



**QUEERING  
BLACK  
ATLANTIC  
RELIGIONS**

Transcorporeality in Candomblé,  
Santería, and Vodou

ROBERTO STRONGMAN

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RELIGIOUS CULTURES OF AFRICAN  
AND AFRICAN DIASPORA PEOPLE

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To my great-grandmothers,

ANITA MATHÉLY ROSEMOND

LAURA GRABILL STRONGMAN

JOSEFINA MONTOYA SALDAÑA

VIRGINIA JIMÉNEZ GUEVARA

*Je t'écoute . . . Mwen tandè'w*

*I hear you . . .*

*Las escucho . . .*

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Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; Mawu-Lisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become. —AUDRE LORDE, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

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## INTRODUCTION

Enter the *Igbodu*

The entrance of inductees into the initiation chamber of an Afro-Atlantic spiritual community uncannily resembles the practice of reading you are currently performing. Your opening of this book mirrors the neophytes' unlocking of the doors to the space in which their new consciousness will gestate. Whether within the *djevo* of Haitian Vodou, the *camarinha* of Brazilian Candomblé, or the *igbodú* of Cuban Lucumí/Santería, this sacred place is a space of intellectual, physical, and spiritual nourishment, the first step in a rite of passage that will mark the death of the old, illusory self and foster the rebirth of the new, spiritually aware subject.

Much like one's indecision before a shelfful of clamoring books at a bookstore or library, the process of committing to the temporal and monetary rigors of the *igbodú* is often marked by much vacillation and postponement. But eventually the seekers succumb to the mysteries within, pledging themselves to whatever temporary privations might be required for the sake of spiritual transformation. The initial disorientation and pervasive loneliness

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are compensated with the wholesome enrichment of learning the secrets of each lesson, ceremony, or chapter.

The igbodu is the place where the community's secrets are kept.<sup>1</sup> They are shared only with the select few who make their abode within for a predetermined period—a year historically, but increasingly, due to the demands of urban and industrialized societies, as little as a month or a few days. This is the paradigmatic space of cultural regeneration and demographic propagation in these religious societies in which orality has superseded textuality as the main conduit of information and ritual transmission.

As in the acts of reading and writing, the novices in the igbodu spend most of their time in seclusion. This is a space of meditation where, through the cultivation of silence, one may hear the West African divinities called *orishas* speak.<sup>2</sup> But the isolation is punctuated by the periodic incursions of priests and elders who tend to the initiates' physical needs. As infants in the practice, the initiates are fed, bathed, and dressed by the community of saints. Even their bodily excretions are removed from the space by their new brothers and sisters. The igbodu is a place of humility, where one learns to trust others through the sacred simulacrum of renaissance.

Welcome to the scholarly igbodu that this book represents. In it, you will learn about *transcorporeality*, the distinctly Afro-diasporic cultural representation of the human psyche as multiple, removable, and external to the body that functions as its receptacle. This transcorporeal view of the self obtains clear visual representation in a tropical fruit that is largely unknown in Europe and North America because the fragility of its skin impedes exportation. Nevertheless, this emblematic and queer fruit, emerging from the flora of the geographical and climatic region covered in this book, is widely cultivated and consumed on both sides of the black Atlantic by humans and gods, as it is one of the favorite offerings of the orishas Changó and Oshún. The cashew pear (Fr. *pomme de cajou*, Sp. *marañón*, Pg. *caju*, Kreyòl *pom kajou*, also known by the taxonomical name *Anacardium occidentale*) allows us to readily see how the transcorporeal conceptualization of the body holds the kernel of the self, not within the meat of the fruit, but on the outside. Unlike the lesser-known fruit, the seed is a prized and popular nut worldwide. The easy removability of this seed and its wide commercial dissemination as an export crop to distant, often high-latitude and temperate lands where it releases the photosynthesized power of the tropical sun speaks to the externality, flight, and Ashé-power of the transcorporeal Spirit. This unique view of the body in which the ego, soul, or anima exists in an outward orientation vis-à-vis the physical body—preserved in its most evident form in African-



FIG. 1.1. Cashew pear, displaying external seed. Photograph by Jacob Abhishek.

diasporic religious traditions—allows the regendering of the bodies of initiates, who are mounted and ridden by deities of a gender different from their own during the ritual ecstasy of trance possession. By discussing novels, paintings, films, interviews, and ethnographies, my book assembles and interprets a representative collection of such transcendental moments in which the commingling of the human and the divine produces subjectivities whose gender is not dictated by biological sex. In so doing, it demonstrates that, while transcorporeality is rooted in the religious practice of trance possession, its effects spill over into the everyday life of participants and observers of these religions and it becomes a leading feature of nearly every aspect of Afro-diasporic cultural production.

The purpose of this book-cum-igbodu is to impart knowledge of this black transatlantic conceptualization of corporeality among a readership inside and outside the academy ready for such new information. It means to achieve this goal by utilizing cultural studies' critical methodologies to expose and explain the occurrence of transcorporeality in literary, aesthetic, and performative contexts. It also employs ethnographic interviews to produce self-reflective personal narratives that give voice to queer priests and

practitioners of the Afro-diasporic religions that have preserved and transformed transcorporeality, adapting it to the exigencies of various historical and geographical contexts across the Atlantic world. The counterpoint between theoretical discourse and interpretive first-person accounts offers multiple points of entry to readers at various stages of familiarity with academic discourse.

The term “transcorporeality” was introduced by Graham Ward in his seminal book *Cities of God*. My use represents neither a derivation nor an adaptation but a fuller elucidation of the term. Using the Christian imagery of the broken body of Christ, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and incarnation theology, Ward employs “transcorporeality” to illustrate the proliferation of Christianity: “Continually called to move beyond itself, the transcorporeal body itself becomes Eucharistic, because endlessly fractured and fed to others. It becomes the body of Christ, broken, given, resurrected and ascended. . . . The transcorporeal body expands in its fracturing, it pluralises as it opens itself towards external growth” (2000, 95). Because he focuses exclusively on Christianity, the full potential of transcorporeality is beyond the bounds of Ward’s important contribution. Where is the “trance” of “transcorporeality”? More than fanciful word play, this question forces us to look beyond a view of the incarnation as a singular historical event or as the logical domain of Christianity. My work furthers Ward’s exploration of the transcorporeal by studying how incarnation theologies are universalized through the phenomenon of trance possession, the quotidian rite through which humans understand themselves as embodiments of the divine in Afro-diasporic religions.

