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AFRO-CARIBBEAN RELIGION AND RITUALS:  
DUGU, VODOO, SANTERIA AND  
BRAZILIAN RELIGIONS/CULTS

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Social Sciences

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by  
Eva Archangel Lopez  
June 2002

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by  
Eva Archangel Lopez

June 2002

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*June 5, 2002*  
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## ABSTRACT

Towards the end of the twentieth century, people of both African and Indigenous heritage openly embraced different aspects of their culture, including their music, religion, folklore, magic, language and art. This thesis will explore and discuss the religion and rituals (ancestral cult) of Afro-Caribbean societies, people of African and indigenous heritage. This thesis will also seek to answer the question of the extent to which Americans have become tolerant of other people's culture and what influences, if any, have transmitted from the Afro-Caribbean people to other North American societies.

Since the immigration trend of the 70's, 80's and 90's, many people from the Caribbean region, Central America, and parts of South America have migrated to the United States, making their homes in some of the large cities. Upon arrival, many of the immigrants were likely to seek out and join a religious group. Today, though still affiliated with some religious groups, many immigrants have come together with others from their own homeland to practice their cultural religions and rituals.

The religion and rituals of four Afro-Caribbean groups will be discussed in this study. Dugu is the ancestral cult of the Garinagu (Black Caribs) of Central

America. Voodoo is the religion of Haiti. Santeria is the religion practiced throughout Cuba. Macumba, Umbanda and Candomble are Neo-African religions of Brazilian Blacks. Adagoragodoni, an informal Garifuna ceremony performed instead of Dugu, Voodoo and Santeria practices have taken root among their members in various cities in the United States. As shown in this study, the religion and rituals evolve among Afro-Caribbean groups religious practices and rituals are carried out privately among families and friends in apartments, basements, and back rooms of clubs, restaurants, and homes of individuals. The ultimate goal for many of these Afro-Caribbean groups is to maintain and preserve their religion and rituals, so that their offspring will have some knowledge of the richness and uniqueness of their cultures.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, special thanks to my advisors Dr. Jenny Zorn, Dr. Randi Miller and Dr. Russell Barber for their help in completing this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Jim Pierson and Dr. George Everson, for their time, dedication, patience and encouragement, which motivated me to complete my thesis on Afro-Caribbean Religions and Rituals. A profound thanks goes to my mentor, Dr. Rafael Correa, who was as passionate about my topics on Caribbean cultures as I was. As an undergraduate recipient of the McNair Scholar's award and under the tutelage of Dr. Correa, I presented my research findings at Penn State University and later at a conference sponsored by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in Delavan, Wisconsin that yielded much experience. As a result of my research topic on the "Oral Traditions of Garinagu," Garinagu have been included in one of the General Education Capstones -the Origin and Contemporary Roles of Latino Culture- here at California State University, San Bernardino.

I must pay tribute to my deceased parents, Justo and Cecilia Flores, who I am sure are smiling down at me with joy, for having taken up the interest in exploring the Garifuna culture that they loved and encouraged my

siblings and me to maintain. I also pay tribute to my deceased brother Joseph Flores, who had begun to show interest in the Garifuna culture and died abruptly before he could become fully involved in organizing with other Garinagu to sustain the culture.

Most of all, I wish to thank my husband, Roy, for his continuous encouragement and unending support. I also want to thank our children, Lisa, Stephanie, Charlene and Neil, who gave this project its purpose. Finally, I wish to thank all my extended family for all their help in this endeavor.

DEDICATION

To my wonderful husband,

Roy

and to our children

Lisa, Stephanie, Charlene and Neil



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

African spirituality, traditional, magic, religious beliefs and practices, as well as the spread of Christianity and other faiths have become topics of hot debates within the past century. A variety of religions not found among contemporary Africans, but among their descendants dispersed throughout the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade, have become of interest to many scholars. The concern is with the African Diaspora<sup>1</sup> in North America, the West Indies and Latin America and to a small extent in Northern Europe during the past five hundred years.

Many of the peoples of Africa who were torn from their homes and brought to the New World to serve as slaves left most of their cultural heritage behind. However in some parts of the New World, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, those Africans managed to salvage their religious beliefs from the wreckage of their

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<sup>1</sup> African Diaspora: the concept of the "Diaspora" usually has referred to Jewish settlements outside Palestine, which became the modern state of Israel. In recent years it has come to be used also with reference to people of African descent living outside Africa, particularly those dispersed by the slave trade.

old ways of life and clung tenaciously to their gods, finding them a source of peace in a difficult alien environment. Coming from different parts of Africa, the people brought with them a variety of religious beliefs. It was those beliefs that stressed possession by supernatural beings that found most favor in the New World. It became an article of faith that when the drums spoke and the proper songs were sung, the gods in Africa could hear their children across the sea. In other Afro-Caribbean cultures, those drums were a signal to their ancestors in their newly adopted homeland. The drum calls brought gods and ancestors to swiftly possess them and participate in their ceremonies.

Many African slaves, to prevent official interference by their masters, quickly provided their gods with "white masks" by identifying them with Catholic saints. As long as the saints were venerated, the slave masters did not inquire into the details of the rituals. Slaves conceived Catholicism as more of a social activity than as a framework of doctrines and beliefs and more of an institution than a faith. This mentality gave rise to "Folk Catholicism," defined as a cult of saints associated with crops and animals, with drought and floods, with the evil spirits and demons of the jungle and the country

crossroads. Folk Catholicism's belief in "liberating interventions" by supernatural powers has influenced the development of such groups as the Spiritualists, the Umbanda cult and the Pentecostalists. Many of the African-Caribbean cultures were able to syncretize Catholicism, the religion they adopted, with their own traditional religious beliefs (Leacock, p. 1, 1975).

In defining syncretism, scholars emphasize a different aspect of the borrowing and blending process. Research supports the idea that Afro-Caribbean religions have gone beyond the borrowing level and, depending on the geographical area, a coherent, integrated system of belief has grown and in some ways is very distinctive (Houk, p. 180, 1995). It is a process that involves the creation of entirely new culture patterns out of the fragmented pieces of historically separated systems. The lack or avoidance of redundancy and contradiction characterizes this process. The incorporation of elements of dominant religions (e.g. Catholicism) served to broaden or extend the existing religious systems without the characteristics mentioned earlier. One of the most salient and prevalent characteristics of African-derived religions in the New world is syncretism of Catholic saints and African gods and is visible in the Orisha, Dugu, Voodoo, Santeria,

Candomble, Umbanda, and many other cults (Houk, p. 180, 1995).

Throughout the West Indies, Central America and Brazil, drums still sound and the faithful dance, sing, and wait for the deities or their ancestors to possess them. In most parts of the New World, African religion has been greatly modified. However, the idea that supernatural beings and ancestors come to earth to possess and give messages to people remains the central belief. The conception of who those supernatural beings are, what their nature is and what they are expected to do, once possession of the human body occurs, has changed drastically since.

Missionaries protested the tenacity of belief in any supernatural beings that fell outside conventional Christianity. Missionaries were agents of change and their intervention called for complete transformation of the people they had conquered (Cashin, 1993). Christianization was not a passive process and the missionaries sought not only to influence living patterns, but also to confront and vanquish "falsehood" and to teach doctrine. Missionaries grew frustrated with the slow pace of conversion, especially when the natives and slaves targeted for conversion returned to their traditional

beliefs and practices. Most converts were won through deathbed confessions or were frightened into believing that they would go to hell or would suffer pain of diseases for a long time. The missionaries used the technique of fear, because it achieved compliance in converting savages (Goddard, 1998).

Over the years, and especially in the late twentieth century, Afro-Caribbean rituals have taken on a new face, including a new attitude from many, especially the Christian missionaries, who were once critical of the ritual practices of all ethnic groups they encountered in the New World. The missionaries' goals after the discovery and colonizing of the New World were to bring Christianity to the "savages" and "barbarians" at whatever cost, even at the expense of forcing them to abandon their own religious practices.

Today several ethnic groups are openly practicing their rituals and healing ceremonies. This transition came as a result of changes implemented by the Second Vatican Council initially spearheaded by Pope John Paul XXIII and later by Pope Paul VI, who presided over the last three council sessions. The Second Vatican Council, commonly referred to as Vatican II (1962-1965), was the central event of Catholic life in the 20th century. Pope John



XXIII called for the Council to "open the windows" in the church to the world, a process set in motion to embrace the times. Vatican II refocused the church from institution to people and rejected the fixation on "the way things were" by setting policy and shaping beliefs. Vatican II issued the Declaration on Religious Freedom, which called for the church to reconcile relationships. Missionaries began to interact with other cultures respectfully and recognized the values that other cultures had to offer (Faulkner, 2001). For several hundred years many societies hid their ritual practices as a result of being driven underground by missionaries and European slave masters, who were antagonistic toward the significance these rituals held for those who practiced and participated in them. Studies conducted by Edward Sapir, in contrasting "genuine" and "spurious" culture, have become useful in understanding the issues of origin, acculturation and authenticity now important to Afro-Caribbean religious believers, as well as to scholars. Genuine culture according to Sapir is "a culture in which nothing is spiritually meaningless, in which no important part of the general functioning brings with it a sense of frustration or unsympathetic effort (Glacier, 1996)." Genuine culture considers the individual as the

primary focus and not a mere cog. Slaves did not simply become Christians; they fashioned Christianity to fit their own peculiar needs and experience of enslavement in the Americas (Glazier, 1996). Christianity in the New World was clearly spurious for many members of the White planter class. Since many Whites came to the Caribbean islands to seek their fortunes their religion as described by contemporary chroniclers was imitative, half-hearted and bleak. While the culture of the slave masters was filled with inconsistencies, the religions of slaves were characterized by traits of authenticity, genuineness and creativity.

Over the past 10 years problems of "origin," "genuineness," and authenticity have become important topics of debate with a number of Afro-Caribbean religious leaders, many of whom have traveled to Africa in search of evidence of Caribbean ritual practices. These debates are not new to the field of African and Caribbean studies (Glazier, 1996). In the first half of the 20th century, renowned scholars such as Melville Herskovits, E. Franklin Frazier and their students staged vigorous debates on the possibility of the existence of African survivals in the Americas. Herskovits wrote extensively that identifiable elements of African cultures were retained and could

readily be reorganized in New African religion. Herskovits saw the greatest degree of retention in music, folklore, religion, and magic, the least in technology and economic life, with language, social organization, and art in intermediate positions. The differences in the degree of retention of African customs in the New World was affected by the climate, topography, organization and operation of plantations, the numerical ratios of Negroes to Whites and the contacts Negroes had with Whites in rural and urban settings (Simpson, p. 27, 1973). Frazier argued that the effects of slavery were so disruptive that Africa became a "forgotten memory," and the issue of African retention in the New World was moot (Glazier, 1996).

But cosmological, theological, linguistic and ritualistic elements of a characteristic West African worldview seem to have prevailed in one form or another in most of the Americas. Cross-cultural expressions of these elements can be seen in diverse Afro-Caribbean traditions (Coleman, 1997). This thesis will focus on the religions and rituals of four Afro-Caribbean groups. Dugu is an ancestral cult of the Garinagu people of Central America. Rarely mentioned among diverse religions, Dugu is a sacred rite with African and Amerindian influence. Voodoo is a folk religion that developed in Haiti and has millions of

devotees. Santeria, an Afro-Cuban religion, has influence among Cubans inside and outside of Cuba. Macumba, Umbanda and Candomble are Afro-Brazilian religions that have evolved over the years. Information collected in terms of behavior, interaction and cultural practices will be used to interpret motivations, goals and purpose as perceived by scholars and by me based on my identity as a Garifuna and a brief experience in a Dugu ceremony. The purpose of this thesis is to enlighten the debate of African origin, authenticity and Amerindian influence.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GARINAGU RELIGION: DUGU

#### Brief History of the Garinagu

From the inception of slavery, Blacks in almost every part of the Caribbean and the Americas resisted and sought every opportunity to escape from slave ships, mines and plantations. They took refuge in swamps, bushes, forests, and Native Indian communities. The runaway slaves were called Maroons, probably from the Spanish word "cimmaron" meaning "wild," one of many derogatory terms used to describe the slaves, a common Eurocentric custom during that era, destined to give a lasting negative impact. Many of the fugitive slaves shared similar ethnic origins traced back to the Yoruba or Bantu roots of the Benin region of Africa. Known for their closely tied social structure and cultural strengths, several of these groups have survived and to present day continue their ritual practices.

