special orisha, normally five are given, but there can be exceptions to this.
 - The first is Elleguas necklace, red and black beads

- In some ilés (houses) the all-white Obatalá is given first, since he is the greatest of all orisha.
- Oshun, yellow and amber beads
- Yemaya, white and blue beads
- Shango, red and white beads

Finally, two grades of priestly initiation are found in traditional Santería:

- Santeros: although sometimes followers of Santería are called “Santero”, this is the name for a priest or priestess of Santería, who has undergone a lengthy and costly initiation. One has to pay from 5.000 to 50.000 \$ in the USA, for example. In traditional Santería, only followers, whose head has been claimed by an Orisha, undergo this initiation called kariocha, that follows a time of preparation that can last up to three years. During the initiation, the orisha, that the adept is linked with, is “seated” in his head. This process is called “hacer santo”, “making saint” or asiento. During this time, a three days feast, the orisha first takes the head of the initiate by possessing him or her in possession trance. This trance is induced by the playing of the sacred drums, the bata drums, that have to be prepared carefully with rituals including animal sacrifice for sacred use. The initiates then are called “iyabo” (Yorùbá for bride), and are considered novices for a period of one year, obliged to wear white clothes and to observe several taboos. Some of them have to be observed during a lifetime, depending on, which orisha has been seated and the special taboos linked with that orisha. A divination called itá which is conducted by a special Santero, the Italero, tells the neophyte which taboos he will have to respect and what the future as a Santero will bring for him. These last year of initiation is also dedicated to learning technical skills like casting the cowrie shells for divination or learning enough Lucumi (Yorùbá) for ritual purposes.
- Babalaos: Only Santeros can become Babalaos in Cuban Santería. Only men can become Babalaos and you cannot become a Babalao deliberately, but the itá-oracle has to tell you. Only Babalaos can sacrifice four-footed animals and the use of the Ifá-divination system is restricted to them. In a one week ceremony without contact to the outer world, the Babalao is initiated, a process called “making ifa”. This process was a secret, until a Cuban ex-Babalao turned communist revealed it to a wider public.

Here is a part of the description he gave, as rendered by Raul Canizares:

“Some of the individual rites emphasise the babalao’s identification with the legendary first 16 kings of Yorùbá. One of these is “receiving of Orula” (= Orunmila, hgh), probably the most important part of the seven-day ceremony, which takes place on the first day. The

initiate has been shaved, painted, and crowned with a head-dress of coconut shell, beads, and red parrot feathers. One of the senior babalaos paints the names or symbols of the sixteen kings on a long block of cedar that is laid before the initiate, and the five senior babalaos then paint their symbols on the block to show that they witnessed the event. After this, twenty-one palm nuts are taken from a gourd filled with river water or rainwater and placed on each of the twenty-one symbols; they are then coated with the feathers and blood of two black hens that are sacrificed. The padrino then dresses each *ikin* with a mixture of honey, cocoa butter, palm oil, and small pieces of coconut pulp. He says: “This is the great truth of our faith: behold Orula, make him part of your soul”. The initiate, with his hands behind his back, must use his mouth to take up each *ikin*, clean it by swallowing the stuff that covers it, and spit the *ikin* back into the water-filled gourd. By doing this he has taken Orula’s ashé into his soul and is now considered a neophyte babalao. This ceremony is followed by the “pact with Death” in which, accompanied by ritual dances and songs, the babalao makes a deal with death that he will not touch his head without permission of Orula himself.”

Note: There are emerging babalao-free versions of Santería in the US in our days.

2.2.2.3. The worship of the orisha.

2.2.2.3.1. Orisha hierarchy

As the name Santería indicates, the special feature of orisha-worship in the Americas is that it has blended with the cult of catholic saints. We have already mentioned that in the beginning of this course.

Furthermore, there has been, commonly speaking, a certain transformation of the stories about the orisha, *itá*. We have seen, that in Yorùbáland stories about the orisha differ from region to region and that there are more important and less important orishas in different parts of the country. Because of that fact, one cannot give something like a Pantheon of the orishas.

Furthermore, orisha-worship is subject to historical change.

But in Santería one can find a relatively stable hierarchy of the orisha. The main difference between the groups of the orisha are the orisha that can be “seated” and those, that are received, and not seated. An orisha that is seated, is installed in a Santero’s head.

On top of spiritual hierarchy in Santería we find Olodumare/Olorun. Only Obatala and Ellegua know the abode of him. Olofi is thought to be the aspect of God, that can be reached; it is extremely rare, that he is seated. The same holds for Oddua/Odduduwa. The seven orisha that can be seated ore “made” during the kariocha ritual are referred to as “las siete potencias africanas” “seven African powers”, they are Obatala, Elegua, Oshun, Yemaya, Shango,

Ogun and Oya. Furthermore, Ifá (Orula) is seated, in the Babalaos head. Then we have the orisha that are received (temporarily): Olokun, Babalu Aye, Aggayu, Yewa, Obba, Dada, Orishaoko and Ochosi. A third group consists of the minor Orisha, that can be received together with an aspect of one of the seven powers, Osun, Aña, Iroko, Obi.

- **Orisha that can be seated (las siete potencias africanas):**

For their attributes and the saints that they are connected with in iconography, please look up the Power-Point-Presentation, sheets 89-99 & 110-128.

- **Orisha that cannot be seated, but received temporarily**

For them look up the sheets 100/135;

For the stories about Yewa and Obba, look up sheets 102-103

For description of the Ibeyi, look up sheets 101 & 138-140

- **Minor orisha**

For them, look up sheet 104/136

2.2.2.3.2. The *bata* drums

In Santería ritual the Orisha manifest themselves in possession trance. They are evoked through drumming and dancing. There are special rhythms played for each of them. The drums that are used for this purpose are called the *bata drums*, two headed drums of different size and tone. The heads are made of goatskin. 3 drums make up an Ensemble, they are played in a polyrhythmic language, so that each of 6 hands involved plays a particular phrase; woven together, this results in the special rhythm of the special orisha being honoured by the drums.

The names of the drums are *iyá* for the large one, the mother drum, that calls the changes for the others; *itótele* for the middle drum and *okónkolo* for the smallest of the three; those lay down the basic rhythms, while the *iyá* does the talking. The drums have to be consecrated in a process that involves 3 ceremonies, the first one accompanying the construction of the drums' bodies, the second being held before the fixing of the goatskin drumheads and the third, called the "blessing of the drums", when they are to be played for the first time.

1. Choosing the wood (it is always mahogany)

This ritual starts with propitiating Osain, the Orisha who rules over the plants; the chosen pieces of wood are washed in a herbal infusion, called Omiero. A rooster is sacrificed to the drum spirit Aña.

2. 3 Babalaos and an Alaña (a consecrated drummer that owns a batá set) have to take part in the second ritual, Omiero is used again and the warrior Orishas (Eleggua, Oshun, Ochosi and Ogun) are propitiated. Only when all of them have given their blessings, the process is

carried on. Ifá is cast in order to find out the odu that characterises the drums. An individual spirit will possess them and sacrifices have to be made. Sacred herbs and other magical ingredients are placed inside the drums and finally, the goatskin is fixed, accompanied by animal sacrifice.

3. The 3rd ceremony enhances the new drums' ashé. The elder drummers first begin to play their own batás. Then they give their drums to the neophyte drummer to play while they for their turn play the newly consecrated drumset, so that they can share their ashé with the new drums. The new Alaña then returns their set to the elder alañás who give back his set to him. Now the new Alaña plays his properly prepared sacred instruments for the 1st time.

To sum up, we see, that psychic energy is going into the drums in the process of shaping them, they are filled with ashé. Therefore, Santeros hold, that batá-drums are very powerful and that their sound is pure magic. They are proud of having preserved this tradition from Africa. Nevertheless, as David H. Brown has pointed out, the institution of the sacred drums did not arrive in Cuba as a tradition that was passed on from Yorùbáland, but rather was reconstructed and reshaped in a process one best describes as “culture building”.

2.2.2.3.3. Trance

The possession-trance is induced by the sound of the powerful batá drums and dancing. Different rhythms for the orisha are played, starting with Elegguá, who has to open the way. Joseph M. Murphy describes the moment, when an attendant is falling into trance, as follows:

“The music seems to be coming from inside [the dancers] as if by their movement they are liberating the sound from within themselves. One woman in particular is carried away by this energy, and others begin to channel theirs toward her. The dancing circle clears for her alone, and the drums focus directly on her.

Her eyes are closed, and she is whirling and whirling. She bumps up against the human ring that encloses her and gently rebounds back to the circle's centre. The call and response between soloist and congregation has become tighter and more intense. For each praise name of Oshun, the *ile* immediately responds *esho*, “hold”: hold the rhythm, hold the *orisha*, hold the whirling dancer. Then, with a sharp slap from the *iya*, she falls to the ground. The drums are silent, and the room echoes.

Three *santeras* help her up and begin to escort her from her room. As she parts the crowd, she is clearly a different person. Her eyes are open now and gigantic, their focus open

to the whole world. Her face is illuminated with an enormous smile, and she moves her shoulders and her hips with sensuous confidence. Oshun has arrived. [...]

A few minutes later, the embodied *orisha* returns resplendent in a gold gown. Her hair is long and unbound, and, like a true African, her feet are bare. She shows the same magical smile and unearthly eyes. The drummers begin her praises, and all join a litany of her praise names. She dances her acceptance of these with grace, and even blows kisses to her votaries. Her dance is sensuous and sweet, moving from deep down her spine.”