This reworking of the idea of transcorporeality through Afro-Atlantic religion has profound philosophical implications for the understanding of the black body. The imposition of a European discourse of identitarian interiority onto colonized and enslaved populations renders the black body’s representation an empty shell. While many theorists have endeavored to fill this personal vacuum with a unitarian form of consciousness, I fear this produces neither an epistemologically accurate account of Afro-Atlantic consciousness nor a politics of enablement. The philosophies of African peoples conceive of the body as an open vessel that can be occupied temporarily by a variety of hosts. During the height of the slave trade, the real act of imperialism was not so much to label Africans soulless as to close off their philosophical corporeal openness while at the same time legislatively prohibiting precisely those religious rituals of trance possession that render black bodies inhabited or soulful. While endowing Europeans with individuality, the

discourse of interiority trapped the black body into a physical image projection that obstructed the full, plural communion with the spiritual hosts that had animated it prior to its capture by the West and its philosophy. It is the capture of the black body, not its evolution, that rendered it empty. The African bodily house received many visitors until the guests were rudely expelled and the door shut and sealed by monopolizing newcomers. However, the multiple forms of consciousness knocking at the door are loosening the bolts of this subversive manipulation of the corporeal construction and restructuring their ancient abode according to familiar forms, as a physical craft, opening it to welcome them once again.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 1, “Of Dreams and Night Mares: Vodou Women Queering the Body,” examines the initiatory-critical works of five female anthropologists to study how women’s perspectives on Haitian Vodou corporeality problematize the Cartesian mind/body problem. Deploying the theory of transcorporeality, I argue that Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse* (1938), Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen* (1953), Katherine Dunham’s *Island Possessed* (1969), Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola* (1991), and Mimerose Beaubrun’s *Nan Dòmí* (2010) document the development of a feminist and queer canon that is concerned with the potential of Vodou to develop more enabling models of embodiment.

Chapter 2, “Hector Hyppolite èl Mème: Between Queer Fetishization and Vodou Self-Portraiture,” utilizes the concept of twinning prevalent in Afro-diasporic religions, and Vodou in particular, to frame a queer counterpoint between the works of Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite and those of white ethnographers such as Hubert Fichte and Pierre Verger. I suggest that Hyppolite’s paintings avail themselves fully of the cross-gender identificatory possibilities of Vodou in order to respond to the fetishistic queer gaze of these ethnographers.

In chapter 3, “A Chronology of Queer Lucumí Scholarship: Degeneracy, Ambivalence, Transcorporeality,” my objective is to elucidate the existence of a queer Lucumí tradition of scholarship by anthropologists from Cuba, the United States, and France and to trace the evolution of this research through the release of the movie *Fresa y Chocolate*, which I see as representing a pivotal moment in the chronology and lineage of this scholarship. The chapter proposes that *Fresa y Chocolate* is as much about Lucumí as it is about queerness.

Chapter 4, “Lucumí Diasporic Ethnography: Fran, Cabrera, Lam,” continues the exploration of Lucumí as a cultural arsenal of non-heteronormative identifications and representations through a reading of Lydia Cabrera’s

lifework and Wifredo Lam's tableaux. This exposé is framed around a conversation with an initiate and informant, Fran, in order to foreground the dialogic quality of field research, the need to give voice to the practitioners of Afro-diasporic religions, and to afford the ethnographer a moment of public self-reflection.

Chapter 5, "Queer Candomblé Scholarship and Dona Flor's S/Exua/lity," provides a historization of queer Candomblé scholarship as the contextual framework of a discussion of Jorge Amado's novel *Dona Flor e seus deus maridos* and the Bruno Barreto film adaption bearing the same title. Here I argue that the trickster quality in Brazilian Candomblé's orisha Exu makes possible a prominent non-heteronormative thematic element in Amado's novel, whose main protagonist, Dona Flor, allegorizes the orisha Exu in its feminine version: Exua. Further, I propose that Dona Flor is the fulcrum of a homoerotic triangle, as her two husbands allegorize orishas with plural gender identifications. The novel is therefore a prime example of the rich queer cultural potential of Candomblé and Afro-diasporic religions in general.

Chapter 6, "Transatlantic Waters of Oxalá: Pierre Verger, Mário de Andrade, and Candomblé in Europe," utilizes ethnographic interviews and literary analysis to investigate the role of Europe as the next frontier for Candomblé. The chapter examines visits to Candomblé communities in Brazil and Portugal and provides a reading of Mário de Andrade's novel *Macunaíma* to ascertain how a religion with African origins and substantial creolizations in the New World is now adapting in its third passage to the former European colonial center.

*Queering Black Atlantic Religions* seeks to make significant interventions and contributions to a wide range of academic fields by fomenting hemispheric understanding of black cultures while moving beyond US and Latin American models of analysis. In so doing, it attempts to intervene in current discussions regarding the scope of the ethnic studies disciplines within black studies and Latino studies. In a related sense, this work contributes to Latin American and Caribbean studies as it foregrounds the black experience as an important component of the ethnic makeup of Latin America and makes visible important linkages between the Hispanophone, Lusophone, and Francophone Caribbean that are often overlooked in the language-specific disciplines prevalent in the academy. Furthermore, the field of diaspora studies has been dominated by works attempting to understand South Asian migration to England and the United States. This study seeks to add to a growing body of work that expands on the understanding of diaspora from the perspective of other migrant trajectories. This project makes

an important contribution to the field of gender and sexuality studies as it contributes to an understanding of how First World categories of sexual difference often fail to correspond to non-heterosexual categories elsewhere. This observation builds on queer ethnic works such as *Global Divas* (2003) by Martin F. Manalansan and *Aberrations in Black* (2003) by Roderick Ferguson. Certainly there is a need for a greater understanding of Lucumí, Candomblé, and Vodou within religious studies.<sup>4</sup> When the topic of syncretism emerges within religious studies, it is not viewed as a multilayered formation that can acquire new strata through current migrations. Similarly, it addresses gaps in other fields such as the discussions of migrancy in American studies that are almost entirely devoid of the topic of religion. The confluence of theoretical and ethnographical writing on religious ritual ensures that this book should be of interest to scholars and students of anthropology, cultural studies, and performance studies.

#### Toward an Afro-diasporic Philosophy of Corporeal Receptacularity

The Western philosophical tradition presents the concept of a unitary soul within the hermetic enclosure of a body. In *Sources of the Self*, historian of philosophy Charles Taylor presents a genealogy of the Western self in which Descartes marks the most important milestone:

The internalization wrought by the modern age, of which Descartes's formulation was one of the most important and influential, is very different from Augustine's. It does, in a very real sense, place the moral sources within us. Relative to Plato, and relative to Augustine, it brings about in each case a transposition by which we no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside us, or at least not at all in the same way. An important power has been internalized. (1989, 143)

It becomes important for us to place Taylor's claims concerning Descartes in the historical context of the Enlightenment. The theocentric philosophical tradition delineated by Plato and Augustine is characterized by the human search for an identity beyond the individual, in the divine without. The intense secularization of the Enlightenment disrupts this theocentrism by foregrounding the individual, a move that brings about the internalization of identity. This sense of inwardness, however, is dependent upon a clear demarcation between the new boundaries of the self and the body. In the

following passage, Descartes reasons how even if the mind or soul might be within the body, the two remain distinct parts of the individual:

Pour commencer donc cet examen, je remarque ici premièrement qu'il y a une grande différence entre l'esprit et le corps, en ce que le corps de sa nature est toujours divisible, et que l'esprit est entièrement indivisible; car en effet, quand je le considère, c'est-à-dire quand je me considère moi-même en tant que je suis seulement une chose qui pense, je ne puis distinguer en moi aucunes parties, mais je connais et conçois fort clairement que je suis une chose absolument une et entière; et quoique tout esprit semble être uni à tout le corps, toutefois lorsqu'un pied ou un bras ou quelque autre partie vient à en être séparée, je connais fort bien que rien pour cela n'a été retranché de mon esprit; et les facultés de vouloir, de sentir, de concevoir, etc., ne peuvent pas non plus être dites proprement ses parties, car c'est le même esprit qui s'emploie tout entier à vouloir, et tout entier à sentir et à concevoir, etc.; mais c'est tout le contraire dans les choses corporelles ou étendues, car je n'en puis imaginer aucune, pour petite qu'elle soit, que je ne mette aisément en pièces par ma pensées, ou que mon esprit ne divise fort facilement en plusieurs parties, et par conséquent que je ne connaisse être divisible: ce qui suffrait por m'enseigner que l'esprit ou l'âme de l'homme est entièrement différente du corps, si je ne l'avais déjà d'ailleurs assez appris. (1948, 130–31)

In order to begin this examination, then, I here say, in the first place, that there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as the body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible. For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire; and although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot, or an arm, or some other part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my mind. And the faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be properly speaking said to be its parts, for it is one and the same mind which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my mind cannot easily divide into parts and which consequently I do not recognize as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources. (1996, 105–6)

Clearly, Descartes's concern here is to negate the full absorption of the soul by the body through the process of subjective internalization. The two remain distinct entities, even if one resides within the other. Apart from remarking on Descartes's famous cogito in his description of the "I" as the "thinking thing," we should note his concern for divisibility and indivisibility as tests for integrity. For Descartes, the possibility that the body can be separated into parts implies that it is of a different nature than the indivisible mind/soul. In fact, Western philosophy does not prove capable of developing a discourse for the parts of the mind until the twentieth century, with Freud's 1923 *Das Ich und das Es* (*The Ego and the Id*) and with Sartre, who in his 1943 *L'être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*) claims that "l'altérité est, en effet, une négation interne et seule une conscience peut se constituer comme négation interne" (1943, 666; Alterity is, really, an internal negation and only a conscience can constitute itself as an internal negation).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, through his reasoning, Descartes crystallizes the notion of a self within a body, establishing this self as internal, unitary, and inseparable from the body.

In the twentieth century, a strong Western philosophical current attempts to amend Descartes's internal subject. Bataille, for example, posits the divine as a self inside the body: "J'entends par *expérience intérieure* ce que d'habitude on nomme *expérience mystique*: les états d'extase, de ravissement, au moins d'émotion méditée" (1943, 15; *By internal experience* I mean that which is normally called *mystical experience*: ecstasies, rapture, as a form of meditative emotion). Bataille suggests here that even though inwardness initially requires secularization, once established, it can become sacramental again without forcing the self to exit the body. Similarly, Michel Serres in *Variations sur le corps* uses an aesthetic discourse to claim that the body's internalization of the self does not imply a rejection of the profound and transcendental mystery of artistic appreciation:

Voilà les cycles admirables de support réciproque entre le labyrinthe de l'oreille interne, chargé du port, et les volutes spiralées de l'externe, qui entend et produit la musique, convergeant dans un centre noir et secret, commun à ses deux réseaux, où je découvre soudain la solution aux mystères sombres de l'union de l'âme qui ouït la langue et du corps porteur. (1999, 23)

Let us consider the admirable cycles of reciprocal support between the labyrinth of the internal ear and the spiraling corrugations of the external ear, which hears and produces music, converging into one dark and secret center, common to both networks, where I suddenly

discover the solution to the shadowy mysteries of the union between the soul that hears language and the body that carries it.

While Bataille and Serres are interested in recuperating the divine for the internal self, for Sartre, “tout autre conception de l’altérité reviendrait à la poser comme en-soi, c’est-à-dire à établir entre elle et l’être une relation externe, ce qui nécessiterait la présence d’un témoin pour constater que l’autre est autre que l’en-soi” (1943, 666; All other conceptualizations of alterity will end up presenting it as in-itself, in other words, to establish between it and Being an external relationship, which would require the presence of a witness to verify that the other is different from that which is in-itself). This French philosophical internalization of the self acquires its most recent expression in Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis,” presented in his *L’histoire de la sexualité* (*History of Sexuality*, [1979] 1976) as the popular belief that since the seventeenth century discourses of sexuality have been driven underground and made secretive while in fact narratives and “confessions” about sex have nothing but proliferated since then. If we believe we are repressed, it is because of the Cartesian model of a bodily entrapped soul—a culturally conditioned image that is not shared by all phenomenological traditions across the world and historical periods.

In *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, Paget Henry explains that Afro-diasporic philosophy does not exist as a tradition isolated from other manifestations of culture:

Because traditional African philosophy emerged implicitly in the ontological, ethical, existential, and other positions taken in religious, mythic, genealogical, and folkloric discourses, its presence and visibility depended upon the continued vitality and growth of these systems of thought. Their contraction or decay would mean decline and eclipse for traditional African philosophy. . . . In the Caribbean . . . traditional African philosophy experienced an even greater eclipse as a result of the rise of colonial discourses and a literate, hybridized local intelligentsia. (2000, 43, 45)

Henry’s statement implies the need to investigate Afro-diasporic religion as a repository of philosophical information that can overcome the imposition of Western philosophical discourses on colonized peoples. In fact, a thorough study of Afro-diasporic religions reveals how—unlike the Western idea of the fixed internal unitary soul—the Afro-diasporic self is removable, external, and multiple. This idea has antecedents in J. Lorand Matory’s

“Vessels of Power,” his 1986 anthropology master’s thesis, and in his *Sex and the Empire That Is No More* (2005b), where he discusses how African pots, calabashes, baskets, and other concave ritual, representational, and utilitarian objects provide Oyo-Yorùbá metaphors of personhood. My work is inspired by his statement that “the Cartesian notion of the body is the detachable and disposable vessel of an invisible mind or soul” (2005b, 169) and extends it to interrogate just how the notion of the body as vessel allows for queer resubjectifications that are rare or impossible under the containment model provided by Descartes.