The "Garinagu," prefer with pride this ethnic reference, as opposed to "Black Carib," the name give to them by the colonizers. Kern writes that in the course of later research at the British Library, she discovered that the name "Black Carib" if the historical sources are

correct, was of the ancestors' own choosing (Kerns, p. 12, 1948). In their native language Garinagu is their name in the plural form and Garifuna is the singular form. This term Garifuna is also an adjective and has been used as a way of expressing their identity since the 1970's when it was legitimized (Palacio, p. 8, 1993). Garinagu are descendants of escaped African Negroes, brought to the West Indies as slaves and Yellow Island Carib Indians of the Lesser Antilles (See Appendix A). The escaped slaves took refuge among the Island Carib Indians of St. Vincent and subsequently intermarried, bringing about a rapid growth of hybrid mixture of African and Island Caribs. They soon adopted the Island Caribs' Arakawan language and to a large extent their culture. Today the Garifuna language is still spoken by their descendants. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Garinagu emerged as a unique society and largely supplanted the Native Carib Indians. In 1797 the Garinagu with assistance from the French, attempted to protect their land from British encroachment by launching a series of failed uprisings. To punish them for their insolence the British deported them to the Island of Roatan in the Gulf of Honduras. It was not long before they settled along the coastal regions of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Southern Belize (See

Appendix A). According to Coelho Garinagu also formed small communities in Costa Rica and as well as in London (Coelho, p. 47, 1955).

As sojourners, Garinagu brought and continued to practice their religious beliefs and rituals in secret in their new homeland. Their beliefs stemmed from at least three general traditions, the African, the European and the Native American. This premise in some form can be related to all peoples in the Caribbean region, including Latin America. The religion of any local group usually shows a predominance of one of these traditions. Among the Garinagu there is no reason to doubt the African influence is the most important of the three. However, in fairness to their Amerindian heritage, the Carib and Arawak Indians also contributed to the beliefs and rituals of the Garinagu (Solein, 1959).

When the colonizers came to the New World in their crusade to convert the "savages," there was much resistance. The Indians were not receptive to the idea of a new religion, because they had an existing way of worship and praising in forms of ritual to particular deities. It might not have been in the fashion that the Spaniards expected, but they had their concept of a supreme authority, whether it was the sun or the moon, a

concept of a world beyond the one they lived in and a concept of the soul.

#### Belief in the Supernatural World

The belief in spirits both of the dead and of the bush is widespread in Africa and the New World. Although it is impossible to trace their exact origin, there are a number of parallels between Garifuna culture and other West Indian cultures. Garinagu paint a temporary indigo cross on the forehead of infants to ward off evil spirits. Jamaicans and Brazilians have an identical custom. Although fear of the evil eye is undoubtedly European in origin, Garinagu have a preventive measure not generally found among the Mestizo peoples of Latin America (Horowitz, p. 137, 1971). The Island Carib Indians' religious patterns were more like those of the peoples of the Tropical Forests. They made offerings to guardian spirits, which were not represented by idols. The importance to the dead people was shown not only in the great fear of ghosts, but also in the shaman's practice of keeping his ancestor's bones as a source of power and the belief that his ancestor's spirit assisted him in obtaining a spirit helper. The Arawaks combined the guardian spirit concept with fetish worship, creating a



large number of idols called zemis (Steward, p. 25, 1963). More than four hundred years ago the first Christian missionaries to the islands were told by the Island Carib Indians of their belief in an unnamed superior who lived in heaven and was endowed with all goodness. They regarded the earth as an indulgent mother, who furnished them with the things necessary for life (Rouse, 1963).

#### The Concept of the Soul

The religion of the Garinagu is composed of Roman Catholic teachings and practices and beliefs that come from their African and Amerindian forebears. Promoting the deification of the family dead by placating them if they are irritated with their descendants ensures one good will and protection against natural and supernatural dangers. The ancestral cult, when considered in terms of its practical implications and its role in preserving tradition, must be regarded as the core of the Garifuna system of belief. The Garifuna's belief from a materialist view is obvious for its value in aiding group survival.

Regardless of where Garinagu live they form a separate ethnic group which some social scientists might choose to call a caste. They tend to be endogamous and though they mix freely with other people on many levels of

daily intercourse, they usually prefer to return to their own group for the more intimate functions of life, including recreation, marriage, birth and death (Horowitz, p. 139, 1971). Like many other Circum-Caribbean cultures, their virtues of flexibility and versatility enabled them to incorporate their rituals into their Catholicism, thus achieving an alliance. In no other aspects of their Garifuna culture have the African, Amerindian and European elements of their cultural inheritance so completely fused as the elaboration of theological concepts, especially those pertaining to the nature of the soul (Coelho, p. 135, 1955).

According to the most general Garinagu theory, the soul of the individual is thought of as being composed of three parts. The first is termed the *anigi* (heart), a vital force or animal spirit. Its seat is the heart and this vital force manifests itself through the functioning of the principal organs, i.e., heartbeat, pulsation of the arteries, breathing and body heat.

The second component of the soul, the *iuani* (heart-soul) is considered immaterial and leaves the body immediately after death. Garinagu elders held the *iuani* to be synonymous with the *anigi*. After conversion to Catholicism, it became easy for the Garinagu to identify

the *iuani* with the concept of the soul preached by missionaries (Coelho, p.138, 1955). Between the physical *anigi* (heart) and the spiritual *iuani* (heart-soul) is the *afurugu* (shadow, "the other of a pair"). The word itself appears to be a cognate with *afuragua* "to blow" or to "kindle" fire. The *afurugu* is an astral body reproducing the material shape of a person in all its detail, but composed of a substance akin to that of supernatural entities. During the life span of a person, the *afurugu* has no independent existence. It leaves the body before death and in life acts as a kind of general index to health. In the middle of the twentieth century, there seemed to be no agreement among the Garinagu concerning the relationship of these three spiritual entities to the various types of disembodied spirits (Taylor, p. 102, 1955). Two categories of the latter were distinguishable. Those who did little except to plague human beings (*ufie, mafia, iauraragu, agaiuma, ogoreu, umeau, dibinau, duendu, susia, labureme ubau*), and those who rewarded faithful attention and punished neglect (*ahari, ahambue, gubida, hiuruha*). The ancestral spirits (*gubida*<sup>2</sup>) ranked with the

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<sup>2</sup> The etymology of the word *gubida* is a moot question; no African derivation could be found for it, while its primitive form, *cupita* is reminiscent of *Kurupita*, which

angels with whom they are often identified. The Island Carib Indians believed in the plurality of souls associated with the healing of the heart and arteries. The soul in the heart was destined to go to an earthlike paradise in heaven, where it would become a part of a company of good spirits or *akamboue*. The soul in the rest of the body either stayed in the bones after death or went into the forest or seashores. They were regarded as evil spirits or *maboya* (later evolved into *mafuiya*) and were attributed to disagreeable and frightening occurrences, such as nightmares, sickness, shipwrecks, thunder and other natural disasters (Rouse, 1963).

The Yoruba of West Nigeria believed in the individual having multiple souls and upon reaching heaven, the ancestral guardian's soul gave an account of all the good and bad deeds done on earth. If a man has been good and kind on earth, his soul was sent to the good heaven. If he had been cruel and wicked, he was condemned to the bad heaven as punishment for his deeds (Bascom, p. 70, 1969).

The journey of the soul (in its spiritual form) into the world of the dead is a slow and gradual process. For a

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designate a malignant spirit among the South American Carib tribes. All other words have been shown to derive from Amerindian ones, recorded by Taylor (Taylor, 1951).

spirit to attain the highest position in the other realm, it must travel this road. The soul goes to Heaven or Purgatory after death; the Catholic teaching in relation to this point is in essential agreement with Garinagu traditions. Souls in Purgatory need to have Mass said in their honor and are not of great concern to the living. But the astral body (*afurugu*) of the deceased that remains on earth must be handled with the greatest precautions during the transitional periods. Garinagu believe that when an individual passes from the tangible and everyday world of the living to the world of the dead, it can be a disturbing period. The *ahari* (the recently deceased) are irritable and capricious. The *ahari's* attitude is attributed to having being attached to earthly delights, from which it is difficult to disentangle (Coehlo, p. 141, 1955). The idea is that the deceased is not ready to leave the physical world. In general not many people are comfortable discussing death, and the thoughts of its reality are frightening.

Because the road to the world of the dead is long and arduous, the spirits will ask for baths to refresh themselves and offerings of food to restore their forces before they arrive there. Their travel cannot be measured in terms of actual distances. It seems to imply a change

in substance and the acquisition, by the spirit, of greater fluidity and mobility. At the time of his research, Coelho in 1955 noted that information on this point was somewhat obscure. He cited difficulties in translating concepts for which there were no equivalents in European languages and secondly, the Garinagu's reluctance to discuss these points with outsiders, since matters concerning the ancestors were among the most esoteric aspect of their culture.

The journey into the world of the dead has a number of stages; the *ahari* stops frequently, meeting friends who died before him but had been unable to travel as rapidly as he. Such stories have been told by a small percentage who were considered dead but "came back to life," relating their brief encounter with death. It is during this journey that the *gubida* (deceased ancestors) make their desires known through oracles—for example—a great grandfather having been slighted by his delinquent grandchildren or children, has visited them with their misfortune. As a result he requests a three-day Dugu (Coelho, p. 135, 1955).

Dealings between the *gubida* (ancestral spirits) and the diviner (*buyeh*/shaman) are not carried out directly at first, but through an intermediary of another class of

spirits called *hiuruha*. While the *hiuruha* occupy an inferior position in relation to the *gubida* ancestors, they are the medium between the *buyeh* and the *gubida*, revealing the reasons for their displeasure, when they show irritation with their descendants. The *gubida* are invited by the *hiuruha* to "come down" and discuss matters with their estranged families, at the same time inviting them to religious ceremonies.

#### The Dugu Ceremony

Preparation for the Dugu, the dancing rites (*adogorohani*- literally means, "treading the earth" for the souls), takes three main parts. Invitations are sent to relatives and friends within the surrounding areas of Belize and abroad to Guatemala, Honduras, and the United States. Unlike the practice of Voodoo, which is carried out in parts of the United States, namely in basements of apartments and small rooms, the Dugu ceremony is only performed in the Garifuna towns and villages of Central America. Garinagu living here in the United States have not made any attempts to perform Dugu, because presently it is more convenient for them to travel to their respective homelands, to join extended families in fulfilling the desires of their ancestors. Furthermore,

this rite is such a private ceremony for Garinagu that trying to prevent it from becoming a spectator event would not be an easy task here in the United States. However, Garinagu living here have recently transplanted the practice of *adagoragodoni* (the ritual of depositing an offering). This short ceremony which lasts only a couple of hours can be done individually or with a few close relatives who get together in the home of the relative giving the offering. The ancestor's favorite food, most of which is available at small international markets that dot communities where Garinagu and other Caribbean immigrants reside, is prepared and placed on a small makeshift altar. If a more formal ceremony is required, then relatives make preparation for the major rite of Dugu.