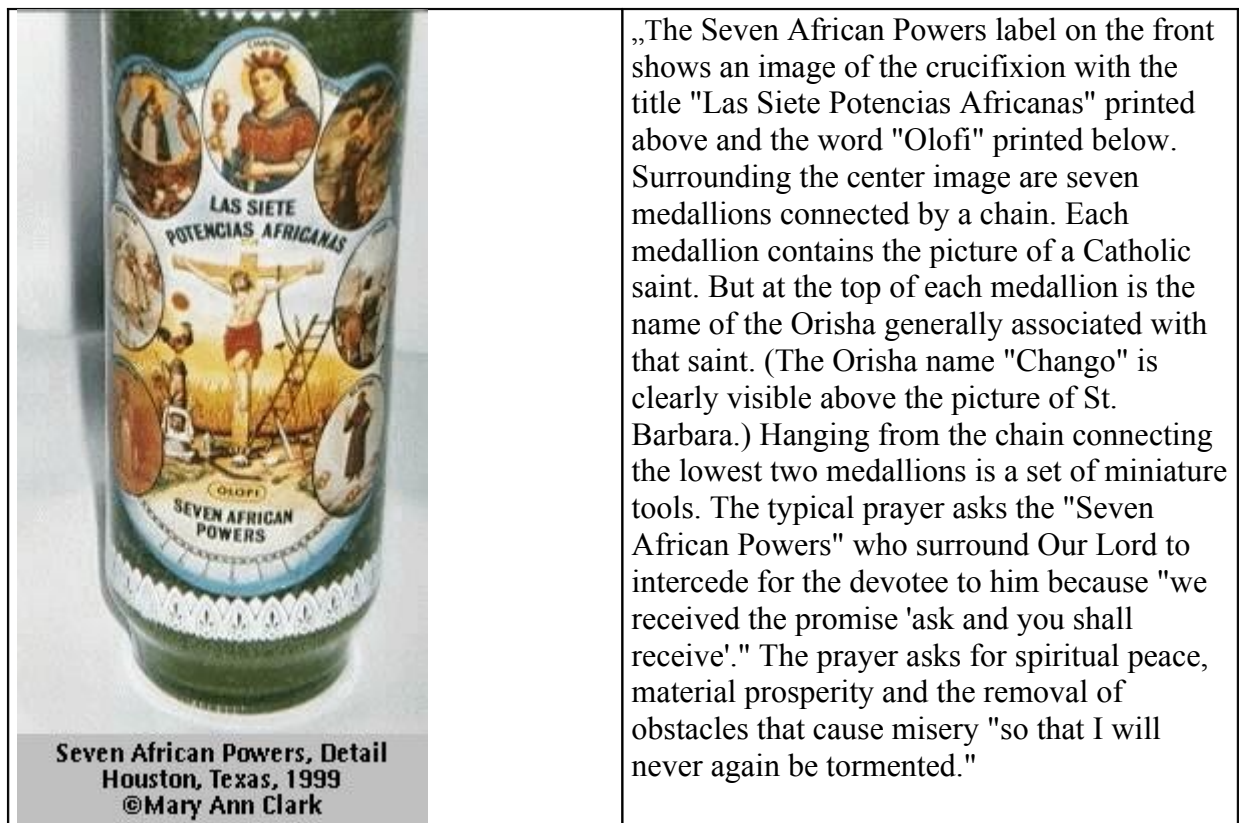
2.2.2.3.4. Ebbo- sacrifice

Sacrifice is essential to rites in Santería, as we have seen. To understand the role of sacrifice in Santería, we simply have to refer to the concept of *àṣe/ashé*; like we have seen in the context of the *batá* drums, sacrifice is linked to the transmission of *ashé*. Often Santería practitioners are attacked by animal rights activists or civil law. In Florida, a case being held against a Santero for sacrificing animals was brought before the high-court, that made its decision in favour of the freedom of religion. Being a vegetarian myself, I find much hypocrisy in accusations brought forth by members of Western societies against Santeros due to animal sacrifice in a ritual context, where, in most cases, the animals slaughtered are eaten, given the way that animals are treated normally in our industrial ways of producing meat.

2.2.3. The relationship between Santería and Catholicism

As we have seen, the iconography of Catholic saints is used in Santería (and in Afro-Brazilian cults as well) to depict the Orisha. Many explanations of this circumstance have been brought forth by scholars, like labelling Santería as „Syncretism“ in a negative sense (an Africanisation of Christianity misunderstood) on the one side or speaking of „camouflage“ on the other side. This would mean, that santería is wholly African tradition, using the Saints as mere masking in order to be able to practise the cult within the framework of Spanish popular Catholicism. Mary Anne Clark has described the use of the „siete-potencias-candles“ in North American *Botanicás*. A *Botanicá* is a store, in which one can buy herbs, soaps, candles and other paraphernalia related (not only) to Afro-American cults. The *siete potencias* candles are one example of the so-called seven-days-candles, magic candles that burn for seven days. As a rule, the front side shows the picture of a saint, a religious symbol or the picture of an Orisha, whilst on the back side one can find a prayer. The *siete-potencias-candles* show a very popular depiction of the seven African powers using Catholic iconography:

Here is the description, that Mary Ann Clarke gives:



She goes on with her description:

“Here we find two symbol systems intertwined in such a way that one need not choose between them in order to participate in the blessings promised by the candle. One can move freely and easily between two symbol systems exploiting the strengths of each. In order to understand this hybridity, let's look more closely at these images. Most prominent is the crucified Jesus surrounded by a group of objects associated with his passion and death. This tableau called the Arma Christi, Arms of Christ or Instruments of the Passion, are a group of objects associated with Christ's suffering, death and burial. The Arma Christi is commonly found on paintings depicting the Mass of Saint Gregory. As commonly found on the candles the image includes the cock that reminded Peter that he had denied Jesus, a column and scourge, the cross, the hammer and nails along with the pliers used to remove the nails, the sponge used to offer Jesus vinegar to quench His thirst and the lance that pierced His side. This image focuses attention on one of the most important events in Christian mythology and places the candle squarely within a Christian milieu. However the title above and Yoruba word "Olofi" below the image suggest more is going on here. Olofi is a creolization of the Yoruba word Olofin, a title of Olodumare the Supreme Being of the Yoruba pantheon. The

title Olofin means "supreme ruler" and among the Yoruba is often combined with Orun (heaven) or Aiye (earth) to designate Olodumare as the sovereign of those planes. Among Santería practitioners, Olofi is often associated with Jesus Christ as the personal God of mankind. Thus the image and caption suggests that not only is this an image of the crucified Christ but also of the Yoruba deity Olofi.

Looking at the individual medallions we find a similar hybridization. Although each image is of a well-known Catholic saint, the name printed above each image is that of the Orisha commonly associated with that saint. Thus we find, moving around the label, The Virgin of Mercy named Obatalla, the Virgin of Regla named Yemalla, the Virgin of Cobre as Ochum, St. Barbara as Chango, St. Francis as Orula, John the Baptist as Ogum, and St. Anthony as Elegua. Those who are familiar with Catholic hagiography will note that, with the exception of the Virgin of Regla whose story associates her with St. Augustine who was born in North Africa, none of these saints could be identified as an "African" saint.

Below the image, on a chain connecting the medallions, are tiny tools including a sword, a battle-axe and a lance along with several types of hammers. Santería devotees and others familiar with the religion will recognise these as the tools of Ogun that many wear on a similar chain around their ankle. Ogun the Ironworker is a powerful Orisha who is believed to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for his devotees. Including his tools here not only mirrors similar tools found among the Arma Christi but also invokes the potency of this Orisha.”

Now, lets us take a look at Oshun, one of the Orisha featured on that candle, being one of the Orisha that can be seated, as we have already heard. In Yorùbáland she as river-goddess (very popular in the town of Oshogbo, that lays on the side of the river Oshun), a goddess of fertility; in Santería he is the patron of love, sexuality and matrimony, and is associated with money and yellow metals. She is depicted with the image of the Caridad de Cobre, a „vresion“ of the Virgin Mary, and the patron Saint of Cuba. According to Cuban legend, the picture of the Caridad was found on the sea by three fisherman in the region of Cobre (a region, where there is mucche copper (cobre) to be found). Te fisherman built a chapel for the inmage, but it disappeared and was found on another place, thus signifying the vrey spot where the Vrigin wanted, that a church was built for her. This church became a central place of religious practice in Cuban catholicism. The black house-servants that were accompanying their white mistresses to the basilica, were watching waht that coukld only explain to themselves as an adoration of a female Goddess similar to veneration of Oshun in Yorùbáland..This example shows, how these iconographic relationships might have emerged

historically. The question for the scholar of religious studies will be, how one can label or this process theoretically. As early as 1937 Melville Herskovits took the theological concept of „syncretism“ and used it in his anthropological work to explain the process described above. In his eyes, acculturation had taken place leading to a synthesis of African patterns and the European traditions the black slaves were exposed to. Roger Bastide did a critique of that explanation. According to him, the process described should be understood as „translation“. In his opinion, the Santeros are holding, that in the end there is only one God, but God is too remote to be reached by mankind. For that purpose we have intermediaries, angels and saints in Catholicism and Orisha in Santería. But one could translate the two conceptions into each another. The main point of critique against Bastide is, that he is constructing a homogenous theory of religion out of a diversified field of religious practice on the basis of the idea, that Santería shares a religious core with the other main religions of the world (although one must concede, that there are some Santeros who share that opinion). But the term „syncretism“ is still widely used in the description of Afro-American religions. For instance, George Brandon explains Santería with that concept, although he „deconstructs“ in later stages of his work, showing, that it has to be looked at as a black-box concept:

„Rather than resolving the problem of syncretism we have come in a roundabout fashion to the conclusion that the concept of syncretism is a problem for history and anthropology, a problem which cannot be resolved but only dissolved. In my opinion the concept of syncretism is a black box concept. The black box contains a number of processes which when illuminated turn the box white. In every black box there are two boxes trying to get out. Here, one concerns processes and other states. I believe that processes are the more fundamental of the two. [...] I believe that the concept of syncretism will dissolve into the study of cultural and social processes and the effects of problem solving and manipulation, decision-making, ecology, and creativity in relation to social and historical context[...]"

He shows, how elements of an older „ethnicity“ are being re-formulated and adopted with the aim „to survive the invasion of a stronger [...] civilisation“ and to foster group-interests. Raul Canizares is bringing forth similar arguments. In his opinion, the whole question circles around levels of discourse. The result of his analysis says, that there is a direct proportionality to be found between Christian and African elements in Santería. The higher level of discourse – better practical and theoretical knowledge of Santería – will acknowledge more African and less catholic elements in Santería. But a practitioner of Santería (higher level) talking to an outsider will use the latter level of discourse, that, for instance, stresses the role of the catholic saints.

We also have to mention some scholars, like Gerhard Kubik, Henry Drewal, Andrew Apter or David H. Brown, who stress the transformative character of Yorùbá cultural traditions.

Mary Ann Clarke's analysis of the use of the „siete-potencias-candle“ supplies the latter theories. After having noticed, that the candle cannot be found on the altars of santeros, she asked herself, in which contexts it was used (of course, it was being bought constantly, so there had to be some use for that item). As she found out, it is used by Santeros, who exert spiritualistic practices not belonging to Santería proper, or doing ritual work for outsiders. Furthermore, outsiders of Santería use these candles, when carrying out rituals outside the real framework of Santería. We can thus see, that herewith we neither find an example for syncretism in the sense of melting elements of two different religions to a new religious movement nor for camouflage, the process of masking original African rites with catholic iconography. Rather we have an example for a cultic milieu, where cults adapt to the needs of clients.