In *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Kuame Gyekye presents a tripartite plan of the self, consisting of the *honam*, the material body; the *okra*, the immaterial soul; and the *sunsum*, the quasi-material spirit (Gyekye 1995, 89). In *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Kwasi Wiredu explains Gyekye’s systematization of Akan personhood by comparing it with Descartes’s mind/body binarism:

One thing, in any case, should be absolutely clear: Neither the *okra* nor the *sunsum* can be identified with the immaterial soul familiar in some influential Western philosophical and religious thinking (with all its attendant paradoxes). This concept of the soul is routinely used interchangeably with the concept of mind while the concept of *okra* and *sunsum* are categorically different from the Akan concept of mind (*adwene*), as our previous explanation should have rendered apparent. Thus Descartes (in English translation) can speak indifferently of the soul or the mind and appear to make sense. In Akan to identify either the *okra* or the *sunsum* with *adwene* would be the sheerest gibberish. (Wiredu 1996, 129)

The multiplicity of the self displayed in the Akan scheme is prevalent in Western African societies and has been noted by Haitian Vodou scholar Guérin Montilus in his study of Adja philosophy:

The Vodou religion of the Adja taught these same Africans that their psychic reality and source of human life was metaphorically symbolized by the shadow of the body. This principle, represented by the shadow, is called the *ye*. There are two of these. The first is the inner, the internal part of the shadow, which is called the *ye gli*; that is, a short *ye*. The second, the external and light part of the same shadow, is called the *ye gaga*; that is, the long *ye*. The first *ye gli*, is the principle

of physical life, which vanishes at death. The second, *ye gaga*, is the principle of consciousness and psychic life. The *ye gaga* survives death and illustrates the principle of immortality. It has metaphysical mobility that allows human beings to travel far away at night (through dreams) or remain eternally alive after the banishment of the *ye gli*. After death, the *ye gaga* goes to meet the community of Ancestors, which constitutes the extended family and the clan in their spiritual dimensions. (2006, 2)

This multiplicity of the self found in African philosophy survives in the Caribbean diaspora. The African duality of the immaterial self—the okra and sunsum of the Akan and the *ye gli* and *ye gaga* of the Adja—become the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj* in Haitian Vodou. In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert define these two elusive terms:

The head, which contains the two elements that comprise the soul—the *ti bònanj* or *ti bon ange* (the conscience that allows for self-reflection and self-criticism) and the *gwo bònanj* or *gros bon ange* (the psyche, source of memory, intelligence, and personhood)—must be prepared so that the *gros bon ange* can be separated from the initiate to allow the spirit to enter in its place. (2003, 118)

Here we begin to see that there is a cooperative relationship between the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj*. Alfred Métraux further expounds on this cooperation:

It is the general opinion that dreams are produced by the wanderings of the Gros-bon-ange when it abandons the body during sleep. The sleeper becomes aware of the adventures of the Gros-bon-ange through the *Ti-z'ange* who remains by him as a protector and yet never loses sight of the Gros-bon-ange. He wakes the sleeper in case of danger and even flies to the rescue of the Gros-bon-ange if this faces real danger. (1946, 85)

For the self to achieve altered states of consciousness—in trance possessions, dreams, or death—the *tibonanj* allows the *gwobonanj* to become detached from the body. In the case of trance possession, the *gwobonanj* surrenders its place and its authority to the *mètèt*, “the main spirit served by that person and the one s/he most often goes into trance for” (McCarthy Brown 2006, 10).

In her landmark book *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, Karen McCarthy Brown further explains the multiple concept of the self in Vodou by presenting the notion of the *mètèt*, roughly translated as “the master of the head”: “The personality of the *mèt tet* and that of the devotee tend to coincide, an intimate tie hinted at in the occasional identification of the ‘big guardian angel’ (*gwo bònanj*), one dimension of what might be called a person’s soul, with the Vodou spirit who is his or her *mèt tet*” (1991, 112–13). Here we see how the *gwobonanj* is the central element of the self in Vodou. Not only is it the seat of individuality but it also maintains links between *mètèt* and the *tibonanj*, two aspects of the self that are not directly connected to each other. These links are broken after the death of the individual, in the Vodou ceremony of *dessounin*:

In a certain sense, the *maît-tête* is the divine parent of the *gros-bon-ange*, the psychic inheritance from the parents. The ceremony of *dessounin* thus accomplishes two separate but related actions: it severs the *loa* cord of the *gros-bon-ange*; and it separates the *gros-bon-ange* from its physical parent—the now defunct matter of the body—launching it as an independent spiritual entity into the spiritual universe, where it, in turn, becomes either part of the general spiritual heritage of the descendants of that person, or even, perhaps, the divine parent, the *loa maît-tête* of some subsequent *gros-bon-ange*. (Deren 1970, 45)

We can summarize the roles of the two most important aspects of the self by saying that the *gwobonanj* is consciousness, while the *tibonanj* is objectivity. The *gwobonanj* is the principal soul, experience, personality (Agosto 1976, 52), the personal soul, or self (Deren 1970, 44). The *tibonanj* is described as the anonymous, protective, objective conscience that is truthful and objective, the impersonal spiritual component of the individual (Deren 1970, 44), whose domain also encompasses moral considerations and arbitration (Agosto 1976, 52). The *tibonanj* is a “spiritual reserve tank. It is an energy or presence within the person that is dimmer or deeper than consciousness, but it is nevertheless there to be called upon in situations of stress and depletion” (McCarthy Brown 2006, 9).

The complex relationship between the *gwobonanj* and the *tibonanj* has at times not been correctly understood by Western scholars, who have disseminated erroneous information, further mudding our collective understanding of the self in Vodou.<sup>6</sup> For example, Desmangles ascribes to the *tibonanj* characteristics that most scholars attribute to the *gwobonanj*: “The *ti-bonanj* is the ego-soul. It represents the unique qualities that characterize an



FIG. 1.2. Representation of the gwobonanj as the Blue Angel. Hector Hyppolite (1894–1948), *Lange blue (Blue Angel)*, ca. 1947. Oil on cardboard, 0.65 × 0.65 m. Musée d'Art Haïtien. Photograph: Mireille Vautier / Art Resource, NY.

individual's personality" (1992, 67). Comparisons to Western philosophy underscore his confusion:

The Vodou concept of the ti-bon-anj in heaven seems to correspond to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the soul, for Vodouisants believe that it "appears" before Bondye to stand before the heavenly tribunal where it is arraigned for its misdeeds, and must suffer the appropriate penalties. (Desmangles 1992, 69)

Wade Davis also ascribes to the tibonanj attributes that most scholars use to define the gwobonanj: "the Ti bon ange [is] the individual, aura, the source of all personality and willpower" (1986, 185). Furthermore, Davis (1986, 182)

says that the *tibonanj* travels during sleep, while most scholars agree that it is the *gwobonanj* who does so (McCarthy Brown 2006, 9; Montilus 2006, 4).

In addition to the *gwobonanj*, the *tibonanj*, and the *mètèt*, there remain three components of the Vodou concept of personhood. The *nam* is the “spirit of the flesh that allows each cell to function” (Davis 1986, 185) or “the animating force of the body” (McCarthy Brown, 2006, 8). The *zetwal* is the “celestial parallel self, fate” (McCarthy Brown 2006, 9) and the “spiritual component that resides in the sky,” “the individual’s star of destiny” (Davis 1986, 185). The *kòkadav* is “the body itself, the flesh and blood” (Davis 1986, 185), “the dead body of a person,” and “a material substance separable from these various animating spiritual entities” (McCarthy Brown 2006, 9).

The phenomenon of trance possession needs to be explained through the multiplicity of the self in Vodou. The projection of Western philosophical concepts by certain schools of anthropology onto Vodou has been responsible for inaccurate understandings of trance possession: “Dans sa phase initiale, la transe se manifeste par des symptômes d’un caractère nettement psychopathologique. Elle reproduit dans ses grands traits le tableau clinique de l’attaque hystérique” (Métraux 1958, 120). “The symptoms of the opening phase of the trance are clearly pathological. They conform exactly in their main features, to the stock clinical conception of hysteria” (Métraux 1959, 107).