As the preparation for the Dugu continues, specific efforts are made to obtain that particular food or drink that the ancestors may request. Finally a date is agreed upon with the *buyeh* (shaman), who in turn informs the following officiated performers: drummers (three *segunda*;) *Afunahountiuya* (dressed in red-*gusewe*); *Guyasa* (singers) and *Adugathatinya*- (appointed fishermen) who will venture to sea (Sebastian 1984).

It is for the aforementioned reasons, the long journey, the need to be refreshed, and to discuss matters,



that the Dugu ritual is held. Even at this point the neglect of the *gubida* may have already caused illness, derangement or death. So to avoid further misfortunes, Dugu, the most important of three ancestral rites (the other two are *Chugu* and *Amuyadanani*) is carried out in a specially constructed temple called a *Dabuyaba*. After songs of invocation led by the *buyeh*, the call is answered by the *hiuruha* and accompanied by the *gubida* for whom the rite is being given and who may invite other *gubida* to the feast. The women, who outnumber the men participating in the ritual by at least four to one, generally spend the rest of the night dancing *abaimahani*, gestured songs of appeasement sung in unison. Before six o'clock the next morning a crowd gathers at the beach to watch for the appearance of the *Adugahtiu* --fishing party of men and women sent out to obtain crabs, fish and other seafood for the rite. A procession led by the *buyeh* and three drummers' parades from the beach to the *Dabuyaba*, a short distance away. Upon arrival, members of the procession continue to sing and dance to the monotonous rhythm of the drums for some time.

For the *mali* or part of the ceremony devoted to the placation, the *buyeh* announces: "heart-drummer, thou will

placate our grandmother." The number of placations during any particular Dugu depends upon the wealth of the family making the offerings, but it must be a multiple of eight. For each placation performed the drummers receive a quarter pint of rum and a candle. When the family giving the ceremony has completed their placation, members of other families who want to placate their own ancestors but cannot afford the expense of an individual rite are allowed to do so.

Spiritual possession is not essential to the success of a Dugu, yet it is rarely absent from its performance. At tense moments during the ceremonies, one or more of the participants may lose consciousness and go into a trance called *owehani*, assuming the characteristics of the *gubida* ancestor being honored. The possessed individual may interrupt his or her dance to impersonate the *gubida* whose spirit has entered her (Simpson, p. 108, 1978). If the possessed individual threatens to become too violent, restraint may be used. This is done by squirting rum onto the faces of the possessed persons and fanning them with cotton strip fans to placate the spirit, or by giving them a drink called *Hiyu*, held in readiness by the officiating *buyeh*. Those who appear to be most susceptible to being possessed by the spirits are young women between the ages

of 18 and 25 years old who have been "prepared for receiving them." Preparation involves abstention from sexual intercourse and learning of sacred songs, sometimes revealed through dreams (Simpson, p. 108, 1978).

Based on personal knowledge I know that teenage girls as young as 13 have participated in Dugu. Prior to the 1980's young people attending Catholic affiliated schools were not permitted to participate in Dugu ceremonies, and violating the rule in those days could have meant possible expulsion from school. It is tradition that at least one member of the extended family of the relatives giving the Dugu participate in the ceremony. If an adult member of an extended family is unable to participate, then it is recommended that the oldest teenage female take his or her place. Most parents tend to use the school's restriction as an excuse not to have their teens participate. In fact their reasons for not wanting their children to be involved in the ceremony are not synonymous with those of the school's. While the school's policy was based on ethnocentrism, Garinagu parents, including my own mother felt that because of the intense spiritual elements involved, it was inappropriate for young teens to participate in a Dugu ceremony.

At the onset of the Dugu the first sacrifice of a rooster occurs at midnight on the first day and subsequently sacrifices are made at regular intervals. At daybreak of the second day, dancing is interrupted for the ceremony of *adagoragodoni* "offering" or "sacrifice." The *gubida's* favorite salt-free dishes, intended for the dead, are arranged by the cooks on the offering table. At this time the *buyeh* decides which portion will be the reserved sacrifice and what may be allocated to the living participants. A special pillaging ceremony, '*abaiuhani*' takes place that evening, a feast similar to the "feeding of the children" in the Shango cult in Trinidad. This will be the only occasion that children are admitted to the hall during the performance of a Dugu.

The dancing and sacrifice of cocks and spirit possession continues through to the third day. On the third day a deep, round hole is dug by the edge of the sea or some distance behind the *Dabuyaba*, into which the offerings of baskets of food and drinks are lowered. The rest of the day is spent in *abaimahani* (performed by women) and *arumani* (performed by men) singing of solemn songs.

The following day in the evening the families are gathered for the final *arairaguni* or "bringing down of the

spirits." *Gubida* acknowledges receipt of the Dugu at this point. Every night until the Wednesday morning following the termination of the Dugu, a light must be kept burning in the sanctuary (*gule*) of the *Dabuyaba* (Taylor, p. 131 1951). Depending on the response, dissatisfaction is one in which the ceremony may have to be repeated.

What are some of the reasons that could cause a *gubida's* dissatisfaction? A female who was menstruating and decided to participate in the ceremonies would be one reason for dissatisfaction. Participants who laughed loudly and drank excessively would be another reason. Another taboo is a female coming into the temple during a Dugu wearing slacks or black underwear. An individual not wearing the proper attire can experience *owehani*. There has been no clear explanation as to why trance, which is a desirable outcome, can also be induced by improper behavior and improper dress attire. One would think that improper clothing would render trance impossible. The explanation consistently given is that non-compliance to proper behavior and dress attire shows a lack of respect which interferes with the demonstration of the climax of Garifuna respect, appreciation for and feeling of communion with the *gubida*, causing them to become angered. The color black is associated with death and the ancestral

spirits, though not physically interacting in daily life, want to maintain a sense of connection and not be reminded of being dead or no longer among the living. If at the time Taylor and Kerns did their study Garinagu were confirming to the dress attire then the need to explore the question of what would happen if one did not comply with the dress attire was never explored. Taylor wrote a description of the clothing worn by both men and women. "Members of the family giving the rite wore in the case of the women, a sort of long white shift, sash and head-  
kership, all stained to an orange-red dye; the men folk wore ordinary clothes, but smeared their faces, hands and feet with the same paint" (Taylor, p. 119, 1951). Later Kerns wrote that most of the people who took part in the Dugu dressed in ordinary clothing. "Women must have their heads covered when they dance; men must remove their hats to do so. In some cases, descendants of the focal ancestor wore clothing dyed in orange at the spirit's request" (Kerns, p. 166, 1983). There has been very little modification in the way the practices in Dugu has carried out.

## A Personal Experience

My first exposure to a Dugu ceremony was only a few years ago, when I unexpectedly got an opportunity to be a participant for a brief period of time on the second night of its performance. As luck would have it the family making the offerings were extended relatives of mine. Having very little knowledge of this part of my culture, I expressed my interest to my aunt and we prepared to attend that evening. I dressed in the required Garifuna gown, skirt (*gudu*) and a head kerchief (*musweh*). I also carried a pint of rum, which I placed with the other offerings upon arrival at the *Dabuyabah*, quietly announcing that I had brought this for the ancestors. We arrived at eight o'clock that evening, just as the drummers ended their break. The drummers restarted and the singing and dancing began. I joined the circle of men and women as they danced halfway around the circle, turned and then danced halfway back, repeatedly. One woman led the singing and the others followed by repeating her lead. As we danced to the beat of the drums, a teenager, who I noticed giggling with other youngsters outside the temple earlier, interrupted her dance, slumping backwards. Two women dancing behind her caught her, breaking her fall. It was obvious that she had become possessed and was impersonating one of the

*gubida*. The teenager spoke in Garifuna, warning an unsuspecting relative of a neighbor's evil plot against her. As she flapped her arms, made jerking movements with her body, kicked her feet up and went into what seemed like tantrums, the *buyeh* came and squirted rum onto her face. The two women holding her jumped away to avoid being splattered with rum, because they too could become possessed. It was at least 15 minutes before she came out of her trance and as she did so, she got up, smoothed out her attire and acted as if nothing unusual had happened. Though fluent in the Garifuna language while possessed, according to another relative the young girl could not speak or communicate in Garifuna and in general communicated only in the Creole dialect. Many people outside the culture have speculated as to what can cause one to become possessed. The most common explanation is that the sounds of the drums and the dancing and twirling makes for dizzy spells causing the individual to go into a trance. Still it remains to be explained how someone who does not communicate in Garifuna can fluently give advice, warnings, and other information while in the state of *owehani* and why only a few are affected by the beating of the drums. As I participated in the dancing, I consciously developed a defense mechanism by remaining extremely alert



to avoid possession. Coehlo notes that spontaneous possession may occur, but measures can be taken to prevent it. One such method is tying a knot in a red dyed piece of cloth that the dancer then holds in his or her hand<sup>3</sup> (Coehlo, p. 199, 1955). Coehlo also indicate that explanation on this matter varies between *buyehs* in Honduras and the ones in Belize.

According to Dr. Joseph Palacio, an anthropologist and a member of the Garifuna society, Dugu rites serve as a place for psychological release. It is a popular method of healing both physically and emotionally. The greatest benefit to be derived from ancestral rites is reasserting group solidarity among friends, relatives and the community at large; solidarity explains why the Garinagu have been able to achieve cultural homogeneity in synthesizing heterogeneous elements to a greater extent than most other Afro-Caribbean societies have managed to do. Only people who are members of the culture are allowed to participate in any aspects of this ceremony. For many

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<sup>3</sup> In Belize spirit possession "may manifest itself at any time or place during the three days that the rite lasts," and is not restricted to a few devotees (Taylor, p. 122-123, 1951). A buyeh condemned the idea that holding a knotted red dyed piece of cloth would prevent possession.

years the Church labeled the spirituality of Garinagu as devil worship.

The rift between Christianity and the Garifuna traditional way of worship no longer exists. According to Father Calistrus Cayetano, a Garifuna and a Catholic priest, "since the Second Vatican Council ruling (1962-1965) and with a greater understanding and appreciation of other societies, there has been a shift and willingness to consider the good and the values of other cultures." He went on to say that "Dugu is synthesizing Garifuna way of worship with the Catholic belief" (Moberg, 1998). He has even participated in portions of the Dugu ceremony, a move unheard of prior to the Vatican Council's ruling. Once forbidden to practice their ceremony, the ritual was done in secrecy as Garinagu struggled with their identity and now they practice their most sacred ceremony without any fear of reprisals (Moberg, 1998).

#### Buyeh (Shaman)

A Garifuna *buyeh* may be a man or a woman. In terms of the culture, he or she must have the revelation of the gifts bestowed on him by supernatural entities and in this way learn how to best put them to use. The greatest

religious practitioners or *buyeh* are born with the diviner's knowledge. The fact that many have succeeded their fathers in priestly functions is construed as evidence of biological as well as supernatural inheritance, rather than of transmission through teachings (Coehlo, p. 202, 1955). I spoke to an informant here in Los Angeles who (according to Garinagu is knowledgeable about the customs and rituals) has demonstrated signs through her actions in certain situations of having the gift to become a *buyeh* in the future. She told me of a lake, Chewecha by name, located in Guatemala, where one who is gifted but needs to increase the force of their intellectual propensity travels to bathe in the lake, a ritual similar to baptism. Garinagu believe that many of the ancestral spirits gather at this lake, and they believe this explains the powers that can be transmitted to an individual who shows signs of being gifted. Another informant told me that a *buyeh* is only effective when he or she receives support from "Dinj," a spirit who is believed to be in charge of all the other *gubidas* and is instrumental in appointing a *buyeh* through dreams and oracles.