2.3. A Brazilian parallel: Candomblé and Umbanda

Although the Brazilian religious landscape is full of varieties in the cultic milieu, one can distinguish the two major branches of Yorùbá derived religions in this country, namely Candomblé and Umbanda. In Candomblé, there is a bigger amount of traditions of the peoples of Bantu language. Other denominations or cult-groups that one could mention are Batuque, Xango, Tambor de Mina oder Nago.

Afro-American religions in Brazil are closely connected to Afro-American culture, like art, music, dance and healing. For the development of these religions in Brazil, the *quilombos*, settlements of escaped slaves, have been of high importance. In the beginning of the slave-trade, the slaves brought to Brazil were mainly of Central-African origin (Angola, which was colonised by the Portuguese, where today Portuguese is still the main language spoken). Later, the number of Yorùbá speaking people of Benin and Nigeria among the slaves reached a high degree. With the rise of tobacco-industry, urban centres with a significant amount of inhabitants of African origin arose, the most important being Bahía and Pernambuco. Before that time, many people stemming from the African continent were already living in St. Luiz, the capital of the northern state of Maranhao. The merchants divided the slaves into (fictitious) nations (like Nâgo, Jeje [Yorùbá from Benin], Congo and so on). From the part of the catholic church, they were grouped in so called “*hermandades*” (brotherhood) and “*irmandades*” (sisterhood). This is a similar process to grouping of slaves in *naciones* and *cabildos* in Cuba..

Brazilian Yorùbá were members of the “brotherhood of our lord of the martyrdom”, and the “sistershood of our lady of good death”. Women out of that latter group were to found the first terreiro (as the meeting place is called in Candomblé and Umbanda) in Bahía. Today, there are more than 2000 cabildos Throughout Brazil, most of them being led by women. As in Cuban Santéria, the cult centres around the Orixá (as they are written in Brazil), who are associated with catholic saints, like

- Oxala (the Brazilian name of Obàtálá, derived from Oriṣànlá) as Jesus crucified;
- Yemanjá (=Yemoja) as Mary, our lady of conception
- Nana Buruku (a divinity of the Ewe), a godhead associated with water, as Saint Anne
- Yansan (=Oya) as Saint Barbara, because of her relatedness to lightning; legend has it, that her father was struck and killed by lightning after having slain his daughter for converting to Christianity.

The leaders of the cults, focussing on the central concept of Yorùbá cosmology, *aṣe* (braz.: *axe*), are called *pai de santo* (men) or *mae de santo* (women). The initiates are called *filha* or *filho de santo*, respectively, meaning “daughter” or “son” of the orixá; they receive the orixá in mediumistic trance. Then there are male supporters, *oga*, who do not play a spiritual role in the cult. But give their financial aid. This stems from the time, when the cults were prohibited by Brazilian law.

The *terreiro* can be a building on its own, that is owned by a single person or a group, but also just a single room or a flat in a house. As a whole, it is a sacred place with special rooms (*quartos de santo*), the entrance to which is restricted to initiates, whilst in the so-called *barraços*, where the drumming, singing and dancing is done and also many possessions take place, one can find many visitors, since this part of the terreiro is open to everyone.

Umbanda has originated in the 1920ies in Rio de Janeiro and has spread all over Brazil since the 1950ies. Being a religion of the lower classes in its beginnings, it soon attracted many middle-class citizens and is a religion with members (or participants) from all social levels nowadays. The main differences to Candomblé can be seen in its more individualistic and utilitarian approach and lesser significance of preservation or reconstruction of African elements, so that it can be looked at as more syncretistic than Candomblé, giving more room to spiritualistic tendencies in the tradition of Allen Kardec.

3. The worldview of the Ewe and Fon of Dahomey and Haitian Vodou

3.1. The worldview of the Fon people

3.1.1. A historical note

The Fon people played the central political role in the former kingdom of Dahomey in the region that is now called Benin, the neighbouring country to Nigeria in the west. They have a very similar religious tradition to that of the Ewe, called Vodou or Vodun. The word „vodun“ means the spiritual beings as well as the cult of these beings. The Fon trace their origin back to a place called Adja-Tado, where their first ancestor is said to have lived around 1300. They established a dynasty in a place called Alladah or Adrah, which was to become the principle power in the region during the seventeenth century. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century they managed what has been called the Fon expansion. Although never a really centralized kingdom, but more a loosely structured society of lineage groups and extended families, the kingdom of Dahomey became an important power in 18th century coastal region in the eastern part of West Africa. A number of wars with the leading Yorùbá kingdom of the time, Oyo, made them vassals of this kingdom, but finally they could get rid of Oyo's dominance, as we have already mentioned before. Through cultural contact, but also through direct import, Yorùbá religion had a certain impact on the religion in Dahomey, especially through the Ifa-divination system. In the middle of the 18th century a Dahomean king imported the Yorùbá Ifá-system in order to centralise the kingdom's oracular authority by de-legitimising and controlling the many vodun possession oracles in the country (Brown 116f).

3.1.2. Worldview and cosmology: Mawu-Lisa, Nana Buruku and Da

As with Yorùbá cosmology and religion, we should not conceive of the Fon worldview as a unified system of beliefs held in the same way by all of the Fon people. Firstly, the investigators in Fon religion and worldview had to face a multiplicity of Gods, cults and myths. This variety results from different reasons: firstly, Fon people have had great ability to adapt and integrate foreign traditions; then, we find regional differences, but also variations according to different cult-groups and their own outlook into the world. This somewhat centrifugal and subversive tendency was fought by the king who introduced Ifa-divination to his kingdom. As P. Mercier writes, concerning cosmology, we find a common conception

widely diversified in details, and modified in varying degrees among the different groups by a number of influences.

For the Dahomeans, this present world in which we live in is not the first and only world that has been created. At the beginning of the present world, there are Mawu and Lisa, a divine pair, which themselves originate from Nana Buluku, a divinity without a specific cult, but who is looked at as pre-eminent to the other deities. The myths do not assign any role to him in the ordering of the world, which is done by Mawu-Lisa, the dual divinity, regarded as twins, sometimes as an androgynous being (the cult of twins, xoxo, plays an important role in Dahomean life, but it is still debated, whether their ever was a special cult dedicated to Mawu-Lisa, or Mawu-Lisa has been looked at as a remote divinity).

Mawu – female	Lisa – male
Ordering of the natural world, assisted by Da	Ordering of the world of man, assisted by Gu
Moon, Night, Freshness, Rest, Joy	Sun, Day, Heat, Labour
Fertility, Motherhood, Gentleness, Forgiveness	Power, Strength, Toughness

In fact, the most significant act in giving order to the world consists in the distribution of forces among the vodu. But before that, the principal outline of the cosmos has to be given and established.

Like the Yorùbá, the Fon conceive of the world as a calabash, of which the two halves meet exactly; the earth, flat, lies in this horizontal plane. The whole calabash floats in another calabash, surrounded by water, the outside waters being the source of the rain. The task of ordering the world thus consisted in gathering together the earth, determining the place of the waters and fitting together the whole. Da, who, in more folkloristic accounts is looked at as the son of Mawu-Lisa (like the other vodu), in more sophisticated versions is considered to be more like a force, that manifests itself in a number of ways in the world. His principal manifestation is Da Ayido Hwedo, the rainbow. Da Ayido Hwedo, which means “serpent” gives birth to all the other Da in the myths. The serpent is the symbol of flowing, continuous movement. Da Ayido hwedo, by coiling himself around the world, encircled it and made it stable and firm. He also has a dual character like Mawu-Lisa, but is not conceived as a pair. In the rainbow, male is the red part, the blue part being female.

3.1.3. The vodu and their abode

Like with the Yorùbá orisa, there are many versions of the genealogy of the vodu, which cannot be reconciled in another way than by a systematic, projective approach from outside. Despite of this difficulty, we can say, that the notion is generally held, that Mawu-Lisa gave birth to all the vodu. When the world was ordered, each of the vodu was given his domain. Hevioso (Sogbo), the androgynous thunder-God, was made lord of the atmospheric phenomena, Sakpata, a dual deity, whose weapon is smallpox, was given the earth; Agbe-Naete, twins of opposite sex, find their domain in the sea and the water, whilst Age is in charge of the wild, uncultivated land, were no man lives. These are the domains of the principal vodu; there are two other important vodu, that have no domain on their own. First we have to take into account, that each domain is subdivided into further, specialised fields of vodu power. So each domain is a group of vodu. And each domain has its own language, which is not understood by the vodu of other domains. Legba, the last of the vodu born by Mawu-Lisa, acts as the intermediary between the groups of the vodu. He is the universal interpreter between the vodu. Like Eshu, he is a trickster deity. Then there is Gu, who in some accounts is named as the eldest son of Mawu-Lisa, belonging to a group of sky-gods directly under the authority of Mawu-Lisa. He is the vodu of iron, with the characteristic features of a cultural hero, like Ògún, and is considered the lord of the domestic fire-place and the crafts. He plays a central role as the assistant of Lisa in the second part of the task of ordering the universe. Mawu is considered of being the force or the part of the dual deity, that was engaged in ordering the cosmos and creating man, with the assistance of Da. The week is traditionally divided into 4 days in West-Africa, so that you have for moon-month, one period from new moon to new moon, 7 weeks of four days instead of 2 weeks consisting of 7 days, like we are used to. The cosmos was put into order and man was created on the first day, when Mawu undertook a journey and formed the first beings out of clay. On the second day, work was interrupted and Gu appeared on the scene. On the third day, man was given sight, speech and knowledge of the outside world, on the fourth he was taught the technical skills. So Gu is the one, who is in charge of making the world a place inhabitable by man. Gu has two aspects: on the one hand he is an instrument in the hands of Mawu-Lisa, specially linked to Lisa, the strength and the sun; on the first day, the creator, in his aspect as Mawu, made a journey and formed the primordial men; on the fourth day, it is the creator in his aspect as Lisa, who travels around the world, accompanied by his assistant Gu, who gives the technical skills to mankind. The second aspect of Gu is that he is identified with iron, and with his emblem, the gubasa, a ceremonial sword. In this aspect, he is the heavenly blacksmith, a cultural hero, patron of all the blacksmiths and inventor of all crafts.