Nevertheless, it is important to note how other scholars from the Haitian national elite have questioned the uses of Western philosophy to understand Afro-diasporic trance possession:

Si le phénomène de la possession—la transe ou l’extase—chez les criseurs du Vaudou est une psycho-névrose, peut-on la classer dans la catégorie de l’hystérie selon l’une ou l’autre doctrine ci-dessus exposée? Nous ne le croyons pas. Les possédés de la loi ne sont pas de criseurs dont on peut provoquer l’attaque par suggestion et qu’on peut guérir par persuasion. (Mars 1928, 128)

Even if the phenomenon of possession—trance or ecstasy—among Vodou practitioners implies a psychological breakdown, can one classify it within the category of hysteria according to one or another doctrine here presented? We do not believe this to be a correct approach. Those possessed by *lwa* are not psychotics who can be induced into such a state by the power of suggestion or healed through persuasion.

However, even as Métraux inaccurately equates trance possession with the already questionable notion of hysteria, he does provide one of the clearest

definitions of this phenomenon during the 1950s, the early period of serious scholarly investigation of Vodou:

L'explication donnée par les sectateurs du vaudou à la transe mystique est des plus simples; un *loa* se loge dans la tête d'un individu après en avoir chassé le "gros bon ange," l'une des deux âmes que chacun porte en soi. C'est le brusque départ de l'âme qui cause les tressaillements et les soubresauts caractéristiques du début de la transe. Une fois le "bon ange" parti, le possédé éprouve le sentiment d'un vide total, comme s'il perdait connaissance. Sa tête tourne, ses jarrets tremblent. Il devient alors non seulement le réceptacle du dieu, mais son instrument. C'est la personnalité du dieu et non plus la sienne qui s'exprime dans son comportement et ses paroles. Ses jeux de physionomie, ses gestes et jusqu'au ton de sa voix reflètent le caractère et le tempérament de la divinité qui est descendue sur lui. (Métraux 1958, 106)

The explanation of mystic trance given by disciples of Voodoo is simple: a *loa* moves into the head of an individual having first driven out "the good big angel" (*gros bon ange*)—one of the two souls everyone carries in himself. This eviction of the soul is responsible for the tremblings and convulsions that characterize the opening stages of trance. Once the good angel has gone, the person possessed experiences a feeling of total emptiness as though he were fainting. His head whirls, the calves of his legs tremble; he now becomes not only the vessel but also the instrument of the god. From now on it is the god's personality and not his own which is expressed in his bearing and words. The play of these features, his gestures and even the tone of his voice all reflect the temperament and character of the god who has descended upon him. (Métraux 1959, 120)

Métraux's quote is helpful for us in that it allows us to locate the seat of selfhood in the corporeal head of the individual. In Haitian Kreyòl, *tèt* has an interesting double meaning. It is a noun referring to the anatomical head and, in its function as a reflexive prefix attached to personal pronouns, it also means "self." This synecdoche becomes important, as it establishes the head as a referent for selfhood, in a part-for-whole metaphor. It also presents the head as the physical location for the multiple parts of the self. Writing in the interstices between African and European philosophies, Métraux describes trance possession using an ambiguous language implying penetration and

hovering. This vacillation between metaphors for possession continues in the following quote:

Le rapport qui existe entre le *loa* et l'homme dont il s'est emparé est comparé à celui qui unit un cavalier à sa monture. C'est pourquoi on dit du premier qu'il "monte" ou "selle" son *choual* (cheval). . . . Elle est aussi un envahissement du corps par un être surnaturel qui s'en approprie; d'où l'expression courante: "le *loa* saisit son cheval." (Métraux 1958, 106)

The relationship between the *loa* and the man it has seized is compared to that which joins a rider to his horse. That is why a *loa* is spoken of as mounting or saddling his *chual* (horse). . . . It is also an invasion of the body by a supernatural spirit; hence the often-used expression: "the *loa* is seizing his horse." (Métraux 1959, 120)

Métraux's use of in/out metaphors for the phenomenon of possession is a Western importation. The rider metaphor popularized by early scholars of Vodou like Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Deren, and Katherine Dunham—whose works are discussed in chapter 1—articulates the symbolic language used by the initiates themselves.

Afro-diasporic religions operate under a transcorporeal conceptualization of the self that is radically different from the Western philosophical tradition. Unlike the unitary soul of Descartes, the immaterial aspect of the Afro-diasporic self is multiple, external, and removable. These various subjectivities rest upon a concave corporeal surface reminiscent of a saddle or an open calabash.

Unlike the Western idea of the body as the enclosure of the soul, the *kòkadav* is an open vessel that finds metaphoric and aesthetic expression in the *kwi*, *govi*, and *kanari* containers of Haitian Vodou. As Thompson explains, one of the most arresting sights for a newcomer into an Afro-diasporic religious setting is the collection and assortment of ritual containers:

The close gathering of numerous bottles and containers, on various tiers, is a strong organizing principle in the world of vodun altars. That unifying concept, binding Haitian Rada altars to Dahomean altars in West Africa, precisely entails a constant elevation of a profusion of pottery upon a dais, an emphasis on simultaneous assuagement (the liquid in vessels) and exaltation (the ascending structure of the tiers). (1983, 182)

In fact, some of the most striking art objects of the African diaspora are anthropomorphic receptacles, as noted by Falgayrettes-Leveau, in her exhibition

catalogue *Réceptacles*: “Les Kuba et les peuples apparentés du Zaïre ont privilégié de façon presque systématique, mais avec raffinement, la représentation de la tête dans la conception des plus beaux de leurs réceptacles: les coupes à boire le vin de palme” (1997, 32; The Kuba and their kin in Zaire have privileged in an almost codified, yet refined, manner the representation of the head in crafting the most beautiful of their receptacles: the cups for drinking palm wine). These cephalomorphic receptacles emblemize the function of the head—and through synecdoche, the body—as an open container. This association of the head with such ritual containers is evident in the use of a specific receptacle called *pòtet*, literally “container heads”:

This part of the initiation also involves the preparation of the *pòtets*, as containers for the new selves, repositories for ingredients symbolic of the new union of spirit and human being: hair, sacrificial food, herbs, and oils. When the initiates join the community for their presentation as *ounsis*, they walk with these pots balanced on their heads and place them in the altar, as symbol of their entering the community as initiated *ounsi*. (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2003, 118–19)

Wade Davis explains how the separation of the corporeal and immaterial aspects of the self involving such containers effects the phenomenon of zombification:

The spirit *zombi*, or the *zombi* of the *ti bon ange* alone, is carefully stored in a jar and may later be magically transmuted into insects, animals, or humans in order to accomplish the particular work of the *bokòr*. The remaining spiritual components of man, the *n'âme*, the *gros bon ange*, and the *z'étoile*, together form the *zombi cadaver*, the *zombi* of the flesh. (1986, 186)

This very detached description of the process of zombification is consistent with Davis's (1988, 7) clinical view of zombification as purely the result of neurotoxin poisoning. Davis views the *tibonanj* as the principal soul and the seat of individuality. However, this view is incongruent with the work of other scholars, who believe that “the famous zombies are people whose *Gros-bon-ange* has been captured by some evil *hungan*, thus becoming living-dead” (Métraux 1946, 87). Moreover, apart from zombification, there are various forms of spiritual embottlement, all of which involve the capturing of the *gwobonanj*, not the *tibonanj*. For instance, when the individual willingly decides to bottle up part of himself, it is the *gwobonanj*:

A certain amount of immunity against witchcraft may be obtained by requesting an hungan to extract the Gros-bon-ange from the body and to enclose it in a bottle. The soul, removed from its bodily envelope, may either be hidden or buried in a garden or entrusted to the hungan for safekeeping. (Métraux 1946, 86)

While this procedure protects the gwobonanj, it does not prevent bodily damage to the material body from which it proceeds. This creates a potentially dangerous scenario in which people who have sustained severe bodily injury—through either spells or accidents—will beg to have their gwobonanj liberated from the bottle, in order to end their corporeal suffering through death.