Afterlife, the final stage of existence, begins with death. The deceased reluctantly surrenders their place in

this world and undertake a long and arduous journey to the next, the "other side." They never entirely sever ties with the living, however, particularly with their descendants. As ancestors, *gubida* will continue to take interest in the affairs of their descendants and to demand ritual attention on occasions. Their descendants must care for them or suffer misfortune for their neglect (Kern, p. 103, 1948).

#### Why Garinagu Continue to Practice their Rituals

What are some of the theories that can give light as to why these rituals continue today among the Garinagu? An emic interpretation would be women who are obviously more prominent in the rituals are visibly older and suggesting that because as they age, they grow more attuned to the supernatural. Others suggest that having better memories than men, they more easily master the intricate details of the death rituals. Women themselves speak of their "gratitude" and "duty." What people personally believe about the needs and powers of the dead does not wholly determine whether they contribute to or take part in ritual events. Some say they participate in the rituals to avoid criticism and accusations of neglect from the living. The rites are prescribed and next of kin are

responsible for seeing that they are held. Anyone who shows reluctance to sponsor various rituals is reminded of his obligations and a vivid detail of the dire supernatural consequences of default is described to him. Pressures are brought to bear only where collective and public rituals are concerned and where neglect of the dead means stinting of the individual. Among believers and non-believers alike, social pressures often outweigh the threat of supernatural revenge (Kerns, p. 148, 1948). An etic interpretation is that younger people have little interest, because relatives participate on their behalf. When a relative can no longer participate because of illness or death then one becomes obligated to take over. Finally, I believe that my reason for having interest in the rituals, as a Garifuna, is belief that a connection is maintained with both the living and the dead. Losing a loved one is a difficult process, but the mourning process is shortened when you realize that the loved one will continue to be a part of your life in spirit, while protecting and guiding you. Eventually, death will not seem so frightening, because you have someone who is dear to you waiting on the "other side," just as I will be waiting for my offspring. There is a pervasive assumption among anthropologists that a population's traditional

beliefs and practices - their culture and their social institutions must play a positive role in their lives or these beliefs and practices simply would not have persisted (Harrison, p. 128, 2000). In the Garifuna culture as well as many other Caribbean cultures, the cult of the ancestors is a very important part of religious life. With information being disclosed at a more liberal rate, more theories are bound to be formulated explaining why certain practices continue among folk societies.

In many details the ceremonies performed for the ancestral dead among the Garinagu correspond with the elements of traditional rituals in West Africa, and with places in the Caribbean including Haiti, where the religion Voodoo developed. In its rituals and artifacts, there is a rich history and power that continues to hold promise and reward for its million devotees, despite continuous persecution from the Christian and Protestant churches whose hierarchies protest their continued practice of animal sacrifices (Scalora, 1993). As you will see, this folk religion plays an important part in holding the Haitian people together.

CHAPTER THREE  
VOODOO RELIGION

Certain exotic words are charged with evocative power and Voodoo is one such word. I asked my 12 year-old what the word "Voodoo" means to him and he answered "witchcraft." Speak the word aloud and notice what happens to your spine. Few words in language carry as much fascination or evoke such fiercely opposing responses. It usually conjures up visions of mysterious deaths, secret rites or dark saturnalia celebrated by 'blood maddened, sex maddened, god-maddened' Negroes. To the uninitiated, Voodoo has long been thought of as a primitive form of magic and belief in ghosts. Most of what the average layman knows of Voodoo comes only from the misleading use of it in Hollywood horror movies and in paperback thrillers that emphasize "witch doctors" or the sticking of pins in "Voodoo dolls." In his writings, Spencer St. John revealed allegations of cannibalism in Haiti (See Appendix A) that provoked, according to his own admissions, strong feelings in Europe and the United States. As a result of his repeated allegations in 1886, and also in additional new details, several writers denounced Voodoo as a cannibalistic religion. Hence from

their writings Haiti came to be regarded as a "savage country," where every year children were sacrificed and devoured by monstrous worshippers of the Serpent (Metraux, p. 17, 1972).

Voodoo is a conglomeration of beliefs and rites of African origin closely mixed with Catholic practice. In fact Voodoo encompasses an exceedingly complex religion and magic with complicated rituals and symbols that have developed for hundreds of years. The believer in Voodoo-- and there are millions of Blacks and some Whites who practice it-- centers one's hopes and fears as strongly on it as does a follower of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or Islam (Riguad, p. 7, 1969). It is the religion of the greater part of the peasants and urban proletariat of the Black Republic of Haiti (Metraux, p. 15, 1971). In recent years as Haitians migrated to New York, Miami, Canada or France, the gods have moved indoors to be served in basements or corners of apartments. The devotees of Voodoo ask of it what the faithful ask of any religion: remedy for ills, satisfaction for needs and hope for survival.

Voodoo evolved over 500 hundred years and derived from ancient African rites and beliefs brought to the New World by slaves. Voodoo is a religion practiced by autonomous cult groups of which each often have its own



peculiar customs and traditions. Under French rule, 700,000 African slaves were used to work the sugar cane fields, generating tremendous wealth for plantation owners. Throughout the Americas and wherever the Atlantic slave trade brought the people of African descent, they secretly nurtured their spirit worship. In the face of colonist's suppression, slaves outwardly accepted the forced worship of Christian saints as counterparts to their own ancient spirits (Scalora, 1993). Like the Garifuna religion, Voodoo is also a syncretic religion, and both incorporate aspects of Catholicism within its own tenets, while still retaining a distinct identity.

Voodoo carries a rich history and power that continues to hold promise and rewards for its devotees. This in spite of continued persecution from the Catholic and Protestant churches whose hierarchy protest Voodoo's practice of animal sacrifices (Klarreich, 1994). Today Voodoo is less frightening than it was in the colonial days. In the colonial days Voodoo was frightening to the slave master because in his mind, his guilt resulting from abuse of his power by mistreating his slaves, and most of all his fear created some anxiety. He treated his slave like a beast of burden but dreaded the occult powers, which he imputed to him. The ubiquitous fear recorded

during the 18 century was cause for many of the atrocities and uprisings. The fear that reigned on the plantations had its sources in the deeper recesses of the soul: it was the witchcraft of the remote and mysterious Africa that troubled the sleep of the people in the 'the big house.'

Every single African tribe had it own beliefs and rituals and each had a common element with every other one. For example, all slaves, whether Senegalese or Angolese, believed in a multiplicity of spiritual beings. They believed that some of these spirits controlled the aspects of nature, lightening, storms, the sea, and the sky. They thought that diseases and other ill fortune came from spirits who must be placated in order to win back health and wellbeing. All felt that the normal course of events could be altered by magical spells, formulae or charms; that one could bring misfortune to any enemy, luck to oneself or ward off otherwise inevitable fate (Leyburn, p. 137, 1955).

#### The Supernatural World of Voodoo

To construct a Voodoo theology out of the infinitely varied, sometimes contradictory and fragmentary notions of the supernatural world held by Voodoo experts is a difficult task. The confusion that exists in this field is

more confusing to the outsider by the absence of any attempt to reconcile the traditional African attitudes to gods and spirits with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The teachings of the latter are nevertheless accepted without reserve. The supernatural beings, the worship of whom is the essential purpose of Voodoo are called loas, 'mysteres' and in the north of Haiti 'saints or angels or les invisibles' (Metraux, p. 82, 1972).

Voodoo's followers worship spirit deities called loas, the gods of Voodoo, seeking to appease these deities through sacrifices and other traditional rites. Who are the loas or gods of voodoo? Loas are intermediaries that carry man's messages to God. One school of thought with reference to the relationships between the loas and the Catholic saints is as follows: there is a spirit "under the water" to correspond to each saint in Heaven. God is too busy to listen to the pleas of men, so the loas and the saints meet in the halfway point on the road between heaven and earth and the loas tell "their brothers what their human followers want." The saints then return to God and report on the appeals, which men have made to the loas and God grants or refuses (Horowitz, p. 495, 1971). Major loas are seen as geniuses, while minor loas are viewed as spirits. Any one loa has multiple emanations, depending on

locale, on a particular ritual, on their association with particular individuals or family groups. Any Voodoo initiate, once dead, can be declared a loa by a hougan, or Voodoo priest (Dayan, 1991). Voodoo conception of spirits is anthropomorphic. No man is wholly good or wholly evil, nor is any god. Human beings can generally be persuaded into any mood and so can the gods. Just as there is variety in human personality, so are the gods who are not all alike. Some are more to be feared than others, while some may be regarded with tender affection, but all are capable of working both weal and woe. A gentle spirit may cause great harm to a person who neglects his commands, while a spirit whose power makes possible the most malignant magic may bring good fortune to his devotee.

The loas are not the only supernatural powers that Voodoo followers must take into account. There are also the Twins, who are extremely powerful, and the Dead, who insist upon sacrifices and offerings and who also exert direct influence on the fate of the living.

Since many devotees believe that the saints are loas, St. Patrick driving the snakes from Ireland is seen as a depiction of the great "Papa Serpent" himself, Damballah, the great cosmic sky serpent, creator and protector of life. The Virgin in her beauty and flowing blue robes

represents the loa Erzule Freda, goddess of love and beauty. St. Jacques, a heroic fighter involved in the Crusades, is the exact double of Ogoun Feraille, a powerful warrior spirit. These visual and spiritual connections fused the Catholic saints and African spirits into the New World form of the loas. This union is the strength of Voodoo practice whose followers see no contradiction in attending Catholic masses and Voodoo ceremonies.

A number of Catholic practices are mixed with African rituals during Voodoo ceremonies. Other influences, which have affected Voodoo rituals to a lesser extent, are the army and Freemasonry. The parading of the flags, the play made with swords, and displays of the orchestra were all borrowed from military life and bear witness to the chauvinistic spirits of the Haitian nation. Masonic influences are said to have been weak and are limited to a few superficial touches (Metraux, p. 157, 1972).

#### Levels of Voodoo Initiation

In Port au Prince four levels of initiation into Voodoo are practiced. The first is a ritual head washing aimed at spirits lodged in the head. This ceremony 'refreshes' and 'feeds' the restive head spirits (Brown,

p.350, 1991). The second level of initiation is Kanzo, a term referring to a rite of fire designed to transform suffering into power. Initiates, who have been sequestered in order to undergo a sort of trial by fire, snatch hard, hot dumplings from boiling clay pots placed in the center of specially prepared fire. Upon completion of the ritual the initiate may be told "never say hot again, say strong!" The third level is Kouche - to lie down, sleep, make love, give birth and less frequently to die - is the verbal form used for all levels of initiation. Through Kouche novices solidify their relationships with their principal protective spirit and simultaneously recognize the power of the spirit as a dimension of their own character. The final level of initiation is the anson, the giving of the sacred rattle. Possession of the anson qualifies a person to begin to do healing work or to become a hougan or a mambo (Brown, p. 351, 1991).

In West Africa, "soul concepts" are highly elaborated. In Haitian Voodoo every man has two souls, which animates the body and is similar to the soul in the Christian sense. The two aspects of the Vodoun soul, the *ti bon ange* and the *gros bon ange* are best explained with a metaphor commonly used by Haitians themselves. Sometimes when one stands in the late afternoon light the body casts

a double shadow, a dark core and then a lighter penumbra, faint like the halo that sometime surrounds the moon. The ephemeral fringe is the *ti bon ange*, the "little good angel" while the image at the center is the *gros bon ange*, the "big good angel." The mambo summons the souls for the families who want to consult them. The latter is the life force that all sentient beings share. It enters the individual at conception and functions only to keep the body alive. At clinical death it returns immediately to God and once again becomes part of the great reservoir of energy that supports all life. The *ti bon ange* is the part of the soul directly associated with the individual. As the *gros bon ange* provides each person with the power to act, it is the *ti bon ange* that molds the individual sentiments within each act. It is one's aura and the source of all personality, character, and willpower (Davis, p. 186, 1988).