3.1.4. The tohwiyo, the ancestors and Fon Anthropology

Having formed the primordial men of clay, Mawu gave existence to mankind through forming tohwiyo, the founder of each clan. All the people that share the same essence and join into practicing the same cult, are of the same tohwiyo. They form a clan. The tohwiyo ensures, that the clan and its members are still connected to the world of the Gods. He also takes part in sending souls to the world and calling them back, and is he centre of the clan, also guaranteeing earthly communication. One can make a distinction between the real clan above and its manifestation on earth, which is incomplete. The chief of the clan, as an intermediary, is seen as somewhat in between the two worlds. This connection is established and held through the ancestor cult, which is given to the clan by the tohwiyo, who also gave the clan the laws of social life. Aside the ancestor-cults, the tohwiyo has his own cult, which is even more important than the cult of the ancestors. Ancestor-cult can cause a serious problem to slaves taken away from their home-soil, where they were linked to their clan. The cult of the Tohwiyo has its own shrines and initiates as the cult of the vodun. The cult of the vodun, too, has its different cult-groups and initiates. The organisation of Fon and Ewe vodu therefore can be called cultic, it is a religion, that is better described as a co-existence of different cults, that, to a certain degree, rest on a shared worldview, loosely held together, than as a religious body organised by central institutions. .

Due to his functioning as governor of the clan, the tohwiyo plays an important role in composing the human being. In the beginning, it was the creator himself who formed men out of clay. Later, he drew back from such worldly affairs and gave his power in procreation to the tohwiyo and to the ancestors around them. The ancestor, who is to become the person's Joto, is "sent" to the family by the Great Sê. He selects the clay, from which the person is to be formed and becomes the person's joto this way, to which the se, the human soul, is linked. With the power of Da, implicitly working in this process, the continuation of human life is thus set into work. The joto is not reincarnated in the new human being, but rather transmits to the latter his sociological part, his status and his role, so that several persons living at the same time can have and indeed most often do have the same Joto.

The human soul (se) has many forms: the se is, strictly speaking, a portion of Mawu, the great Se of the world. It is the animatin principle. Selido is life, feeling, personality; it is peculiar to the individual, spiritual faculty, . The Kpoli, is identified by the fa-oracle, the person's destiny. An then we find the ye, the indestructible part of the soul, the shadow, that leaves man by the

time of the burial and becomes invisible. There are three stages of Initiation through the Fa divination-system, similar to that of Yorùbá Ifá-divination.

The adepts of certain Vodun(n) are called Vodunsi, because they are possessed by the Vodun. They have to go through a process of initiation, in which they learn the language, the dances and the chants of the Vodun and must work, so that there is an income for the house or convent of the vodun, the Vodun-kpame (Hunkpame), supervised by the xwégan (head of house), the Kangan (master of the rope) in charge of discipline and the Hunso and the Nagbo who are "novice" master and mistress respectively. In the Hunkpamê the elect are initiated to the cult of their "spouse", the Vodun to whom they are consecrated for their whole life.

Initiation to the Vodun is a particularly important moment that deeply marks the life of the individual. Its aim is gradually to lead the profane from non-existence to their existence as sacred persons; the novice undergoes a series of separations which are each a death to the previous profane life. Before anything else, the Vodunsi must make a solemn vow of absolute discretion as regards what they have seen and heard or will see and hear in the convent. Any Vodunsi who cannot keep quiet about what is to remain secret and act with the veneration that is due to the sacred object he carries on his head will be a traitor who will be charged. The cult of a certain Vodun is headed by the high-priest, the Hunnon.

After all, the function of this system of initiation, together with the worship of the ancestors of the families and clans, that have their taboos as well, shows, that the cult of the vodun plays an important part in binding together traditional society. It can be looked at from its social dimension.

3.1.5. Recent developments in the context of African traditional religion

Nowadays, there is a revival of these autochthonous cults, one reason for that being, that it is connected to the traditional form of religious experience of these people, that was suppressed both by Christian Missionaries and the communist government of independent Benin in the years 1972-1989. From 28 May to 1 June 1991, a symposium of the great leaders of the Vodun cults was held with the aim of restoring a certain degree of legal recognition for this traditional religion. In 1993, a great international Vodun festival was organised and held in Benin: "Ouidah 92". Its effect was to foster its renewal. In the same year, Pope John Paul II's visit and his highly media-enhanced meeting with Vodun leaders were taken by many Vodun followers, not as a sign of dialogue, but as the indication that the Church at last recognises that the Vodun cult has its place. This combination of circumstances means that in Benin Vodun is currently organising and structuring itself more and more as a traditional religion,

with a national feast (10 January) and a national hierarchy. The problem with these cults can be, that they are partly built upon a system of secrecy and fear, which can lead and in fact does lead in special cases to religious violence, one example being, that the vodun elect their vodunsi and that there reportedly have been cases of kidnapping young men or women whose families did not want, that they join the cult.

But this is a problem of contemporary religious developments in West Africa; that has been subject to investigations by scholars of religion, such as the study carried out by Karola Elwert-Kretschmer, *Religion und Angst: Soziologie der Voodoo-Kulte* / Karola Elwert-Kretschmer . - Frankfurt, Main [u.a.] : Campus-Verl. , 1997. - 220 S. . - ISBN: 3-593-35848-4. - Literaturverz. S. 210 – 220, which takes the counterpart side to many studies carried out in the last decades that try to show the authenticity and originality of African world views and tend to interpret contexts of fear, magic and violence as misreadings by European researchers. The spreading of Afro-American cults has led to a vivid exchange between new world adaptations of African Traditional Religions and these religions on the African continent. We know of Afro-Americans that go to West-Africa to be initiated in a Cult and than build an African cultic centre in America, like Baba Ifa Karade or others. Through this process, new religious developments have started. We have to notice, that not only the religion of the slaves brought to the Americas can be seen as a transformation and adaptation of African traditional religions, but that this process is going on nowadays within the Afro-American religious context.

3.2. Haitian Vodou.

3.2.1. A short history of the religion in Haiti

Apparently, the name Vodou, Vaudu, Vodun, Voodoo or the like, stems from the Fon word Vodun/Vodun, meaning spirit or deity or the cult of this deities. The followers of the religion in Haiti and on other places, like the USA, where it has been exported to by Haitians who went there, do not refer to a religion called “Voodoo”, rather they speak of themselves as people who are serving the lwa (loa), which is the name for the spiritual entities revered and manifesting themselves in mediumistic trance, used in the Haitian context.

Haiti (land of mountains) is the name, that the Arawaks, the Indians settling in the Caribbean sea before the arriving of Columbus, gave to the island that was called Hispaniola by the European conquerors. Slaves from Africa were brought there since 1517. Later, as the Spanish conquistadores searched for wealth in other places like Peru, the western part of the island was abandoned. French pirates made it a dangerous place to live in, and it was only the

French government that could get control of it. So, in 1675 the pirates had turned to farmers under effective French control, which resulted in a division of the island into two parts in 1697 by the Treaty of Ryswick, when the French officially became the colonial power in the western part of the island, the state called “Haiti” of our time, and the Spanish restricted themselves to the eastern part, the Dominican Republic of today.

The French attitude towards the slave-population differed from that of the Spanish, of which we have heard when talking about Cuba. As Anthony Pinn writes:

“With the Treaty of Ryswick the difficulty in providing solid religious training for slaves was reinforced by a lack of interest on the part of the French planters and businesspersons who now controlled the area. This, combined with intense interest in economic gain and advanced production capabilities resulted in slaves receiving a great deal of religious ‘free space’”.

The efforts of the church to label the religious activities of the slaves as Satan’s work and preventing them from their traditional practices through controlling the space in which the slaves moved, and prohibiting gatherings of the Africans, were not successful. In the second half of the 18th century, many French farmers came to the islands, who allowed their slaves to cultivate their own little pieces of land, which were in fact those mountainous regions that were really hard to cultivate, in order not to have to care about supporting them with food. As an outcome of that, an economy of little farming places developed in Haiti, characteristic for the country up to our days. Whilst, as we have seen, the urbanism of Cuba has had the main impact on the emergence of Afro-Cuban religions, in Haiti, the economic background of slave religion is the place of the Africans in a farming society.

Like in Cuban and Brazilian Afro-American religions, the religion of the slaves consisted in a blending of catholic and African elements. And this religion also is said to have played an important role in the Haitian revolution, which took place as a kind of outcome of the French revolution. The French Revolution of 1789 was seen by the French population of Haiti as a chance to get rid of the French colonial administration and French taxes. The blacks, freed and enslaved made their claim for liberation and equality, based on the principle of *égalité*. In February of 1791 they conducted an uprising, that forced the French convent to give equal rights to the mulattos born free. But the social status of the slaves did not change. This led to an uprising of the slaves, that has to be seen as a main turning point in the history of Haiti. On August 14, 1791, slaves and slaves already escaped, gathered in a place called “Bois Caman” (the Caman forest) under the leadership of a slave that had escaped from Jamaica, whose name was Boukman. They started a cruel war, burning down plantations and killing white farmers. It ended in 1804, January 1., with the declaration of independence. So Haiti was the

first colony in the Latin-American world, that gained independence, abolished slavery and declared equality of all citizens.

As a result of that political development, there were no more slaves sold to Haiti after 1804. For religious life it meant an isolation from European Christianity. Until 1860 there was no contact with the catholic church. Christian religion developing on its own. The institution of one priest in certain Vodou-cults playing the part of the Christian priest seems to stem from that time. The so-called “bush-priest” (pret-savanne) begins ceremonies by rendering catholic prayers. From 1860 to the time around 1900, no special attention was paid to the Vodou-cults by officials of the Catholic church, but at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, with establishing “league against Voodoo” catholic work against that religion began. Vodou was labeled as devilish, demonic work, like in Catechisms:

- “ 31. Who is the principal slave of Satan? – the principal slave of Satan is the houngan [vodou priets]
32. What are the names given by the houngan to Satan? – The names given to Satan by houngan are loas [the names for the vodun in haitian Vodun], angels, saints, morts [ancestors] and marass [the divine twins]”
33. Why do houngan give the names of angels, saints and morts? – [...] in order to deceive us more easily.
- 34 How do men serve Satan? In sinning, casting spells, practicing magic, giving food-offerings, manger les anges, manger marassa.”

From 1960 on the attitude of church officials towards Vodun began to change again, now being more open-minded to this form of religious life.