The gwobonanj must be ritually removed from the person's head shortly after death through the ceremony of *desounnen*, in which

the Oungan calls the spirit, or in some cases the name of the dead, then removes the lwa and puts it in a pitcher or bottle, called a *govi*. In death, the link between the spirit and its human vessel must be broken, so that the individual's spirit can move beyond death, and beyond revenge, joining the ancestors under the waters in the mythical place called *Ginen* (Guinea). (Dayan 1995, 261)

Then, a year and a day after death, the gwobonanj is called up from the water in a ceremony referred to as *relemònanldo* (calling the dead from the water) and installed in a *govi* clay pot (McCarthy Brown 2006, 8).

Davis is correct in his assessment of zombification as constituting the embottlement of one part of the self. However, he is mistaken in saying that this part is the tibonanj, since this and other types of spiritual embottlements involve the containment of the gwobonanj. Beyond noticing these important discrepancies, what is important for us here is to consider how regardless of what aspect of the self is bottled, according to all of these authors, any type of hermetic enclosing of the self is seen as potentially dangerous or associated with death. The fact that one of the most dreaded Afro-diasporic states of being should be so similar to the Cartesian view of the hermetically sealed soul points to the contestatory and critical relationship between these two philosophical traditions. Curiously, the zombified body of Haitian Vodou bears striking similarities to the body without organs that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate in *Lanti-Oedipe*:

Instinct de mort, tel est son nom. Car le désir désire aussi cela, la mort, parce que le corps plein de la mort est son moteur immobile, parce que les organes de la vie sont la *working machine* . . .



FIG. 1.3. The container substitutes for the body of the deceased in the process of zombification. Hector Hyppolite, *Vol de zombis*, 1946–48. 66 × 81 cm. Musée d'Art Haïtien.

Le corps sans organes n'est pas le témoin d'un néant originel, pas plus que le reste d'une totalité perdue. Il n'est surtout pas une projection; rien à voir avec le corps propre, ou avec un image du corps. C'est le corps sans image. Lui, l'improductif . . . le corps sans organes est de l'anti-production. (1972, 15)

Death instinct, that is its name. Because desire *also* desires that, death, because the body full of death is its immobile motor, because the organs of life are the *working machine* . . .

The body without organs is not the witness of an original nothingness, no more than the remains of a lost totality. It is not a projection; it has nothing to do with the body itself or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image. The unproductive itself . . . the body without organs is antiproduction.

In this sense, both the Western and African view of personhood can be seen as coinciding. By presenting the most abject state of being as that of the individual that is deprived of its constitutive elements—organs, gwobonanj—

both traditions present an image of the exploited, enslaved, unremunerated, and incomplete worker. Descartes's body as clockwork and Vodou's *kòkadav* are more similar than previously thought.

Unlike the Western idea of a unitary self that is fixed within the body, the African diasporic philosophical-religious tradition conceives of the body as a concavity upholding a self that is removable, external, and multiple. Allowing for a wider range of subjectivities than the more rigid Western model, the modular African diasporic discourse of personhood becomes a vehicle for the articulation of noncompliant identities that are usually constrained by normative heteropatriarchy.

### Science and the Location of Consciousness

Recent scientific experiments in the area of perception and cognition present further evidence that the relationship between the self and the body is not a universal given, but imagined and constructed. Out-of-body experiments conducted by two research groups using slightly different methods expanded upon the so-called rubber hand illusion. In that illusion, people hide one hand in their lap and look at a rubber hand set on a table in front of them. As a researcher strokes the real hand and the rubber hand at the same time with a stick, people have the sensation that the rubber hand is their own. When a hammer hits the rubber hand, the subjects recoil or cringe. Various versions of this experiment have been repeated through the use of whole-body illusions created through virtual reality technology (Ehrsson 2007, 1048). The subjects wore goggles connected to two video cameras placed six feet behind them and, as a result, saw their own backs from the perspective of a virtual person located behind them. When the researcher stroked the subject's chest and moved the second stick under the camera lenses simultaneously, the subjects reported the sense of being outside of their own bodies, looking at themselves from a distance where the cameras were located. The scientists infer from these experiments that they now understand how the brain combines visual and tactile information to compute and determine where the self is located in space. These experiments are relevant to us in that they help us to understand that the location of the self vis-à-vis the body is culturally constructed through the senses. The body and its self need not be coterminous. The self need not reside inside the body, but may be imagined or placed externally. In different ways, current scientific discourse coincides with Afro-diasporic philosophy in its exposure of subjective inwardness as an illusion.

## The Oyèwùmí/Matory Debate

A notable genealogical trajectory for my project can trace its roots to the debate between Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí and J. Lorand Matory, which took place at the 1999 Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture Conference at Florida International University in Miami. This debate—outlined in Matory's (2005a, 2005b) *Black Atlantic Religion* and *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, Oyèwùmí's (1997) *The Invention of Women*, and Olupona and Rey's (2008) *Òrìṣà Devotion as World Religion*—concerns the cross-cultural applicability of the concept of gender and the politics of positionality in cultural criticism.

The debate has inspired multiple public lectures, a large number of scholarly articles, the founding of an online journal, one edited volume, hundreds of citations, and to date at least one book devoted exclusively to the topic (Matory 2008, 516). While it would be beyond the scope of this present study to delve at length into all the complexities of this interaction and into the abundant scholarship it has generated, it might be in order for us to revisit some of the main points of contention in order to provide inroads for readers wishing to become more fully acquainted with its details on their own.