#### Voodoo Ceremony

On the day of a major ceremony, the Vodoun altar is outfitted with a collection of flags, chromolithographs of Catholic saints, crucifixes, holy water, choice foods and liquor, flowers, rosaries, candles, thunder stones or *pierre tonnere* (a small pre-Columbian axe-head) and

various objects thought to have magical properties. About 4:00 p.m. the officiating priest appears in the garb that symbolizes his chief loa. First he rings a small hand bell and traces cabalistic (mysterious) designs on the ground with cornmeal, syrup, raw rum and liquor. He then prepares food offerings for the dead twins and invites them to come to the ceremony. The drummers beat a rhythm for the twins as the priest places food for them in calabash dishes. While singing several songs in honor of the twins, the priest places more offerings for them under trees, at springs and crossroads that the twins are believed to visit.

About 7:00 p.m. the priest consecrates the places suspected to be the abodes of the loas or the sites they frequent. These places are sprinkled with holy water, and libations of white flour, fried corn, and liquor are thrown to the loas. The drumming which has accompanied these rituals acts ceases as the priest begins an introductory address. In this address, the priest says that the ceremony is being offered to the loas of the water, of the sky and of the forest. With his hand bell, a whistle, the rattles, drums and flags of his assistants, the loas are saluted (Rigaud, p. 169, 1971). A mixture of songs and prayers follow, addressed to the saints, all the



angels, all the loas, all the dead and all the twins. All these beings are asked to cease persecuting the members of the family giving the service and to deliver them from tribulation. Legba, the guardian of the crossroads, is now summoned with appropriate drum rhythms and songs, and a chicken is sacrificed and offered to him. After a lull, the priest starts a song for another loa. One possession follows another, but not more than 10 to 20 percent of the devotees become possessed. The loas have the ability to travel through the ritual doorway between the spiritual and secular realms (Scalora, 1993). It is through possession that they mount their human horses. Once in command of their earthly hosts the loas act and speak through them, divining and causing paranormal physical behavior. It is only after possession has ceased that the servitor returns to consciousness, remembering nothing of his or her altered physical and mental state. After several hours of drumming, singing, dancing and spirit possession, the head of the principal offering, a goat, a sheep or a bull is cut off and the animal's blood is caught in the proper utensils. Catholic and Vodoun chants are smoothly interwoven as three or four more chickens are sacrificed. After an intermission the priest concludes the ceremony with a final series of songs and prayers, places

portions of the cooked food at nearby sacred places and oversees the distribution of the rest of the food to the participants (Simpson, p. 68. 1978).

In addition to the annual ceremony, other important Voodoo rites include special ceremonies for the loas, the services of dead relatives and family ancestors (including the nine-night ceremony). There is also the "degradation" ceremony, intended to remove the special talent or spirit of a dead mambo to be given to the person thought to have an occult ability in dealing with the forces of the other world (Simpson, p. 68, 1978).

Harvard psychologist Walter Cannon published a classic study, "Voodoo Death," in 1942. In his study he asserted that Voodoo could kill. From his assertion some interesting theories developed. He explained "the force that really killed was the fatal power of the imagination working through unmitigated terror." In other words, the victim "[believed] in the power of the medicine so strongly he scared himself to death." Not restricted to any one social or economic group, the belief system seems related to the individual's need for control in a world filled with uncertainty and partial knowledge. The victim's mental state and not the bone pointing or effigy burning makes sorcery effective (Starr 1995).

Today, Voodoo persists because human beings, though richer, freer and more educated still from time to time feels helpless and hopeless. During such times, what the child and for that matter what our infant species has relied on - the magical - provides an "out." Ritual ceremonies live where people face desperation and insurmountable odds. The ritual has met the religious and emotional needs of a multitude of ordinary Haitians in situations where such needs have been meagerly provided for by other social and religious institutions. Finally the ritual is a response to the individual's partial knowledge in a world where the unexpected is to be expected and often feared (Bodin, p. 92, 1990).

#### Comparing Elements Between Dugu and Voodoo

I have discussed the Garinagu's Dugu religion and the Voodoo religion of the Haitian people. Some theoretical explanations regarding the behavior of devotees and participants have also been noted, based on the conclusions drawn by various scholars. Finally, in many of its details, the ceremonies performed for the ancestral dead among the Garinagu correspond with elements in traditional rituals in West Africa, as well as in Haiti.

Deities do not possess the Garinagu, but their possession by ancestors is not significantly different from African concepts in which some of the deities are deified ancestors. In a Voodoo ceremony, a priest or mambo may talk with ancestors along with the loa. The position of the Garifuna *buyeh*, in supervising the calling down of the spirits and his control time of possessions of persons in Garifuna rituals, is similar to those in Africa and a number of Afro-Caribbean ceremonies. Furthermore, there are parallels in the ways of feeding the ancestors of the Garinagu and the dead in Africa and other parts of the Caribbean, including the throwing of food on the ground, placing it in a hole and sinking offerings in the sea (Simpson, p. 108, 1978). In the future, I hope to elaborate on this study with intent to continue comparing and noting close similarities among other cultures in the Caribbean.

The animism of Afro-Caribbean religions survived colonial times. As was true in all countries where the slaves were taken, the slave masters discouraged and often prohibited the practice of African religions. But traditional aspects of culture, especially religion, are not easily destroyed, as we will see in the following African derived ritual, where the slaves devised a means

to keep their traditional religions alive. Santeria is a religion that developed in Cuba as a syncretism of African religions, Roman Catholicism and French spiritism, a highly complex form of religion (Scalora, 1993). Still an important religious influence in Cuba today, its belief and practices have diffused to many other countries outside of Cuba.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SANTERIA RELIGION

Santeria is a religion that developed in Cuba from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Santeria is practiced by large numbers of Cubans on the island today as well as by many who emigrated from Cuba (See Appendix A). In the United States, Santeria has taken root primarily in Miami, Tampa, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other undocumented urban locations. This portion of the thesis will focus on the history of Santeria, its major beliefs and practices and where its future seems to lie.

After the discovery of the West Indies and the near carnage of the Ciboney and Arawak "Indians," through disease, physical attacks and cultural genocide, the Spaniards forcefully brought Africans as Indian replacements. In 1521 the first slaves were brought directly from Africa and for the next 350 years, until the late 1870's, the slave trade continued. In 1886 slavery was finally officially abolished in Cuba (Horowitz, p. 25, 1971). According to Curtin (1969:88) out of the 10 million Africans shipped to the New World as slaves, approximately 702,000 were sent to Cuba, a figure that represents 7.3% of the total Atlantic slave trade (Lefever, 1996).

Early on the slaves became aware of the parallels that existed between their African religions and their new religion of Catholicism, which was often forced upon them. Both religions had high gods who were perceived as creators and sustainers of the world. They both had a host of intermediaries that stood between the high gods and the humans who worshiped them. The Catholics had saints and the Africans had orishas. Under the constraints of their oppression, the slaves began to fuse the intermediaries of the two religions and to identify a specific orisha with a corresponding specific saint. Out of this syncretism a highly complex form of religion known as Santeria or the way of the saints developed.

The first slaves arrived in Cuba as early as the 16th century, but it was the slaves brought to Cuba in the 19th century who were the major carriers of the African religious beliefs and practices that contributed to the development of Santeria. These slaves brought to Cuba in the 19th century were largely the Yoruba from southwestern Nigeria and to a smaller degree the Bantu from the Congo region.

In addition to the Yoruban and Roman Catholic roots of Santeria, a third root developed in France in the 1850's under the leadership of Allan Kardec. According to

Kardec, spirits exist in a hierarchy and constantly seek light from the moment they cease to be material. Through the action of a medium, a spirit can be given light and once invoked and enlightened the spirit can ascend to the next spiritual level (Perez and Mena, 1998). Kardec's ideology had an impact on Latin American religious thought and practice, especially in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil and Argentina. In Cuba, spiritism fused with the existing beliefs and practices of Santeria and in the process became a new syncretized religion. To understand the Santeria belief system, it is necessary to define the term ashe. For practitioners ashe is the energy of the universe. It is all mystery, all secret power, all divinity, and is without beginning or end (Murphy 1994). For the practitioners of Santeria, the movement of ashe between the visible and invisible worlds influences the environment. Part of Santeria religious practice is learning to use ashe for the benefit of the individual, the community, and the universe as a whole.

#### Cosmology, Orisha and Saints

The Yoruba in Africa, where many slaves were taken from, were a very religious people. There are five different levels of power in the Yoruba cosmology:



Oludumare, the orisha, human beings, human ancestors and the lowest group (which includes plants, animals, natural entities and manufactured items). At the highest level, Oludumare sustains the universe. He is the owner of heaven, and owner of all destinies. Contact with the Oludumare is made only with the aid of divine intermediaries, known as orishas. These orishas function as sacred patrons or guardian angels. They represent the approachable power through ritual action. The existence of the orishas is dependent upon worship and their power increases the more they are worshipped (Zellner, 1998).

The orishas use santeros, santeras, priests and priestesses, as their instruments here on earth. Parallels to the orishas are the spirits of the dead, or Egun (ancestors). Most people who die become Egun and the most elevated may become orisha. Chanted prayer, done in Lucumi (the Cuban-Yoruba ritual language) drumming, dancing and spirit possessions are all components of communication with the orishas during the ceremonies. Not all ancestors are accorded special ritual attention (Flemming, 1993). Those who are evil or cruel and those who died young, or unable to fulfill their destinies, cannot become Egun. However they still may be recipients of rituals to "elevate" their spirits. At the lowest level of power but

still of vital importance are animals, plants, inanimate objects like rocks, the wind, soil, water and manufactured goods (Zellner, 1998). The religion's cosmology is the Catholic notion of the spirits of the dead," explains Michael Mason, a folklorist at the Anacostia Museum, Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. (Flemming, 1993).

### Rituals

Like many other Afro-Caribbean religions, the ritualistic practices within Santeria exhibit variability. Experiences based on history and geographical regions have given rise to different emphasis and rules of ritual organization. Ritual practices in Santeria revolve around relationships with the orishas and the work that they do particularly in healing, cleansing and "opening the road" says Brown. "These things involve offerings, sacrifice, divination and different kinds of spiritual communications (Flemming, 1993)." A basic Santeria ritual is divination, an expression of the life force of God and at the practical level used to deal with everyday problems. Many Santeria followers who cannot afford to pay physicians, go

to santeros or the babalawo<sup>4</sup> (high priest) to get advice and seek solutions for their personal problem.

One common method of divination in Cuba involves the manipulation of coconuts and seashells. In divination, the orishas reveal themselves to human beings, diagnosing their needs and providing solutions to problems. In sacrifices and offerings, humans respond expressing gratitude and praise and imploring that the orishas continue their productive work (Lefever, 1996).

Daily rituals in Santeria usually take place around an altar and shrine in the house. Prayer and offerings for personal or family benefits are things the person does at home. Organized rituals, meetings and celebrations take place in a house. It is a sacred place in your home where you meet people, do readings and work spiritually (Fleming, 1993).

The animal sacrifice used in rituals is part of a contribution to a balance between animals, plants and humans. Santeria's members believe in sacrificing chickens, doves, turtles and goats to placate their god,

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<sup>4</sup> Babalawo (high priest) popularized by the Cuban actor Ricky Ricardo of the "I Love Lucy Show." In his television shows he use to sing and beat his drums, chanting the word "Babaloo." How much did he know about the Santeria religion?