Outside of Haiti, voodoo-practice can be found mainly in the southern part of the USA, namely in Louisiana, where many French farmers fled to, taking their slaves with them, in the course of the Haitian revolution. They had influence on the so called spiritual churches in the southern states of the USA, where we still can find so called “Hoodoo” doctors today. There are also cults related to Vodou in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

3.2.2. Petwo and Rada-cult.

There are two main cult-forms, nanchons (nations), in which Haitian Vodun is divided. The Petro (or: Petwo)- cult and the Rada-cult. The Petro cult is associated with the Haitian revolution, but Rada claims to be the more important part of the tradition. The name Rada is derived from Allada, the Dahomean holy city. Rada loas (lwas) are cool lwas, whilst the Petro lwas are hot. Both sides of Vodun think of themselves as serving the lwa and bringing the

energies of the universe into harmony with life by that service. As rada lwas are said to reside in Guinea (Ginen, as the Haitian say), rada provides a connection to the African homeland. The cult's purpose for the individual consists in centering oneself in an economy of energy, whose main agents are:

- Bondye (the supreme power; The word is a Creolisation of the french "bon dieu")
- The lwas (mysteres)
- Ancestors (les morts)
- Other spirits

The petwo cults are of New World origin, they are more aggressive, they are not cool & balancing, but aggressive and angry. The difference between rada and petro manifests itself, for instance, in the use of water in rada cult and rum in petro cult. But, as a rule, the petro lwas are not distinctive of the rada lwas but rather alternate manifestations of the same lwa.

3.2.3. The Vodou-Temple

Vodou is a religion organised in cult-groups, without any institutional framework that the cult-groups would participate in. The centre of each cult-group is the "temple", and the members of the group consider themselves as members of the temple, as all belonging to one greater family. The head of the family is the mambo (priestess of the cult) or the oungan (priest of the cult), the initiated members are called ounsi and considered "children of the house". They call the mambo or oungan "mama" or "papa". What has been called a "temple" is, nothing else than the house of the mambo/oungan, that serves as a religious centre.

On the country, these centres are normally farms. One can find main buildings, in which the mambo or oungan live with their families and buildings for the lwa. Between the buildings, that can be decorated with the symbols of the lwas, the so called "Vever" or "vévé" (will talk about that later), we find trees and plants that supply leaves and herbs for ritual use and chicken, roosters and goats destined for sacrifice live there, moving freely. Poorer "temples" consist of only one building, which is the rule in the cities as well. There are no buildings for the lwas, but altars, that might be located in a separate room, a corner of a room or inside a wardrobe. If the temple is in a small place, there is only one altar for all the lwa.

On the *altars*, ritual objects are kept, like:

- The objects connected to the lwa, like: the sword of Ogou, the mirrors and cosmetic articles of the love-goddess Erzili Freda, the pipe of the farmer-lwa Azaka, tureens, trays and bottles that keep sacrificial meals and drinks.
- Pictures and statues of catholic saints, candles, stones and the like

- Sometimes we find toys; they are connected to the divine twins Marassa, who are also considered to be children
- The ritual dress for the ounsí, being worn after having fallen into trance, also can be found there.
- For the water spirits a basin is supplied. This basin might be big enough, that a possessed person (=the water spirit him/herself) can take a bath in it, or it might be as small as a glass of water.

The peristil is the room, in which festivals and feasts take place, traditionally a terrace with a roof. In the middle of the terrace we find the *poteau mitan*, the middle pillar- It serves as the medium of traffic (the way, the ladder), which the lwa use to travel between their world and our world. We find that idea of a connecting piece between the different realms of reality (e.g. the underworld, our world of everyday life and heaven) in many religions; it has been called “axis mundi” (axis of the world) by scholars of religion. Examples could be Jacob’s ladder from the Old Testament (Genesis 28,12), the tree that the shaman uses for travelling, the very idea of a cosmic tree or mountain and the like. Unlike the rooms preserved for the lwas, the peristil is used in everyday life as a profane room.

Drums: the drums are kept in the peristil. They are considered divine voices, similar to Santería ritual, they are believed to channel the lwas with the help of their significant rhythmic patterns. There are two main types of drum-sets:

Rada-set: similar to Santería, a set of three, but with only one head attached to them, they are called pitit (from french “petit”, little): the little one, segon (from french: seconde, the second one): the middle-sized drum and manman (the mother), which is the biggest.

Petwo-set: this is a set of drums of Congolese origin, used for playing the sharper rhythms of the Petwo (or: Congo) rites, in which also a crack of the whip can bring down the lwa.

Other rhythmic devices used are the *asan* (*ason*), a calabash strung with beads or bones (best that of) a snake and bells.

There is much difference to be found between the form of the cultic centres in Vodun. This has three main reasons:

- Every Voodoo-centre is autonomous, not having to face the rules of any higher instance
- No scriptural fixation of tradition is available
- The flexibility of Vodun-tradition, that has adapted itself successfully to changing circumstances throughout the centuries.

3.2.4. Healing ceremonies

In Vodou, healing plays an important role. Healing in every respect is of greater significance for everyday life of an adept of the religion than the more spectacular phenomena of the cult like possession trance. But this central role of healing has also had an impact on the emerging of the commonly held image of Voodoo as magic practice, sorcery and witchcraft.

Sometimes the mambo or oungan will advise the consultant to marry a lwa. In vodun, special lwas can be married to their devotees in a ceremony that is very similar to a wedding between human persons. This is a kind of an oath to stay faithful to the lwa and to practice sexual abstinence on the day that is dedicated to the lwa. It can be the devotees ambition to marry a lwa, but also the lwa can deposit his/her will to do so by manifesting him/herself in dreams or by causing problems that can be solved by marriage.

Normally, the mambo or oungan use divination to find out what kind of trétmen (treatment) is appropriate to handle the problems of a consultant:

- A meal for hungry spirits
- A ritual bath
- Making a pwen (point), an object, that focuses a persons problems, in order to be treated.

Example: a woman has a problem with the way that she is treated by her husband. A glass is filled with ice and syrup, then it is closed. This matter is designed to cool down the man in question and soften him. Then it is wrapped into a piece of dress of the man, in order to establish a connection with him. Then the glass is turned upside down, showing that things will have to change fundamentally. The famous voodoo-dolls stem from that kind of healing practice, too. For example, to gain a lover, one binds together to dolls and the like.

3.2.5. Zombies

Another spectacular feature of Voodoo, represented dramatically in many movies, is the figure of the Zombie, roughly speaking a corpse without a soul, rising from the grave. To understand the concept of the Zombie, we have to know, that Voodooists think of the human person as one who is guided by more than one souls or spiritual principle:

- The **ti bónanj**: the “little good angel”, the conscience of a person
- The **gwo bónanj**: the “big good angel”, the personality of a given person
- The **lwa mét tèt**: the lwa, who is the master of the head, a personal guardian angel, like the Yorùbá *ori* bound to a persons head.

After dead, the connection between the gwo bonanj and the lwa mét tèt has to be resolved in the right way through ritual means. When this is done in the wrong way, the gwo bonanj can be captured by an evil sorcerer (a bòkò), who will transfer the gwo bonanj into an evil spirit, a Zombie, that he uses for exerting witchcraft.

Another form of the “Zombie” is the above mentioned living dead, a dead corpse without a soul. In Haiti, this Zombies are thought of as corpses that the bòkò has taken out of the grave and revived. But, since the gwo bonanj has already left the dead body, it is revived without a soul. The bòkò uses this Zombie to fulfil hard labour as a kind of human working machine. I always wonder, if the circumstances of slavery have taken part in shaping such an imagination.

3.2.6. The lwas

On the top of Vodou-hierarchy we find bon Dieu bon (Bondye), God the father. He is above the lwas, of whom we can find hundreds in Haitian Vodou, some of them of West African origin, some of them from Central Africa, some of them organised in a group, where new lwas can come to existence as new aspects of a given lwa, as it is the case with the Gede-group of lwa. The "vèvé" are drawings of corn meal, flour or gunpowder that "concentrate" energies of a particular spirit so that he/she might be inclined to reveal him/herself by materialising in the body of one of the devotees. The vèvé are the signature of the Gods. The adherents to a certain lwa, the ounsi, gradually become initiated into being mediums of the lwa. The head of person “tèt” plays a specific role in that process, and it has to be taken care of the head ritually, like by cleaning it through a ritual called lavé tèt (washing the head). A person called by a lwa might experience this calling in dreams or through a manifestation of the lwa in the person in mediumistic trance. A person, who manifests a lwa without being initiated into it’s cult, will be called an *ounsi bosalle*, a “wild ounsi”. In order to become a “civilised” ounsi, initiation rituals have to take place. Through these, the ounsi bosalle will become a ounsi konesan (kanzo, from the french *connaissance*, knowledge). The time of instruction involved may take years, central for that are the rituals of kouche (to be laid on the floor). The Ounsi bozalle first becomes a ounsi lave tèt, than an ounsi konesan (kanzo), one that is married to her/his lwa. Later on, he or she can become a ounjenikon, a song master able to lead a ceremony. The steps of initiation take place in a special sanctuary room, the djévo and are called “kouche”. Initiation does not only serve the benefit of the initiated person, but, as a medium able to represent the lwa, he or she also serves the community. The ritual begins with the gathering of the items necessary for the ritual – this can be costly,

although there are no fees to be paid directly for initiation, but there can be a lot to be spent. The lave tèt ritual consists of a 3 days ceremony of sensual deprivation (most of the time lying on the floor in a dark room), in the course of which finally the gwo bonanj of the initiands is separated from their heads in order to establish a connection to the lwa mét tèt. The pot tèt (pot of the head) will be prepared, in order to receive the gwo bonanj of the initiands. After preparation, the ounsis promenade with their pot tèt on their heads.

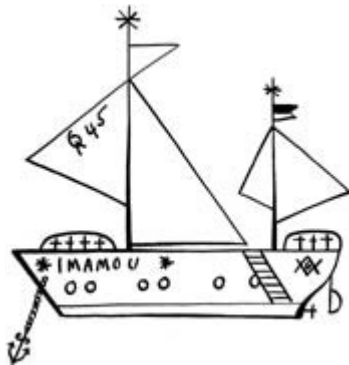


(photograph taken through traditional ceremony in Togo)

After the ritual of lave tèt, their follows a time of instruction and the second step of initiation, the seven-day kanzo ritual, which is closed by the boule zen (brulé zen), the ceremony of the burning pots.

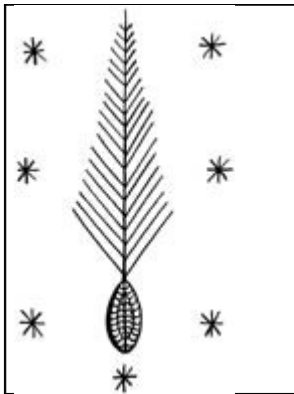
3.2.6.1. Some lwas

In this chapter, I will give a short outline of the role of some major lwa and, if available, a depiction of the respective vèvè is given, too.