Nostalgically alluding to a mythical African past and defying established feminist criticism, Oyèwùmí introduces the controversial idea that the category of woman did not exist in pre-colonial Africa. Oyèwùmí's argument is built on the premise that semantic analysis of kinship terms in Yorùbá reveals that seniority, not gender, was the definitive societal form of subjective categorization. Matory contradicts her hypothesis by providing alternative interpretations of Yorùbá lexical items and by exposing a current practice of transvestism in Yorùbá religions, going back to pre-colonial times in Africa. The ability to don the garments of another gender, as the femininely clad male priests of Ṣàngó have done in Nigeria for centuries, points to the social reality of gender. One cannot transgress a nonexistent boundary. While Oyèwùmí sees gender in contemporary Yorùbá society as a European colonial importation, Matory, on the other hand, understands gender as a long-standing reality of Yorùbá social life. Sacramental cross-dressing, far from evidencing the nonexistence of gender, for Matory implies clear categories that can under certain limited situations be transposed. Firmly staking her ground, Oyèwùmí takes issue with Matory's presentation of transvestism in Yorùbá religious life. Her genderless model would simply explain the female-clad and -coiffed male priests of Ṣàngó not as men who dress as women, but as wives of the orisha.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of the debate cannot be understood without some attention to the matter of authorial reflexivity. Oyěwùmí deploys her status as Yorùbá royalty for authenticity purposes (1997, xvi), and Matory, an African American, exposes the blind spots that class privilege can bestow upon such a “princess” (2008, 515). As much of the debate pivots around the correct English translations of key Yorùbá language terms, who has the ultimate right to linguistic—and cultural—interpretation among Afro-diasporic scholars over African languages’ terminology is at stake. This became clearly visible in Oyěwùmí’s choleric remarks when Matory corrected a missed Yorùbá plural marker in her spontaneous translation of another scholar’s address (2008, 544). Undergirding the entire debate is the tacit fact that an African woman’s definition of the category of “woman” is being challenged by a black man, confounding the gist of the debate with the specter of patriarchy and intra-ethnic gendered antagonisms. Matory notes that Oyěwùmí avoids all direct quotation of his work (2008, 526), and that instead of citing his book, she chooses to cite his relatively unavailable 1991 dissertation (515). There is no essay of Oyěwùmí’s in the Olupona and Rey (2008) volume, and that her argument is recapitulated by another female scholar, Rita Laura Segato, only adds to the controversy over who has the right to speak for whom and in what manner. The fact that Oyěwùmí’s book was the winner of the American Sociological Association Sex and Gender Section’s 1998 Distinguished Book Award would have lent her argument something of a protective shield until the politics of representation again reared its head when it became known that not a single Africanist was among the panel of judges. Redressing this omission, the 2008 African Studies Association conference hosted a panel of Africanist scholars to discuss the work through the lenses of this regional specialist expertise.

Both scholars agree on the notion that the Yorùbá conception of gender defies the binary constraints of Western Cartesian representations of the body. This common platform may very well serve as the point of departure for a continued investigation into what has been one of the most polemic issues in Yorùbá religious studies for the past two decades: that is, the question of how Yorùbá culture constructs the body and how this construction might produce gender categories that surpass the constraints of Western modes of being. Neither Matory’s nor Oyěwùmí’s project asks where the body is in relation to the spirit/essence/anima, nor do they engage with the theories and testimonies surrounding spiritual embodiment, especially as they configure queer subjects. I surmise that the elucidation of the body/self relationship I present here can reorient the deliberation on gender they

inaugurated in this new direction for the current and upcoming generation of scholars of black Atlantic religions.

Calling on the intellectual virtues of the orisha and lwa of wisdom, Oxalá-Dambala-Obatalá, it pleases me to present *Queering Black Atlantic Religions* as an offering to advance the terrestrial conversation about the divine in the black Atlantic on the twentieth anniversary of the 1999 conference in which the Matory-Oyèwùmí debate first emerged. Upon learning these introductory family secrets, you have firmly and irreversibly traversed the threshold. You may now confidently enter the igbodu, the Yorùbá “womb of the forest,” a place where your psyche and body will be prepared for your new sacramental function as the “ìyáwó,” the bride of the Spirit. As you turn the leaf onto this new chapter of your existence and settle into the silence of your cloister, await there the revelation of the hallowed technology allowing you to bear this matrimonial title, irrespective of your sexual anatomy and gender expression.

DUKE

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. Igboḍu, without the accent, is the Yorùbá spelling for the initiation chamber.

2. *Orisha* is the English spelling of Yorùbá *òrìṣà* and analogous to Spanish *oricha* and Portuguese *orixá*. Because many practitioners of Candomblé and Santería see Brazil and Cuba, respectively, as the sources of their religions, I have sought to retain the spellings in the language of use by the various communities in which I conducted field research. For example, some practitioners might not consider Nigerian Ọṣun, Cuban Ochún or Oshún, and Brazilian Oxúm as the same divinity and would even question whether the idea of the orisha is identical across the black Atlantic.

3. The liberatory potential that black Atlantic religions provide for the performance of queer subjectivities need not force us to conclude they are spaces devoid of troubling hierarchies and exclusions. Sobering reminders preventing us from a descent into a romantic primitivism on these religions are the traditional proscriptions against women in the Ifá priesthood, ceremonial prohibitions of premenopausal women slaughtering four-legged animals, and the antagonism that certain hypermasculine divinities can bear toward trans-identified devotees. Interestingly, it is precisely through the interstices of these gendered interdictions that queer men are able to carve a niche for themselves, as they are free of the interdictions against women and can also carry out the paradigmatic feminine sacramental role of being mounted by the gods. For a more extended study of the exclusions that persist in Lucumí communities for queer people and women, see Pérez 2016, particularly chapter 4, “Gendering the Kitchen” (111–40).

4. Transcorporeality is clearly within the literature on the embodied religious perception and behavior currently discussed within the field of religious studies. Over the last decade, there has been increasing attention to the human body not as a historical or biological artifact, but as a multisensory interface between spiritual and physical realms that is continually reconfigured through ritual practice. Some call this “body pedagogics” (Csordas 1990; Mellor and Schilling 2010) or “sensuous ethnography”

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(Stoller 2004; van Ede 2009) and get insights from anthropology and neuroscience. There is also the introduction to a special issue on the body in *Religion and Theology* (2014), which reviews the literature in this emerging subfield within religious studies. Furthermore, the reader is directed to the special issue of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* (2007), volume 37, issue 3, which deals with the instability of categories or units of analysis and the problematics of definition when theorizing about black Atlantic religions.

5. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Special gratitude to Eric Anton Heuser for his help in decoding the most complex German passages of Hubert Fichte.

6. An alternative view accounting for these differences might lie in the non-canonical and diffused structure of Vodou, which allows some degree of latitude for varying interpretations and localized versions of rituals.

7. While Matory's discussion of transvestism does not entail a disruption, inversion, or ironizing of gender categories, his provocative comments prompt some of my own observations on the carnivalesque, diffused throughout this book, in which I contend that the temporary exchange or assumption of identities that takes place during Carnival is quite different from the all-pervasive effects on subjectivity that trance possession implies for initiates. While a devotee might go into trance for an orisha or lwa for twenty minutes at a ceremony once a week, the personality of this deity informs his routine life, predicting employment, marital circumstances, and overall personality. This life-transforming quality of trance possession is markedly different from the fixed and limited experience of Carnival, which is all over on Ash Wednesday. In this sense, carnivalesque cross-dressing functions as the secular counterpart of sacred transcorporeality. While the carnivalesque merely provides an escape valve and therefore strengthens normative categories, cross-gender possessions and mystic marriages allow for a thorough resubjectification of the individual.