Oludamare. In candlelit ceremonies to initiate new clergy, cure the sick, and celebrate birth and death, a priest slits the animal's throat and pours the blood onto the sacred stones, which are recognized as the head of the orishas. In the initiation rites, blood is poured directly upon the head of the new members. Various religions offer sacrifice, including the Jewish faith, which observes dietary restriction. Just like killing an animal to make kosher food, so do the priests in Santeria, who sacrifice or kill an animal (Cohn and Kaplan, 1992).

Plants have long been known to play an important role in the religious traditions of Africa and little attention has been devoted to examining the use of plants in the context of various Afro-Caribbean religions. Medicinal species to a large extent have been overlooked, even though in some cases these plants represent some of the social and cultural traditions of the people who use them. This is evident in Afro-Caribbean Santeria and despite the important role of plants in this religions studies of their use are rare.

Dance and music play major roles in the dialogue between the orishas and the physical world. Communication generally uses three different drums for the music and dance steps familiar to each orisha. The drum rhythms and

the dance postures are utilized to attain a sacred state of consciousness, manifested as a state of trance or spirit possession (Gonzalez-Whippler, 1982). In the trance-state, the orisha approach others present at ritual ceremony and give them advice, warnings and admonitions. Spirits are summoned to the present, through a combination of color, food and different attributes for each of the spirits that are called upon (Brandon, 1991).

Possession can happen in many levels. "I think I have experienced the initial states of possession," reports Steven Gregory, an assistant professor of Anthropology and African studies at New York University. "Where you just feel as though you are leaving yourself and as if your blood is draining out and you are sort of losing control. There is no way of knowing what people really do experience after becoming possessed (Morales, 1996)." There can be the intense experience of the initiation ceremony, which is thoroughly supervised by a priest or the chronic possession of practitioners, who are so invested in their orishas that they constantly feel the presence.

In Cuba, this African derived religion is based on oral traditions. It is rich in symbols, and knowledgeable practitioners use colors, ritual objects, movements, music

and esoteric words to represent mythic events, and in turn they decode these symbols to interpret local social actions. Many practitioners do not verbally announce their participation in secret religions but demonstrate it throughout the use of elaborate symbolism.

Several presidents of the Cuban Republic were widely rumored to be devotees of Santeria and other Afro-Caribbean religions. In January 1959 during a televised speech, a dove landed on President Fidel Castro's shoulder while another perched on the rostrum. Many Cubans interpreted this scenario as evidence of Castro's selection by supernatural forces (Miller, 2000). It has been rumored that Castro wears or carries a *collare de maso* (large necklace) of Obatala, given to an individual by a santero when one has been pledged upon initiation.

Why would a politician participate in a local folk religion? In Castro's case, researchers believe that it is a way of building alliance with the communities. Politicians, like Castro, who has many rivals, need divine power to remain one step ahead of their enemies. Using the orisha to help protect his life is one of the multiple sources of defense that a man like Castro who is in conflict with a superpower would utilize (Miller, 2000).

Like the proverbial black grandmother hidden from view in a family trying to "pass" for white, Afro-Caribbean religion remains hidden from view in polite society. Afro-Caribbean religious traditions have influenced all spheres of society and become a central component in the cultural lives and in the nations they inhabit. While Afro-Caribbean religion and ritual practices were hidden behind the images of saints, the slaves never stopped their homeland practices, nor did they absolutely follow Catholicism. They found points of dialogue between them using the images of saints publicly (in the presence of those who represented colonial powers) to refer to them as deities. It is rumored that Cuban politicians do the same thing today. They have hidden their private Santeria practices from public view and have revealed it only at critical moments. When it is publicly revealed, it is done infrequently, discretely and using symbols, easily interpreted by Western terms. Castro's dove to many Cubans was Obtala, to the Westerner a dove of peace or was just a rare coincidence?

Ethnicity remained significant in the formation of Santeria in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries when most adherents were Yoruba born in Africa of people who could trace Yoruba descent. In the 20th century, it seems that

more and more people who were neither Yoruba nor of Yoruban descent, including whites, took up the religion.

Who is threatened by this Afro-Caribbean religion? The Catholic Church's real competition is the widespread practice of Santeria, the dominant religion in Cuba and other Afro-Caribbean religions. The practices of Afro-Caribbean religion and Catholicism are entwined, and the difficulty is to determine who is worshipping what. The official church's posture toward Santeria is not only tolerance but also inclusion (Robinson, 1998).

Santeria's devotees came to the United States in increasing numbers after the 1959 revolution in Cuba. They brought their religious practices and after a period of cold storage revived them on American soil. In the United States as well as in Cuba there is a wide range of variations in Santeria beliefs and practice, but the determining influence on the form and content of Santeria's ideology, pantheon, and rituals is still its African heritage.

Santeria has no main authority or pope. It is extremely decentralized and wide open to interpretation. It seems to attract low maintenance, cost counter-cultural people of color, while the stereotyped believer is a working class, middle aged woman (typically patrons and



vendors at botanicas, stores devoted to the sale of Yoruba paraphernalia that dot the barrios of New York). Santeria is unlike the Dugu religion, where only members of the Garifuna society are allowed to participate in the rituals. More and more college educated Latinos are turning to Santeria as a way of finding their roots. Not all devotees are Latinos. Some are African Americans out to express their cultural nationalism. Others are middle class Whites searching for a more authentic alternative to New Age religion. The new converts are part of a newly expanded community, and their parents would be baffled by their practice of Santeria.

Finally Santeria and related Afro-Caribbean religions are entire culture systems imbued with a highly developed sense of aesthetics. Everything from the ornate altars on which gifts are offered to the gods, to the divining necklaces with which Yoruba priests forecasts the future, to the complex dancing and drumming that accompany rituals is highly stylized (Morales, 1996). Most people who practice Santeria refused to be interviewed because of the insensitivity with which the media treats non-mainstream religions.

Africa continued to reproduce its own image in various parts of the New World, including Brazil. If these regions

looked like carbon copies that is because every Black remained faithful to the norms and values of his ancestors, wherever the slave trade happened to set him down (Bastide, p. 205, 1978). Arguably another study says that even though concentrated in some Brazilian states, slaves were probably too scattered to maintain their African religious rituals (Leacock, p. 45, 1975). However, while slaves outwardly followed the Catholic faith imposed on them, they secretly continued to practice their African religion belief, even after they were freed in 1888. Macumba, Umbanda and Candomble (a newer form of African spirit worship) are three popular Afro-Brazilian religions that are still practiced today.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGIONS

Unlike other Caribbean countries, including those concentrated along the Caribbean coast, Blacks are unevenly distributed in South American countries. In Brazil, nearly half of the population in the states of northeast and the east constitute Blacks and Mestizos. They make up 70 percent of the population in the State of Bahia and approximately half in the states of Pernambuco, Ceara, Parahyba and Maranhao. In the southern states of Sao Paulo, Parana and Rio Grande, they make up 10 percent of the population and approximately 5 percent at Santa Catarina (See Appendix B). In east and northeast, Blacks live mainly along the coastal regions, formerly plantation regions that depended on slave labor. In Venezuela, Blacks are concentrated in areas that are formally plantations. In Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, Blacks are found almost exclusively in coastal provinces or interior valleys.

Many similarities of culture and social structure are relevant to religion, but significant differences between the Caribbean and South America have also been discovered. In particular there are notable differences in size and population, ratios of Whites to Blacks, policies of major

Christian churches toward religious instruction for Blacks, and the integration of people of color into a single nationality in Brazil after abolition. In tracing the development of Catholicism in Brazil, Bastide emphasized the importance of the Catholic familism of the large plantations during the regime of slavery. Why were slaves attracted to Catholicism? During the colonial period, religion did not become "an opiate of the people" or the basis for messianic movements (Bastide, p. 341). The people of color (mulatto) did not seek a flight from reality or compensation for troubles on earth. Religion for them was simply a channel of ascent, a means to improve one's social status.

Simpson noted that during the experience of Blacks in the New World, the shift to religious cult of one kind or another came as a consequence of several factors. In the first instance it was the nature of the slavery system and then the system that followed it and the social, economic and finally the political treatment that those at the bottom of the system received (Simpson, p.13, 1978). Over time these conditions modified character in stressful directions and those who were most sensitive to the stress advanced new religions and secular systems to deal with their anxiety.

Successful religions spread and persisted after the conditions that gave birth to them had changed to some extent and individuals were socialized into accepting their beliefs and procedures. This has been the case with such Neo-African cults. It has been true of ancestral cults, revivalism in Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Vincent, the Pentecostal movements in parts of the Caribbean and the Spiritualist cults such as in Brazil. The result of this socialization is an acquisition of more meanings and functions for its members, the most universal of which is the satisfaction that comes from group activities.

#### Cults

Cults are very often viewed with a combination of mistrust and fear. Much of this hostility derives from widespread misconception about the nature of "cults" founded upon popular stereotypes and simple ignorance. In sociological terms "cult" may be defined as a movement foreign to the culture in which it lives. Americans defined a "cult" as a group, generally with a religious foundation, whose beliefs and practices are unfamiliar to the majority of U.S. citizens. Many groups that Americans once thought of as "cults"- such as the early Quakers, Seventh Day Adventists, or Mormons have received increased

recognition and acceptance and have become accredited churches. Other groups such as the "Zen Buddhists," viewed by many as "cults," represent mainstream movements in other parts of the world. Hence, defining a group as a "cult" generally has more to do with the way society perceives the group than it does with the characteristics indigenous to the group itself (Szubin, 2000). Some factors that contributed to bringing these cults into existence or preserving them are physical isolation, continuing contact with Africa, continuity of leadership, and the presence of competing cults.

Physical isolation, especially in the early days of the cult, promoted its development. Where physical isolation was less extreme, social isolation existed in varying degrees. Specific cults have been revised, replaced, or transformed, but none of the cult types have disappeared from the regions. A classification of religious cults in the Caribbean is illustrated in the following table (Simpson, p. 14, 1978); see Table 1.

Table 1. Religious Cults of Caribbean

<i>Neo-African Cult</i>	<i>Ancestral Cult</i>	<i>Revivalist Cult</i>	<i>Spiritualist Cult</i>	<i>Religio-Political Cult</i>
Vodum (Haiti)	Cumina (Jamaica)	Revival Zion (Jamaica)	Spiritualists (Puerto Rico)	Ras Tafari (Jamaica)
Shango (Trinidad)	Covince (Jamaica)	Shouters (Trinidad)		Dreads (Dominica)
Shango (Grenada)	Big Drum (Grenada and Carriacou)	Shakers (St. Vincent)		
Santeria (Cuba)	Kele (St. Lucia)	Streams of Power (St Vincent)		
	Dugu (Belize, Honduras, Guatemala)			

Although the classification for the above Table may be applied to South America, not all of the types are found among the religions that are considered to be there. No instances of revivalism, ancestral cults, or of religio-political cults are cited for South America. Umbanda in Brazil, the cult of Maria Lionza in Venezuela, and Neo-African and African-derived religions represent spiritualism by a number of cults. The following Table is the classification for South America (Simpson, p.15, 1978); see Table 22.