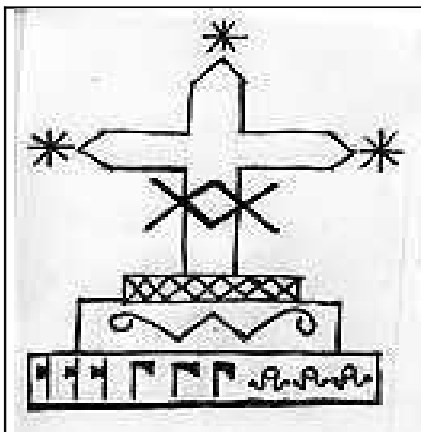


Aroyo (AGWE) is the lwa of the sea, representing the depths of the oceans, where many Africans have perished in the Trans-Atlantic passage. Described as "a ready strength". He is one of Erzulies' lovers. His vèvè is a ship or fish, iconographically he is also associated with the catholic Saint "Saint Ulrich", due to the latters depiction with a fish in his hands.

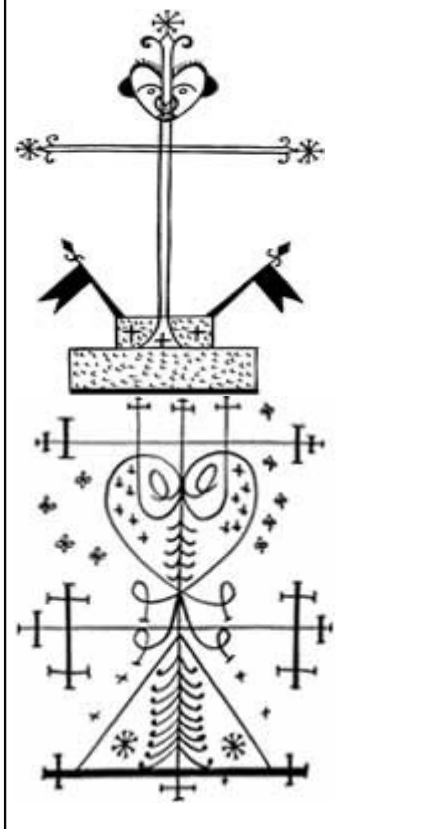
Agwe/Aroyo is the patron of ships and sailors; during his annual festival, his devotees go out on the sea with their boats and give sacrifice to him by placing food and drinks on the ocean in little boats. The crowd dances to the rhytm of the drums in his honour. He likes the salut-shots and marine-uniforms a lot.



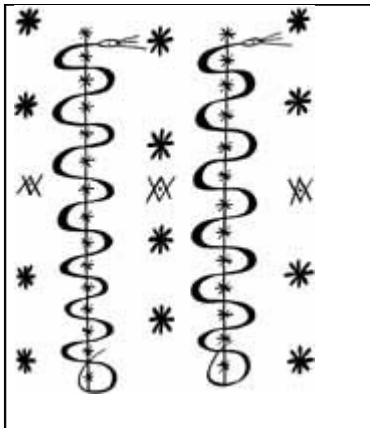
Aizan Velekhete (Ayizan Avlekete) represents the "female principle." She sits in the Haitian Vodou temple, and becomes essential in the initiation of new male and female priests of Vodou. She is represented as the frond of the royal palm tree, the West African symbol of freedom and of the interaction between worlds. She is the main spirit of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haiti's first head of state and a national hero. The palm tree is centrally located on the Haitian national flag.



All cemeteries have a family of spirits that control the "other" crossroads, the passage from life to death. That function resides in the Gede family of spirits. The first one of the symbols is the common symbol for Gede, he watches over the cemeteries, sexuality and humour, he is the lord of death. One cannot easily distinguish Gede from Legba. The Gede-family of lwas is growing constantly.



Baron Cimetièrè (Bawon), whose vèvè is the middle one, is the male principle; he appears as grave-digger, with hoe and shovel, sometimes carrying a coffin. Manman Brigitte (Brijit, the third vèvè), is the female principle. Baron Samedi (baron saturday) is a very popular Gede, he appears in trance as a corpse, talking nasally, falling to the ground; then he is treated in a similar way as one would treat a corpse. But he can also begin to make jokes, often behaving lasciviously. The Gédé also love children, there is a connection between the two passages of life: coming to life and leaving it. Gede is also of importance for healing rituals, because he has knowledge of all the wisdom of the ancestors, therefore being able to support the mambo and oungan in their spiritual work.



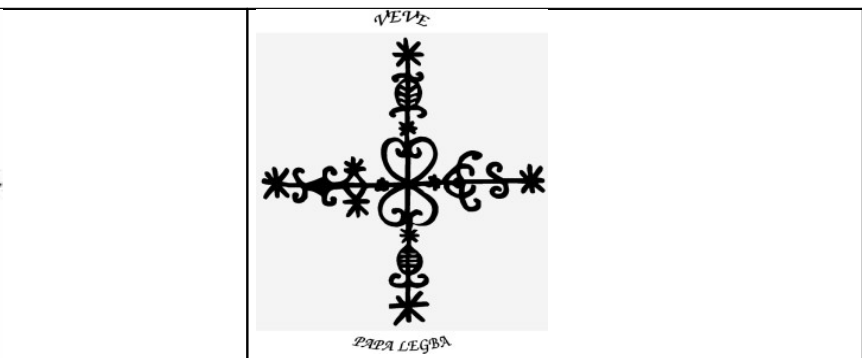
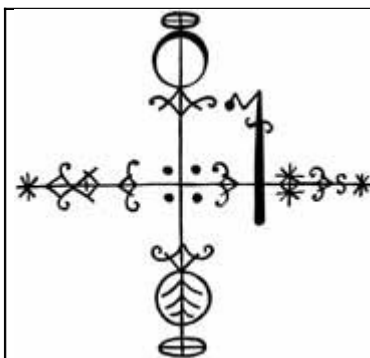
Danbalah and Aida Hwedo (Danbala and Ayida Wèdo) are the divine serpent and the rainbow, whose powers reside in the domain of knowledge. Sometimes referred to as Danbala Wedo, the water spirit, with the symbol of the snake, that can survive in hot and dry regions and therefore is looked at as a symbol of life-energy. Associated with St. Patrick, who is sometimes depicted with snakes, because it is said that he relieved Ireland from the snakes.

Danbalah is the eldest of the lwa, therefore special attention and care is paid to him. He is also thought of as connecting the earth with the water underground (Ginen, Guinea, the homeland), therefore the poteau mitan is also called “poto-Danbalah”.



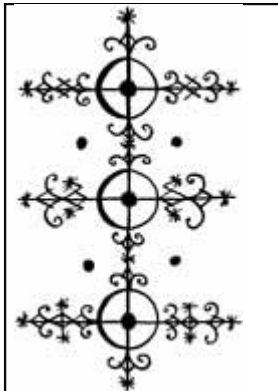
Grand Bois (Gran Bwa) Haiti lacks a hunting tradition, but has a deity that represents the power of all vegetation and all forests in Grand Bois. This lwa is a paramount healer, much of healing in the framework of Vodou being linked to the use of herbs and leaves.

Legba

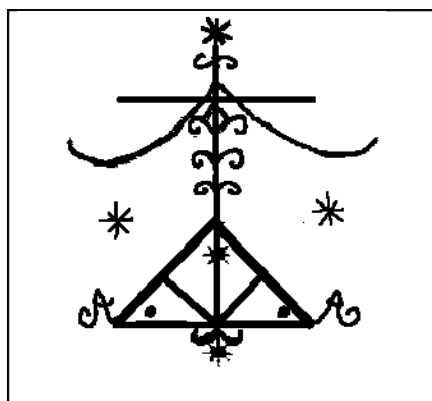


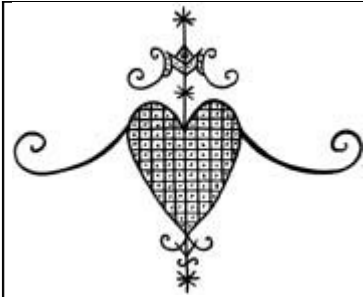
Above we see two Vévé for Legba Ati-bon the first lwa called at all ceremonies. He stands at the crossroads and is called the “master of the Crossroads”, the maitre carrefour; his place is at the entrance of the voodoo ceremonial centre, where gifts are brought to him in the form of little sacrifices, like breaking an egg, lighting a candle or spilling some drops of gin on the floor. He is a master linguist, a trickster, the intermediary lwa. He appears as a very old and crippled man. This can have its source in African mythology, where Eleggua is said to have

legs of different length, due to the fact, that one of his legs is within the realm of mankind, the other in the realm of the spirits. He is the one, who allows for the interaction between the physical world and the metaphysical world, hence the crossroads. In some traditions, he would also be called "the gatekeeper." He is often depicted with an enlarged penis, being responsible for fertility, sometimes he is shown as a hill of earth, the first elevation to be found in the cosmos. Being the lord of the crossroads, the cross is also a sign for him like it is for the Gede.

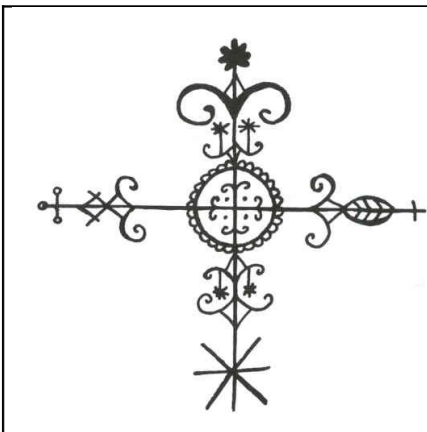
	<p>Maraca Dosou/Dosa (Marasa): These are the primordial Couple, the twins. The name Maraca derives from the peoples of the Kongo basin, where the name is "Mapasa." The Twins are "completed" by the next child, the dosou (male) or dosa (female) whose powers are conflated with the original pair, $1+1=3$. The twins are often depicted by images of the catholic saints Kosmas and Damian, who were brothers. The cult of twins may have to do with the concept of a primordial duality..</p>
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Families with twins are said to be blessed, but they also have a lot of obligations to fulfill, even after the death of one of the twins or of both. There is a cult of twins among Yorùbá people, too, and the birth of twins is a matter of special attention, be it in a negative or a positive way, in many African societies

	<p>Ogou is an important lwa, who is prominent among the petro and the rada lwa as well; his sign is his sword (machete), or a gun, which those possessed by him are whirling around in an impressive way. Being a hot-tempered lwa on the one side, he is also characterized by justice and rightfulness. There are several Ogou, like Ogou Sen Jak Majé (Saint Jakob the older) or Ogou Panama (wearing a Panama hat).</p>
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Erzulie / Ezili: like Ogou, this female lwa has divided in several personalities, some of them tending to the pedwo, other to the rada side. She is the goddess of love, representing motherly love, but sensuality, sexuality and the hard working woman as well. These various aspects are associated with different forms of depiction and veneration of the Virgin Mary. Ezilis never always shows a heart (apt for a goddess of love) and her various personalities could be looked at as a reflection of the roles a woman can take in haitian society.