#### CHAPTER 1. OF DREAMS AND NIGHT MARES

1. For earlier developments of the idea of transcorporeality in Vodou, I would like to direct the reader to two previous articles of mine on the subject: "The Afro-Diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality" and "Transcorporeality in Vodou" (Strongman 2008a, 2008b).

2. Edouard Glissant presents this Carnival tradition as one of the few secular places in which West Indian society is able to critique patriarchal heteronormativity:

Il est une occasion en Martinique où hommes et femmes se rencontrent d'accord pour donner une semblable représentation de leurs rapports: c'est dans la coutume des mariages burlesques du Carnaval, critique de la structure familiale. L'homme y tient le rôle de l'épouse (le plus souvent enceinte) et la femme celui de l'époux; un adulte y tient le rôle d'un enfant au berceau. . . .

Il n'est pas surprenant que le mariage burlesque soit une des rares formes encore vivaces de ce grand questionnement populaire et collectif qu'était et que ne peut plus être le carnaval martiniquais. (1981, 299)

There is an occasion in Martinique in which men and women meet in order to give a symbolic representation of their relationship. This is the tradition of the burlesque marriage during Carnival, a critique of family structure. The man has the role of the wife (often pregnant) and the woman that of the husband; an adult has the role of an infant in a crib. It is not surprising that the burlesque marriage is one of the rare forms still alive of that great popular and collective questioning that can be none other than the Martinican Carnival.

Glissant's Martinican context prevents him from considering Haitian Vodou as yet another site in which West Indian societies are able to question the dictates of gender and sexual norms. However, this Martinican perspective enables us to consider the ways in which this transcorporeality extends beyond the religious and permeates the entire structure of West Indian society, even of those that have been greatly Europeanized as a result of departmentalization.

3. For an alternative view that ridership involves an egalitarian, symmetrical double mounting, please see Jaqui Alexander's (2006, 324) *Pedagogies of Crossing*.

## CHAPTER 2. HECTOR HYPPOLITE ÈL MÈME

1. In his lecture "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso," Alejo Carpentier argues that unlike European surrealism's dependence on contrived technologies to render the fantastic visible, the Latin American marvelous real expresses the always already interwoven threads of the magical and the factual in the quotidian and everyday. In his own words: "Lo real maravilloso, en cambio, que yo defiendo, y es lo real maravilloso nuestro, es el que encontramos al estado bruto, latente, omnipresente en todo lo latinoamericano. Aquí lo insólito es cotidiano, siempre fue cotidiano" (1981, 127; On the other hand, the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace). "En cuanto a lo real maravilloso, sólo tenemos que alargar nuestras manos para alcanzarlo. Nuestra historia contemporánea nos presenta cada día insólitos acontecimientos" (1981, 132; As far as the marvelous real is concerned, we have only to reach out our hands to grasp it. Our contemporary history presents us with strange occurrences every day).

2. Unclear third-person pronoun.

3. The elusive painting *Erzulie auf einem Delphin* was last exhibited in 2010 at Ramapo College Gallery and can be viewed by typing its title in Google images. It was owned by film director Jonathan Demme (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 1991) until the 2014 auction of his extensive Hyppolite collection.

4. "Kounbit" is a Caribbean work party in which bonds of reciprocal aid cement social bonds.

### CHAPTER 3. A CHRONOLOGY OF QUEER LUCUMÍ SCHOLARSHIP

1. The spelling of this deity's name in this book does not seek to recast it in an Anglophone or "re-Africanizing" manner. The Yorùbá divinity Ọ̀ṣun is revered by the name of Ochún or Oshún in Cuba. As Caribbean Spanish retained the "sh" fricative phoneme from Yorùbá in intervocalic position among the ethno-educational social classes that compose the vast majority of Santeros, I have opted for *Oshún*, the spelling that most closely represents the most common variation of its pronunciation. A similar argument can be made for the Spanish spelling of *orisha* instead of *oricha* and *Regla de Osha* instead of *Ocha*. Notice that the retention of this phoneme only takes place intervocalically. In word initial position, Spanish phonological fortition applies and turns the fricative "sh" into affricate "ch." In Cuba, *Changó* is never pronounced as *Shangó*, as it is in the Bight of Benin and Brazil.

2. Ori-eleda is the master of the head. It is the orisha who governs the destiny of an individual person.

3. This is a patakí, a Yorùbá oral narrative, that is widely known in Ifá circles. Fernández Robaina retells it as it is given to him by babalao Agustín Martínez. For further information on this important patakí, Fernández Robaina (1994, 43–45) directs us to his earlier work, *Hablen Santeros y Paleros*; Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui's (1993, 103–66) *Opolopo Owo*; and Heriberto Feraudy Espino's (1993) *Yoruba: Un acercamiento a las raíces*.

### CHAPTER 4. LUCUMÍ DIASPORIC ETHNOGRAPHY

1. The *blanquiamento* (whitening) of Lam parallels that of Mário de Andrade and Machado de Assis discussed in chapter 6.

### CHAPTER 5. QUEER CANDOMBLÉ SCHOLARSHIP

1. In contrast to Matory's fleeting presentation of same-sex desire in Yorùbá religions in Nigeria and Brazil, note Oyèwùmí's outright dismissal: "Homosexuality does not seem to have been an option [for African bachelors and husbands with pregnant wives]" (1997, 63), and any presentation of "homosexuality into Yorùbá discourse is nothing but the imposition of yet another foreign model" (117). This can be read as a reinscription of the problematic myth of the nonexistence of homosexuality in sub-Saharan Africa as prescribed by Sir Francis Burton in his treatise on the Sotadic Zone.

2. The film director may not have known that at the time the title of babalaô was not conferred on women. The role was not available to women as Iyaláwo or Iyánífa until the 1990s. Here, the regendering of the character also likely involves a hierarchical reclassification from babalaô to *mãe-de-santo* or *filha-de-santo*.

1. I have obscured my informants' names in this chapter in order to maintain their anonymity.

2. One more interesting instance of the whitening of black Brazilian literary figures involves the recent representation of Machado de Assis. The idea that money whitens on the bill displaying Mário de Andrade is echoed in a controversial 2011 Caixa Econômica Federal television commercial in which a white actor portrays Machado de Assis. (A clip of this commercial and its "corrected" version can be accessed via this link: Guilherme Howes, "Comercial caixa machado de assis," YouTube, July 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OboocxKLfRk>.) The co-optation of two national writers and the erasure of their African ancestry by two distinct financial institutions speaks to the degree to which blackness and citizenship are incongruous among elite circles in Brazil and the way in which economic ascendancy redeems an ancestry historically dishonored. For more information on the origins of racial whitening in Latin America, I would like to direct the reader to my article "On the Non-equivalence of Black and Negro" (Strongman 2015).

3. For an extended analysis of the relationship between Candomblé and Umbanda, see Lindsey Hale's (2009) *Hearing the Mermaid's Song*. In a schematic way, however, let it be said that Candomblé venerates African deities while Umbanda, in a more eclectic manner, acknowledges these African deities plus Amerindian spirits and those of old slaves, infants, and other ethnic and professional archetypes.

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