Table 2. Religious Cults of South America

<i>Neo-African Cult</i>	<i>African-derived Cult</i>	<i>Spiritualist Cult</i>	<i>Independent Cult</i>
Dahomean and Yoruban (San Luiz, Maranhao, Brazil)	Spirit Cult San Antonio, Maranhao, Brazil)	Umbanda (Brazil)	Batuque <sup>5</sup> (Belen, Brazil)
Candomble (Bahia, Brazil)	Yoruban-Derived (San Luis, Maranhao, Brazil)	Maria Lionza (Veneuzela)	
Xango (Recifee, Para (Porto Alegre Brazil)	Macoumba (Rio de Janeiro, Boni (French Guiana)		

Evolution of Afro-Brazilian Religions/Cults

Umbanda, Macumba and Candomble are popular terms for any Afro-Brazilian religion, also referred to as cults, anywhere in Brazil. Umbanda first appeared in Rio de Janeiro after World War I. It was a product of the combinations of certain beliefs of the Brazilian

<sup>5</sup> Batuque a highly syncretized Yoruban derived cult. It consists of a mixture of Yoruban and Dahomean beliefs and practices, as well as elements of Indian shamanism, folk Catholicism, Iberian and local folklore.



spiritualist movement (Kardecismo<sup>6</sup>), with the basic ritual and concepts of Macumba. The spiritualist strain in Umbanda is evident in various ways. It has emphasis on reincarnations and the idea that mediums might receive the spirits of the dead; there is a stress on doing good or practicing charity rather than stressing the use of supernatural contact for one's own ends. As spiritism passed from the Whites to the Black lower classes, it continued to modify. The spirits that incarnated themselves were now those of Indians and Blacks as though racial segregation persisted in the beyond and as though communication between the natural and the supernatural worlds could be established only by following the color line. Nevertheless color prejudice did creep into Brazilian spiritism.

Spiritism's three phases since its introduction into Brazil include the spiritism of the intellectuals, of the White lower class and the lower class of Blacks. In the spiritism of Allan Kardec, the second phase, mulattos and Blacks were accepted on the condition that they receive only the spirits of Whites. The spirits of cabocles

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<sup>6</sup> Kardecismo: A Brazilian spiritualist movement based on the writings of Allan Kardec.

(Indian ancestry) and of Africans were regarded as inferior and were unfit to serve as protectors of mediums. In the third phase the spiritism of Umbanda, the spirits of Indians and Africans were accepted. Umbanda "purified" the ancestral heritage of Blacks by looking for its roots in India or Egypt. Blood sacrifices, long initiations and sorcery were rejected, the orishas were redefined in "scientific" terms and dead slaves were transformed into gods who descended into human beings to cure the sick (Simpson, p. 148, 1978). It is clear that in Umbanda spiritism, Blacks indoctrinated their most ancient religious symbols with new feelings and attitudes (Bastide, p. 343, 1978). In spite of the levels of spiritualist ideas, Afro-Brazilians religions are greatly apparent in the rituals, the organizations of cult centers, the preoccupations with undoing sorcery and the exaltation of African (Yoruban) deities and Indian spirits. To the extent that Umbanda centers (a pavilion in which the ceremonies are held) engaged in purely magical practices, including sorcery, they are called Quimbanda (Baklanoff, p. 209, 1966).

Most members of Umbanda centers come from the upper-lower and middle classes. In the twelve groups in Sao Paulo, from 60 percent to 70 percent of the spirit

mediums were women, but men participated in other ways- as drummers or as officers in the board of directors at the centers. The majority of Umbandista in these centers in Sao Paulo are between 20 and 40 years of age. Classifying persons according to race is difficult, because Brazil's racial categories are not based on physical characteristics alone, but include such criteria as wealth, education and personal qualities. Umbanda encompasses a "wide range of physical types" in terms of the composition of the population in modern urban slums and middle class areas. While Black membership looms disproportionately large, "Umbanda" has attracted too many persons of non-African background to be classified as a "Black religion." Whites in Sao Paulo attend Umbandist ceremonies 'in large proportions' and Japanese also sought the effectiveness of its magical procedures. Half the membership of the centers is noted to be "entirely of European origins." Thus Umbanda is the outcome of a three-way syncretism associating African, Catholic and Spiritualist elements in one loosely knit body of doctrines, which makes allowance for limited local variations.

Industrialization in the middle 1900's may have brought Blacks in Brazil mobility. However they were slow

to benefit from it, being held back at first by economic competition from poor whites and immigrants. They were not immediately integrated into the social class system of the capitalist regime. They formed a kind of sub-proletariat and the development of urbanization, which destroyed their traditional values without providing new ones in exchange. Macumba is an illustration of what happens to the African religions during a period when traditional values are being lost (Bastide, p. 294, 1978).

#### Macumba

Macumba, a name more frequently used for the Batuque cult is the religion of the old Black slaves who were brought to work Brazil's plantations between the 16th and 19th centuries. Some Brazilians refer to Macumba as a corrupted version of African animism, a naïve, chaotic hodge podge of superstitions and beliefs, which as they would have it survived in Brazil as a form of opposition to the masters during the long period of slavery. Many Brazilians deny its existence or pretend to be above it. Its practice is attributed to the most illiterate members of Brazilian society. Serge Bramly wrote that a member of the religion revealed to him the following: "Here no one likes to admit to practicing Macumba. Since Macumba does not take place on a visible level, its action cannot be

observed. It reveals itself only in results. It has no solid scientific base. That is why most people prefer to deny its existence rather than expose themselves to ridicule for believing in things which science disputes." Nevertheless, Macumba is everywhere in Brazil. It is a source of inspiration for popular songs and carnivals. Macumba has penetrated Brazilian culture and some of its expressions, often of African origin, have become an accepted part of everyday speech (Bramly, p. 10, 1979).

Macumba is a syncretism among the African, Amerindian, Catholic and spiritist cults. In mapping the religious sects of Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century, two systems of belief existed in Rio de Janeiro: the Yoruba who worshipped *orixas* (Yoruba deities) and the Bantu, whose cult is known as the *cabula* (African religious sect of Bantu origin). Macumba started out as *cabula*, an admixture of certain orishas and certain Yoruba rites.

Within the Black masses ethnic and cultural bonds were dissolved. Another solidarity emerged, one of misfortune, of comradeship, in the struggle to adapt to the New World and in loneliness. This syncretism that juxtaposed two systems of belief could not form a coherent system. Through the chinks in this new theology,

hesitantly trying to find itself, other elements crept in especially when it began to appeal to Whites, who soon became as numerous as Blacks in Macumba. The first element was popular Catholicism and the other the spiritism of Allan Kardec. This encounter and fusion gave birth to Macumba (Bastide, p. 295, 1978).

Membership in Macumba. In the Macumba religion, membership is conferred by initiation, which begins with a purification bath. If a symbolic lock of hair is cut off seclusion in the sacred room is shortened. The usual stay in the sacred room is three weeks during which time the candidate is taught precepts, songs and dances. The reception of the new initiate into the sect is the occasion for a great ceremony known as "the crossing" because the priest takes an iron sword and traces a cross first on the back, then on other parts of the candidate's body. The public ceremonies that wind up as a consultation session are a mixture of Africanism, "low spiritism," and magic. "Low spiritism" is a concept that recognizes two different "lines," of descent, that of the Indian and the African. This pejorative term is used to designate the third and last level of spiritism in Brazil (Bastide, p. 314, 1978).

Certain elements of the Macumba ritual deserve a little more attention. The animal sacrifice takes place during the public ceremony, constituting its climax. A cock is killed and its blood is allowed to trickle over a woman's body. One feels that the spectacular element is now the only one that counts and that commercialized Macumba is the next step. Macumba has been driven out of Rio suburbs into the small towns that form a proletarian ring around the city. Macumba flourishes in many parts of South America, even though it has changed from a collective form to an individual one, degenerating from religion into magic in the process (Bastide, p. 297, 1978).

#### Candomble

Candomble, the last of the Afro-Brazilian religions mentioned earlier, is a cult in Bahia. It is often identified as an exemplary survival of African culture in the Americas. Ironically, oral history identified many of its founders as voluntary immigrants from Africa (Matory, 2000). Candomble is thought to represent the most orthodox expressions of African-magical-religion in the New World. The focus of Candomble worship is the maintenance of a harmonious relationship between religious followers and the African gods, known as orixas.

The orixas are associated with natural elements: earth, water, fire and wind. Reduced in number from the Yoruban pantheon, these deities very early assumed the names, but not the identities, of Roman Catholic saints. Plants and their products are integral components in every Candomble ritual and celebration. Hence use of plants for spiritual and medicinal purposes is fundamental to the practice of Candomble. Religious leaders retained elements of their ethno-flora by importing Old World species and by using accidentally introduced weeds and substituted Brazilian species. Ethno-botanical knowledge is basic to the practice and ultimately to the existence of Candomble (Voeks, 1990).

Membership in Candomble. In Candomble, membership initiation can last between three months to a year. During this time the initiates live in the cult center and undergo a long succession of rituals involving the shaving of the head, taking baths in sacred springs, being anointed repeatedly with the blood of sacrificed animals, eating sacred foods and having their head painted and washed with special herbs. Finally clad in an elaborate costume, the newly initiated is presented at a public ceremony with great pomp and celebration. In the case of female initiates, there may be yet another major ritual in



which the initiate is "sold" to her parents or to her husband if she is married, at which time her initiation is complete and she becomes a full fledged member of the cult.

After seven years a male or female member in the Candomble assumes a higher status with the group. The medium is now allowed to set up a shrine in the home where offerings to the spirits are made on a given day each week. Although the medium theoretically is a free agent, participation in all the ceremonies of the cult continues and he or she is expected to remain obedient to the medium leader. The medium usually becomes responsible for important cult functions, such as caring for the stones that represent deities, cooking the foods used in offerings and lead the singing during ceremonies (Leacock, p. 285, 1975). Candomble religion is utilitarian, even in its raptures, in the plunge into the vast, dark night of trance, for participation in the divine restores health, improves one's lot and propitiates fortune (Bastide, p. 249, 1978).

Although some striking differences exist in rituals and beliefs, the Afro-Caribbean religion constitutes a rich complex of rites and myths and remains a strong sense of ultimate African derivation and tradition that members

try to maintain. The deities have African names and are thought to have permanent residence in Africa. Another characteristic shared by all three sects is a stress on rituals. Not only are many ritual acts observed but a great deal of attention is paid to the correct performance of each act.

Umbanda spiritism is very far removed from Candomble and although it has broken off with Macumba, which it contemptuously rejects as witchcraft, it still defines the civilization and expresses the collective subjectivity of a social class within the Brazilian community (Bastide, p. 405, 1978). Beginning as a religion that gave hope and comfort to the slaves, these cults have become a religion that appeals most to the poor and disadvantaged.

Interpretations of those who study these religions have stressed the continual instrumental nature of the cults as the reason for their popularity. The testing of these interpretations will come when the poor and disadvantaged come to have a more secure existence. One can safely predict that the drums will continue to sound, the medium will dance and sing, and clients will seek out their

favorite encantando<sup>7</sup> for many years to come, because the standard of living among the poor is improving at an agonizing rate.

### Umbanda

In the belief system of Umbanda in Sao Paulo, five major types of spirits are identified. First are the spirits of dead Brazilians Indians; a second type is the gentle and approachable spirits of dead Afro-Brazilian slaves. The third type of spirit is the spirit of a dead child, and the fourth is the exu (feminine counterpart is the Pomba-Gira<sup>8</sup>). Such spirits are believed to be those of people who were evil. Antisocial attributes and bad manners characterize the exus. The fifth type of spirit, the orisha, represents a merging of West African beliefs and Catholicism.

Umbandists organize their spirits into seven lines, headed in each case by an orisha, and divided into seven phalanxes. Each phalanx is in turn divided into seven legions of spirits (Simpson, p. 161, 1978). Umbanda,

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<sup>7</sup> encantado: The most important supernatural in the Batuque; any of a special category of spirits who are believed to possess human beings (Leacock, p. 377, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Pomba-Gira: is Exu's wife or female persona of Exu (Brambly, p. 224, 1975).

although it is certainly spiritism of a kind, differs strongly from Kardecismo.