Simbi is of kongolese origin, a name for water spirits; the original simbis were cool, creative spirits in the Kongo cosmology. These include Simbi Dlo (Simbi in Water) and Simbi Andezo (Simbi in Two Waters). The magical ability of their pwen, called nkisi in Kongolese, translated into powerful magics, that were then used in Petro rites, giving rise to Simbi Anpaka, Simbi Ganga and Simbi Makaya to name but a few.

Every Simbi also has specific associations - Simbi Andezo has a connection to both fresh and salt water. Simbi Anpaka is associated with leaves and poisons. Simbi Makaya is known as a sorcerer, and is the patron of the Sanpwel Society. Speaking of “Simbi” as one, his Vévé is a cross with a snake, he is like legba in being connected to crossroads and facilitating communications between the realms of humans and the gods, and shares the symbol of the snake with damballah. He connects the two nanchons, (petro and rada), and is generally associated with magic and magicians.

A short look at some other African-American traditions

4.1. Afro-American Christianity & the Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad

In the protestant countries, we can notice another attitude towards the slaves, resulting in a different development of „slave religion“. In the history of Christian mission among the African slaves on the North American continent (the part that now is occupied by the USA) the contradiction between Christian Ideals and the reality of a slave-holding society was of major importance. During the colonial period, Anglican missionaries had to struggle with the reluctance of the slave-holders, who were against conversion of the slaves mainly out of two reasons. One of them was the fear of dissolving ethnic differences through sharing the same religion, which they thought would lead to arrogant slaves. On the other hand, they feared that baptism would lead to immediate emancipation of the slaves, since the English law forbade enslavement of fellow Christians.

The latter argument resulted in a specific genre of religious literature with the aim of showing, that Christendom and slavery could go together. Mainly, these texts relied on Ephesians 6,5. Suspicions did arise, too, that some slaves would only long for baptism in order to gain emancipation from slavery. A. J. Raboteau tells us about a missionary in South Carolina, who demanded a vow from the slaves to be baptised, that they did not want to receive the sacrament in order to attain freedom. „Apparently he missed the irony“, as Raboteau writes. In contrast to the more „magical“ interpretation of the sacrament of baptism within the framework of Iberian Catholicism, Anglican mission tended to convince the objects of the missionary work of the superiority of the Christian dogma. Therefore, Anglican missionaries tried to slowly indoctrinate the slaves. This strategy proved to be not too successful, after all. When protestant revivalist movements came to the continent from Britain around 1740 and held on to be influential after independence, this situation changed. Baptist and Methodist spirituality, with its stress on personal religious experience proved to be attractive to the Africans, used to ecstatic religious practice. Furthermore, Baptists and Methodists alike were abolitionists in the beginning of their missionary work overseas. Soon they had to change their official attitude towards slavery due to experiencing harsh inhibitions. They adopted the strategy of bettering the situation of the slaves rather than working for abolition. But the short period, during which they had dissolved the spiritual and worldly separation of blacks and whites on the basis of the doctrine of equality of all human beings, had led to a dissemination of Christianity among the slaves. But they were not unaware of the difference between Christian religion the way it was practised by themselves and the Christianity of their white masters. As a rule,

blacks could only hold religious meetings when being looked after and white preachers were installed with the task of preaching exactly what was the version of Christian doctrine the slave-holders thought to be apt for those subjected to them: A former slave describes that kind of service in this way:

„The preacher came and he'd just say ‚Serve your masters. Don't steal your master's turkey. Don't steal your master's chickens [...] Do whatsoever your master tell you to do.‘ Same old thing all the time. My father would have church in dwelling houses and they had to whisper [...] Sometimes they would have church at his house. That would be when they want a real meetin' with some real preachin' [...] they used to sing their song in a whisper. That was a prayer meeting from house to house ... once or twice a week.“

Obviously, a different kind of interpretation of the bible, more apt to reflect their situation in the way that they looked at it, arose amongst the slaves, who did not hold, that Christianity and slavery could coexist.. Afro-Americans began to use images and tales from the bible to describe and reflect their own situation. And what they found in the biblical books, was a story of liberation from slavery. White preachers were confronted with an interpretation of biblical texts opposed to their own. They were preaching redemption from sin, and their black sheep were thinking in terms of their **real** liberation from slavery. In the memory of a white army-chaplain this sounds like that:

„There is no part of the Bible with which they are so familiar as the story of the deliverance of Israel. Moses is their ‚ideal‘ of all that is high, and noble, and perfect, in man. I think they have been accustomed to regard Christ not so much in the light of a *spiritual* deliverer, as that of a second Moses who would eventually lead them out of *their* prison-house of bondage“.

These hopes, like the feeling of being imprisoned in a strange land, have been expressed through the so-called „Negro-Spirituals“, that widely adopt biblical imagery to give an account of the situation of Afro-American slaves in North America. The promised land, Canaan, was associated with the North by the slaves from the south, the flight to the north was described with the crossing of the river Jordan. The irony of this interpretation can be found in the fact, that white religious settlers had described their way from Europe as the land of captivity to America as the promised land with the same passages and images of biblical origin.

Another important reason for the success of Methodist mission among the black Americans can be seen in the familiarity, that Africans, that came from a background of ecstatic religious experience had with revivalist spirituality of the Wesleyan type.

One of the roots of Pentecostalism is to be found in Afro-American Christianity, although this fact has been widely neglected by white historians of Pentecostalism. William Joseph Seymour (1870-1922), a son of slaves, who learned to read and write on his own, was to become the central figure in the Azusa Street Mission of Los Angeles. There, during a ten-

days period of fasting between April 9 and 12 1906 charismatic manifestations like speaking in tongues took place. These events had a decisive impact on the spreading of Pentecostalism throughout the USA. Seymour, having grown up in the delta of the Mississippi went north as a young man, first to Indianapolis. Later he moved on to Cincinnati, where he joined the black community of Methodists and worked as an independent evangelist. Then he went on to Houston, Texas, where he attended the bible-school of Charles Fox Parham, who is commonly seen as the founder of the Pentecostal movement. But he had to listen to Parham from the outside, because the latter was a strict follower of separation of races. Later on, Parham also became a preacher for the Ku-Klux-Clan, holding to the doctrine, that Anglo-Saxons were the legitimate heirs of Israel. By taking a look at the history of Pentecostalism, we see the centrality of the question of race for US-American Christianity. Whilst Azusa Street Mission, bringing forth 38 missionaries in two years time, had been a symbol for overcoming borders between the races in the beginning of that movement, soon white preachers began to complain about the dissolution of these very borders, like Parham did in 1912:

„Men and women, whites and blacks, knelt together or fell across one another; frequently, a white woman, perhaps of wealth and culture, could be seen thrown back in the arms of a big ‚buck nigger‘ and held tightly thus as she shivered and shook in freak imitation of Pentecost. Horrible, awful shame!“

As Ian McRobert has pointed out, white Pentecostals in the USA have made use of doctrinal conflicts to exclude of its history the leitmotif of black Christianity, ecstatic religion and revivalism, incorporated in early Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, up to our days Afro-American forms of Pentecostalism do exist and are coming into existence, like the Revival-Zion-movement in Jamaica or the **Spiritual Baptists**, a movement that originated among the low-class black population of Trinidad under the impact of missionary efforts of the Baptist Church from the USA.

The Spiritual Baptists are also called shouters, with reference to the characteristics of their religious meetings, but members of the denomination do not like that term at all. The group lost connection to its mother church in the USA soon and began to include elements of Trinidad religions, mainly of the Shango-cult, a Yorùbá derived religion in Trinidad. Currently, in Trinidad & Tobago (two islands in the southern Caribbean, not far from Venezuela, statistics say that there are 29,4% Roman Catholics, 23,8% Hindus, 10,9% Anglicans, 5,8% Muslims, 3,4% Presbyterians and 25,7% of other religions. The largest groups of the population of about 1,2 million are East Indians (as Indians are called in the Caribbean) and Africans. Spiritual Baptists nowadays are also found in the USA, Canada, and

Great Britain. Speaking in tongues is very important in this religion, in the centre of the mass, that can last up to 6 hours we find a very emotional sermon, that is accompanied by responses from the side of the community. Being an ecstatic religion on the one side, Spiritual Baptism is characterised by a rigid social structure of the community and the other. Hierarchy is dominated by male persons, the priests are selected for their jobs in reference to their charismatic qualities. Some of the members, even priests, are followers of Shangoism as well. The offices held in the community are called leader, preacher and prover (the interpreter), shepherds (in charge of caring for the children), watchmen (they care about visitors), water carriers (they have to do with baptism), nurses (take care of the candidates), warriors, commanders, inspectors, judges. Preaching, exorcism of evil spirits (orisha!), talking in tongues (as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit) and public confession of sins are central religious activities during the service. The middle pillar of the chapel is of great importance, like in Vodun.

4.2. African derived religions in Jamaica

4.2.1. Obeah & Myalism

In the years 1655-1807, 750.000 Africans have been brought to Jamaica as slaves in sugar-production, but in 1807 the total amount of people of African origin in Jamaica was only 320.000. First reports on religion of the slaves talk about **Obeah** and **Myalism**, rendering them as sorcery and witchcraft. Whether this could be looked at as two different forms of African-derived religions in Jamaica, has been subject of discussion. In such an account, normally Obeah is looked at as the “black magic” tradition and Myalism as its “white” counterpart

- **Obeah** is a tradition commonly looked at as “black” or “evil” magic. Clients consult Obeah practitioners to counter illness and misfortunes. A special topic is the power, that the obeah-man is able to achieve over the shadow of a dead person. The shadow is looked at as an outer manifestation of an inner, invisible principle of a person, that can be separated from that person. After death, it becomes a duppie. In case, the dangerous duppie is not neutralised properly by funeral rites, it can be used by the obeah-man to do evil. Obeah has been subject to anthropological research as well as it has been used as a theme or subtext in modern literature, for example in the writings of Derek Walcott.
- **Myalism** is a tradition that has emerged in the 18th century in Jamaica. As a tradition of its own it can be considered extinct in our days. Most Jamaicans themselves are not aware of Myalism. Today, Myalism is looked at as a kind of “white” magic, whilst Obeah is seen as

its “black” counterpart and is morally discredited. It has been described by visitors to Jamaica as a kind of ritual dance, to which there was some initiation and which also was imbedded into a social structure of responsibility.

As Dianne M. Stewart has shown, in the first reports of visitors, there is to be found no real distinction between Obeah and Myalism. Instead of using these moral or ethical categories to describe the two religions, one could use a more structuralistic approach and differentiate between the two on the level of their structure. For such a point of view, Obeah turns out to be a practice placed on the level of individuality, whilst Myalism can be characterised as a collective undertaking, for the main part consisting in ecstatic worship. Myalist movements were headed by charismatic leaders with skills as herbalists and healers.

Both religions have been taking part in political uprisings, Obeah being outlawed for that reason in 1760, Myalism being part of the so-called Native Baptist war. In the post-emancipation era Obeah and Myalism began to be looked at as antagonistic. But it is not the character of power each of them uses, by which we could distinguish them. Obeah is handling of neutral power, and it depends on the practitioner, to which ends he makes use of that power. Myalism, after having ceased to exist as a practice on its own, became part of other traditions, such as Kumina, which was introduced to Jamaica by rescued West-African slaves, who were transferred from brought-up slave-ships to Jamaica in the time between 1841 and 1865.

4.2.2. Kumina & Revival Zion

In 1859 a religious movement arose in Ireland & England which was characterised by gatherings of praying, fasting & singing in order to achieve salvation in Christ. In 1861 this movement reached Jamaica and fell on fruitful ground. The economic and social shortcomings of that time made Jamaicans black population open to a „millenarian“ message. But the revival was transformed by the black inhabitants of Jamaica into their own religious forms: Revival Zion & Pukumina (a process called „backsliding“ by church authorities) Both are forms of African-based Christianity, that worship both sky-bound and earth-bound spirits. Within that religious framework, spirit possession, drumming, singing and dancing are central ritual activities.

Pukumina can be distinguished from *Revival Zion* by some differences in ritual and through the fact, that in Pukumina-worship also negative earth-bound spirits (fallen angels) play a role

The Pukumina variant is seldomly practiced today. Some scholars also make a distinction between „Revival“ and „Revival Zion“, sometimes all these groups are rendered as „Pukumina“ or „Pocomina“.

Until the 1950ies Revival Zion meetings were held on the street, including special drum-rhythms, singing, testifying, preaching and praying. Nowadays the small communities meet at gathering houses, the group leader's home. Some group leaders are also known for their healing powers. The first part of a Revival Zion meeting consists of drumming and dancing, accompanied by spirit possessions, than there follows the singing of the so called “Sankeys”, songs from a collection of Ira Sankey. This songs are are „tracked“, by the secretary, i.e., he reads them out line by line and sung out by the community. The last part of the meeting consists in reading of the scriptures, preaching or testifying, or healing by laying on of hands, according to the kind of meeting. A special feast within Revival Zion is the so-called “table”, a ritual centred around a decorated table adorned with flowers, candles, sacred water, fruits, coconuts, rice and so on. All in all, a meeting takes place like a normal one, but with more impact on the dancing. Around the table additional rites take place, related to the experiences of initiated persons with the spirit. At the end of the ritual, the table is “broken”, which means, that all join in a communal meal.

4.2.3. Rastafarianism

The Rastafari movement stems from 20th century Jamaica. It is better described as a movement than an institutionalised religious group or body. It has spread all over the world, and is widely known because of it's connection to the very popular Reggae-Music (and other forms of music derived from that like Dub, Raggamuffin and so on).

Ras-tafari is an amharic word, being the title of the emperor Haile Selassie. It means “honourable and adorable prince”. In the year 1930 Haile Selassie was crowned in Ethiopia, at that time the only country on the African continent not subject to a European colonial regime. Marcus Garvey, a born Jamaican, had been preaching about Africans going back to their African homeland. He had founded the Universal Negro Association and the African Communities League in Jamaica in 1914. The crowning of Haile Selassie now was seen as a sign that re-patriation was about to take place. This fostered Ethiopianism, a world-view that had been alive in Jamaica for many years. The first Jamaican to teach the divinity of Haile Selassie was P. Howell during the early 30ies. He has to be looked at as the first and most successful preacher of Rastafari doctrine. He formed the King of Kings Mission and began to preach about Selassie and the returning to Africa in 1931. Between 1845 and 1865 Congo

people that had come to Jamaica. They and their offspring were those among the Jamaican black population having the most recent memories on Africa. Howell came into contact with them and was influenced by their views. In 1933 he was arrested for 2 years for preaching seduction. In 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia and as an outcome of that, Haile Selassie had to leave the country and went to London to exile. As a reaction to this, the Ethiopian World Federation was founded in New York. A department of that Federation was established in Jamaica in 1937. In that time, Howell had already published writings, in which he had formulated the key ideas of Rastafarianism:

- The concept of Black Supremacy
- Theocracy and the Salomonic dynasty
- The opposition between Zion and Babylon: two opposed domains ruled by Haile Selassie and the pope.

He establishes the Ethiopian Salvation Society in 1939, and builds a – now legendary – community at Pinnacle in 1940, where he moves to with a number of followers. In the course of the following years, the government seeks to destroy Howard's organisation, raiding Pinnacle for the first time in 1941 and being successful in destroying it in 1954. The influence of the community, in which Howell introduced African and East Indian influences like Kikongo and Hindi languages, the tradition of Kumina drumming (of Congolese origin), and a couple of chants, that were part of the religious and ritual life in Pinnacle. This community was of great influence during the formation period of the Rastafari movement. In 1941 Haile Selassie returned to Ethiopia. 1947 The Youth Black Faith was founded in Trenchtown, West Kingston. This group can be seen as a linkage to the formation of the House of Nyahbinghi, which is considered the orientation in Rastafarianism being the foundation of Rastafarian orthodoxy. In 1983 a resolution of the Rastafari Theocratic Ensemble adopted a resolution in which this was stated. According to Nyahbinghi order, the following beliefs are held by "Rastafari orthodoxy":

- Within this era, His Imperial Majesty (H.I.M.), Haile Selassie, is the living God
- Ethiopia is Zion
- The oppressive society of the West is Babylon
- Those who have been stolen by Babylon from Africa have the right of repatriation in Africa or Zion.

But it has to be taken into account, that there are many groups and individuals, that consider themselves Rastafarians without belonging to the house of Nyahbinghi or joining the above-mentioned central beliefs. Furthermore, there is no centralised social organisation found in

Rastafarianism. So it has been described as a culture, a social movement, a religion. Rastafari followers prefer the word “livity”, which means a way of life informed by theocracy.

Theocracy in the Rastafarian sense of the word means to accept the divinity as a leader, so that many Rastafari followers consider “Jah” to be the only leader, the head of us all.

So, although the House of Nyahbinghi may have fixed beliefs, Rastafari is also socially and ideologically fluid. During its development since its emerging in the 1930ies in Jamaica, the movement has built many organisations and spread upon the world. Many of these organisations have ceased to exist, like the “Organisation of Rastafarian Unity” (founded in 1980). We can name some, as:

- Rastafarian Centralisation Organisation (1990), a coalition of the following groups: Rastafari Patriot, Rasses International Sistren, Rastafari International Theocracy Assembly, Peace Makers Association.
- Twelve Tribes of Israel: founded 1968 in Jamaica, having international membership. They do not hold Haile Selassie as the Living God, but rather as a person of high spiritual quality.
- Ethiopian World Foundation (1938), a.k.a. Bobo Dreads.

Many Rastafarians belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Rastafari followers tend to build social organisations in order to achieve a certain goal and after the work has been done, the organisation disappears and new ones come to existence.

A point of frequent discussion in Rastafari movement since its globalisation in the 1980ies has been the relationship of men and women, brothers and sistren. Due to Old Testament values, in Nyahbinghi orthodoxy, women are excluded from key ritual activities, particularly during the time of their menses. On the other hand, sisters have played an important role in Rastafari activities.

So we can see, that within the framework of Rastafari social organisation, there is a tension to be found between:

- Organising due to some commonly held values and views on the one hand and democratic principles on the other hand. This could be seen as a
- Tension between egalitarianism and hierarchy that can also be found in
- Male-female relationship, that is often interpreted in terms of the Bible, whilst on the other hand, H.I.M. himself broke with the tradition, when he had his wife at his side during the coronation ceremony.
- Another tension in Rastafari movement exists between the strengthening of African values in a racist and white-dominated world, leading to black particularism and more

universalistic values like love, peace, truth, justice, that would make the faith attractive for many Non-Africans, too.

Some key features of Rastafari Thought and life-style will be mentioned in the following:

- Interpreting history with the bible as a guide-book. Rastafarians look at history as a cyclical dispensation of time. So the stories and the symbolism of the bible can be attached to other agents in different times. For instance, the persecution Of Israel in Egypt or in the Babylonian exile is the persecution of blacks taken from Africa and subjected to slavery in our times; Christ was persecuted like H.I.M; but they have different symbols: Christ being the lamb, H.I.M. the conquering lion of Zion. The symbolism of the arch is based upon an ambiguity, because the English word “arch” means the arch of the covenant and the Arch of Noah. With that ambiguity in mind, we can understand, how Rastafarians can make a symbolic link between the covenant with Jah and the slave ships or the ships that will bring them back to Africa, respectively.
- Using cannabis, “herb”, in ritual context. It is widely smoked, by individuals as well as in ritual context, where the spliff and the chalice are ceremonially lit.
- Reasoning: a form of collective discourse in which individuals explore the implications of a particular insight in discussion, that is not competitive, but co-operative. It resembles forms of traditional African social organisation, where problems had to be discussed until a consensus was found, as opposed to the western democracies basic idea of majority ruling.
- Livity: the daily life. Some practices are based upon Old Testament laws, namely the book of Leviticus: Abstinence from certain food, not cutting ones hair, which results in the traditional dreadlocks. Dreadlocks are sometimes referred to as the covenant and looked at as powerful. Rastafari often say, that one should not grow dreadlocks until he has a strong foundation in the faith. They are also thought of as a tool for communication with Jah. Therefore, according to Nyahbinghi orthodoxy, dreadlocks have to be covered whilst one is in Babylon. Brothers must remove them for giving praises, whilst sisters are generally expected to keep their heads covered in public.

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