Ordinary spiritist sessions end with a moral homily and the ceremonial is meager or nonexistent. In Kardecism the manifestations of the spirits require only that the medium be in a semiconscious state. There is no trance. In Umbanda the spirits manifest themselves through extremely emotional and violent ecstasies. In Kardecism, in the course of meetings, certain people display mediumistic talent and may be sent to medium school to develop or perfect their talent. Membership in an Umbanda sect is conferred only by initiation (known as crossing). Initiation into Umbanda still represents a bond between the new religion and the old (Bastide, p. 332, 1978).

In addition to their beliefs about the spirits, Umbandists emphasize a theory concerning supernatural fluids. These spiritual emanations are thought to surround one's body and to come from three sources: one's own innate spirit, the spirit of the dead and incarnate spirits of persons who are close by. Umbandists combine illnesses and personal difficulties under the heading of spiritual disorder.

In the Umbanda cult, mediums make spirits available to anyone for consultations concerning illness,

occupational success or failure and other personal problems. There are no seances, no calling up of the spirits of deceased relatives, and for the most part activities are open and public. Umbanda is not a revitalization movement and its concern is in helping individuals to solve their personal problems (Simpson, p. 161, 1978).

CHAPTER SIX  
COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Various studies have shown that participation in the rituals of religious cults provides an avenue of escape from the anxieties and frustrations generated by life in the lower socioeconomic class in Caribbean and Latin American countries. Specific benefits resulting from ritual participation psychologically keep members of religious cults faithful to their religion. Attractions include obedience to the gods, group affinity, the drama and experience of rituals, leadership support, guidance and healing. The building up and release of emotional tensions and the recognition that is accorded to those who have special qualities, especially the ability to go into trance are added attractions (Simpson, p. 130 1978). I decided to focus on Afro-Caribbean religions and rituals as my thesis topic because ideas about traditional healing, connecting with ancestors, and practices from other religious traditions have infiltrated mainstream American culture.

Because their beliefs were incompatible with the basic Christian doctrine societies practicing traditional religions were often discouraged from doing so. These

aspects included the worship of many spiritual beings, a belief in possession, the use of spells and incantation for good and in some cases for evil, appeasing ancestors through feasts and rituals and the use of animal sacrifices for some ceremonies. In recent years scholars have been studying culture from a different perspective. In time mainstream religions have become more tolerant and accepting of other people's culture. These changes have brought about an evolution of African spirituality.

Afro-Caribbean religions have gained notoriety in the United States within the past 15 years. Very little has been written about Dugu since the early 1950's and 60's, and since that time the Catholic Church has changed its approach and attitudes towards other people's culture and religious practices. Coelho wrote that Garinagu were reluctant to discuss some spheres of their basic religious belief with outsiders, since matters concerning their ancestors were among the most esoteric aspects of Garifuna culture' (Coelho, p. 145, 1955). Today many Garinagu are more open and many have gone on to achieve higher education. This new breed of scholars has published books and journal articles based not only on research, but also as members of the traditional societies, illustrating a more personal view to different aspects of culture. As a

Garifuna, passion for the culture and support from various professors and mentors has encouraged me to research Afro-Caribbean cultures, which has enriched my knowledge and cleared up some obscure information.

Many other traditional religions have been affected by the evolution of African spirituality. Voodoo religion still conjures up negative perceptions and literary fascination at the same time. Voodoo is feared and misunderstood by many in the United States, while Haitians who practice the religion believe it honors ancestors. What was once an underground practice dating back to the days of slavery is finally being acknowledged as a bonafide religion and recognized for its role in defining Haitian culture (Klarreich, 2000). Fisher, a Haitian residing in New York, earns a living teaching drumming classes at Hunter College and gives private lessons playing at Voodoo ceremonies and folk performances. He even gets lucrative gigs when mainstream artists want a Voodoo sound. He is admired in Haiti, because he has managed to make it in the United States without abandoning his tradition (Ridgeway, 1998): Voodoo continues to be synonymous with the Haitian Nation, just as Santeria is synonymous with the Cubans.



Millions of Latinos living in the United States practice Santeria. A casual walk through Latino neighborhood reveals Santeria religious goods stores, commonly known as botanicas. Hundreds of botanicas exist throughout the city, purveying herbs, candles, incense, oils, idols, books, beads and talismans, yet the best resources are still the people. Their unparalleled knowledge of mystical powers and healing remedies helps scores of followers. Their wealth of information is one of the most tangible links available (Cortes, 1998). With its transportation to the United States, more non-Hispanics are joining the religion. Although media coverage in the United States has progressed, illusions about the religion persist in American culture. In 1993 the issue of sacrifice was addressed in the Supreme Court in the case of Hialeah, Florida-based Santeria church of the Lucumi Babalu Aye vs. Hialeah Ernesto Pichardo, a Santeria priest who challenged the ban in the Miami suburb on animal sacrifice (Flemming, 1996). In June of 1993, the United States Supreme Court overturned a Hialeah, Florida law forbidding the ritual sacrifice of chickens, lambs, goats and other animals. The court concluded that the state of Florida had unfairly targeted adherents of the Santeria religion (Zellner, p. 117, 1998). Many Santeria followers

believe that the religion is booming. Santeria continues to enjoy resurgence because people are searching for roots and culture, looking for something to evaluate their lives (Mandel-Campbell, 1996).

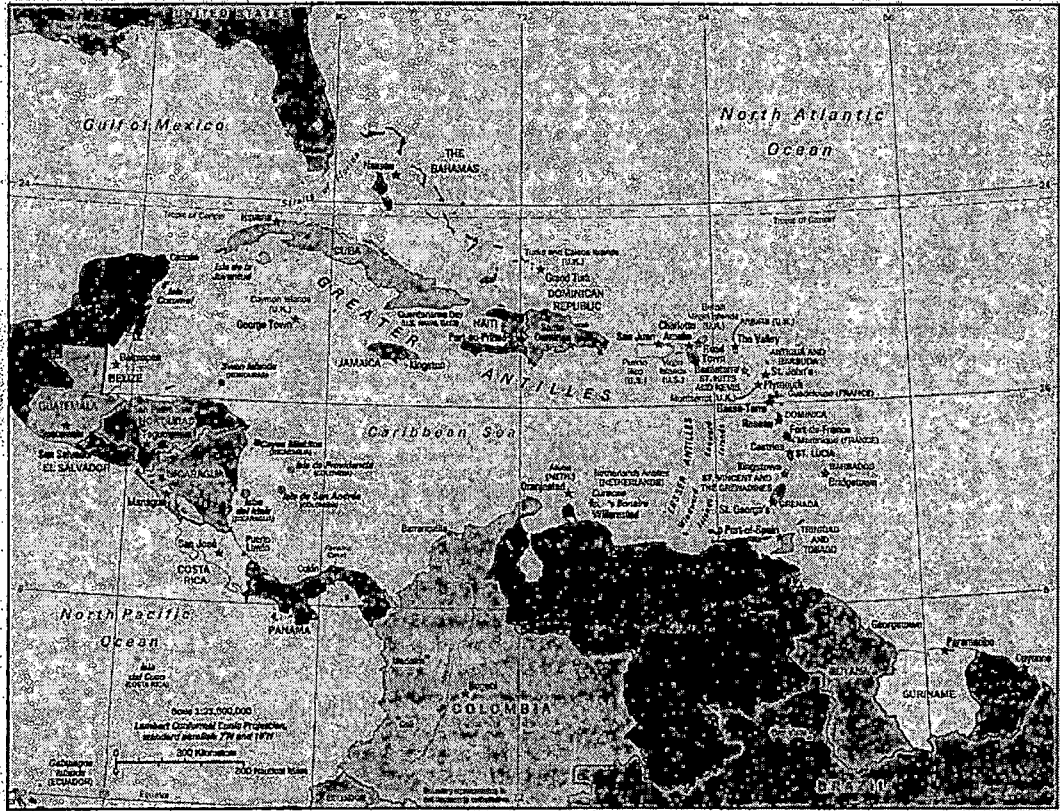
While literature is extensive on Voodoo and Santeria, many of the Afro-Brazilian and Portuguese journals on Brazilian religions are limited or not written in English (Simpson, p. 407, 1978). Research findings do indicate that several social factors have furthered the maintenance of African religions. The suppression of the slave trade did not stop all connection between Brazil and Africa (Simpson, p. 173, 1978). Because of the prohibition of African religious practices, African cults ended up syncretizing with Macumba, Umbanda and Candomble with Catholicism. Encouraged by budding Afro-Brazilians, religious expression is coming out of the closet. Many Brazilians do not consider the traditional religion they belong to a separate religion, because they claim to be Catholics with regards to the fiscal census (Pressel, p. 276, 1973).

Toward the end of the last century, imposition of a single tradition on people has become increasingly impractical and unacceptable. The growth of democracy in many Afro-Caribbean regions has fostered greater religious

tolerance. Latin America is a place where different, new religions co-exist with ancient traditions, all part of a religious diverse life of the regions (Magnani, 1991). The legacy of African Diaspora will always remain evident in the Caribbean regions and Latin America. Modern technology has brought people to each other's doorsteps, resulting in an enormous impact upon the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge for the future.

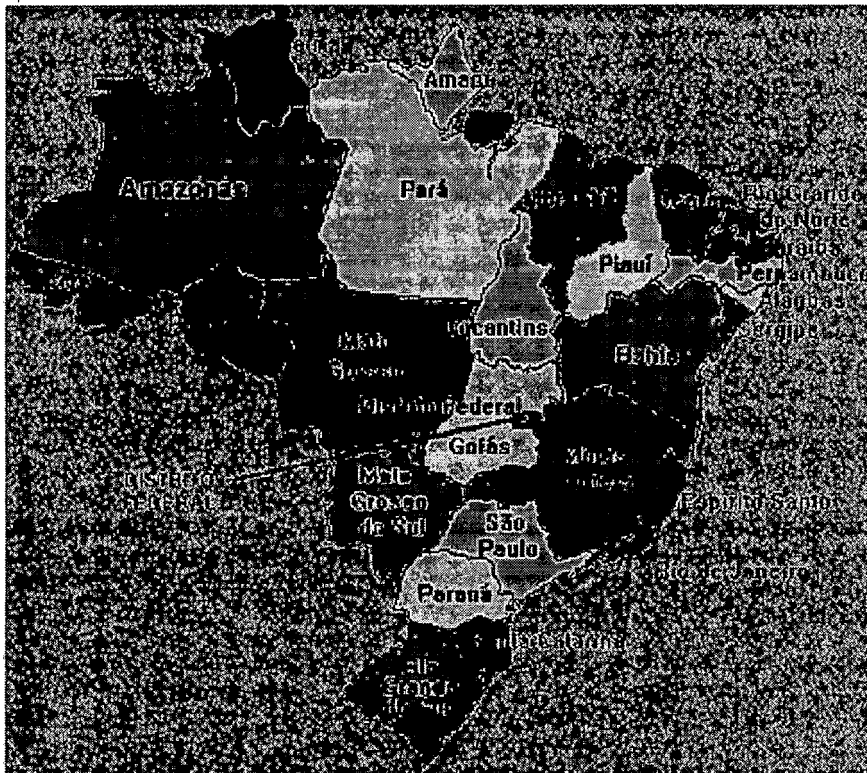
APPENDIX A  
CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE  
CARIBBEAN MAP

Central America and the Caribbean



APPENDIX B

BRAZIL MAP



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