



RELIGIONS

African diasporic religions

Development of new inter-religious tools

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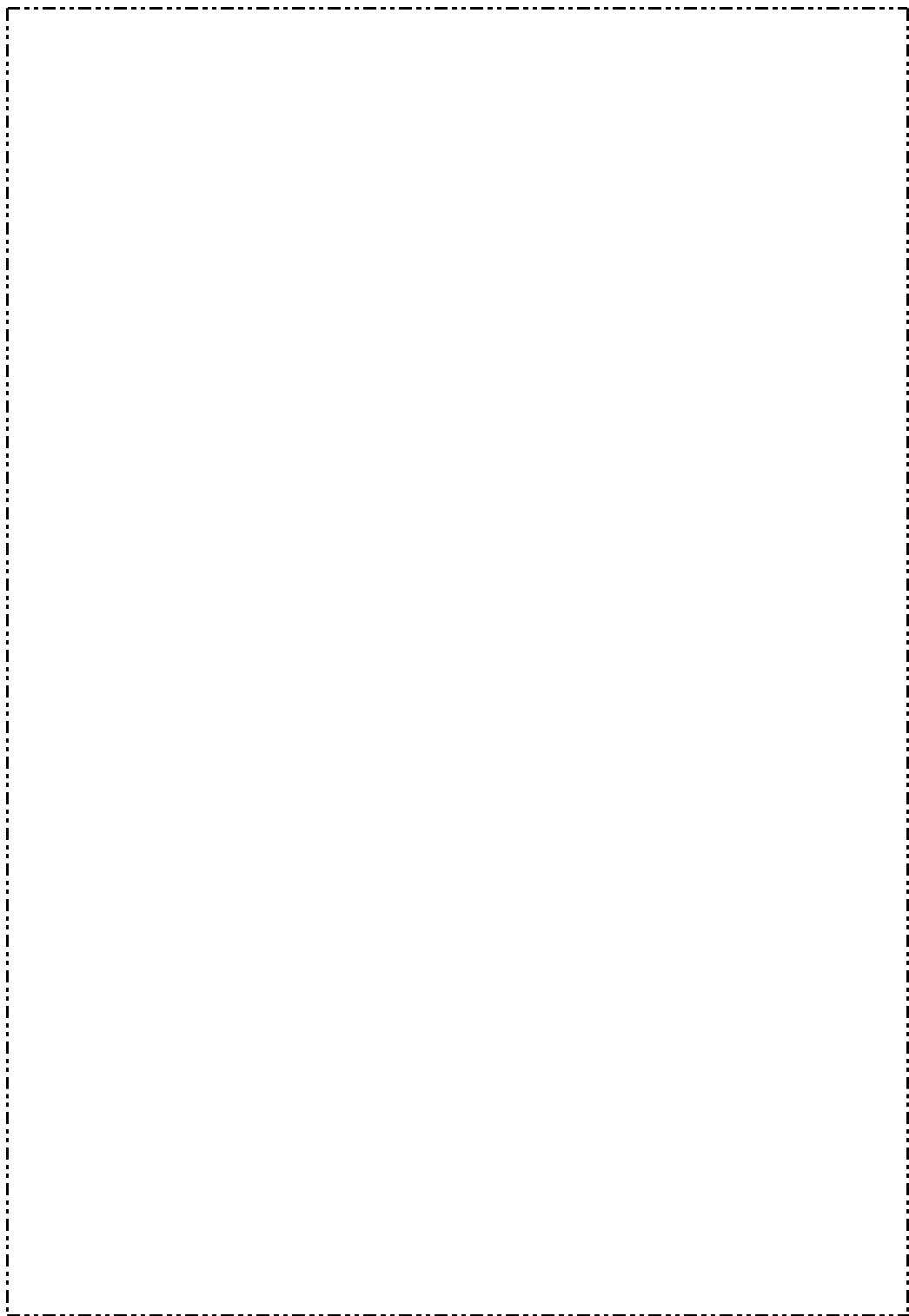


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AFRICAN DIASPORIC RELIGIONS

African diasporic religions are a number of related religions that developed in the Americas among African slaves and their descendants in various countries of the Caribbean Islands and Latin America, as well as parts of the southern United States. They derive from African traditional religions, especially of West and Central Africa, showing similarities to the Yoruba religion in particular.

🔥 BATUQUE

Batuque is an African-inspired or Afro-Brazilian religion, practiced mainly in Brazil. The religion started in the city of Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul.

Batuque is characterized by its strong syncretism with the Catholic religion, with each orixa (god in the Batuque; there are 12 main orixas) having at least one corresponding Catholic saint.

Everyone in Batuque claims Catholic identity (through baptism), being Afro-Brazilian and Catholic at the same time. Although it was traditionally a Black religion, it is nowadays practiced by white people too and has expanded beyond Brazilian frontiers into the United States and Europe and Latin America, especially in Argentina and Uruguay. Batuque is associated with Umbanda and Quimbanda, other Afro-Brazilian religions commonly practiced together in the same terreiros in Porto Alegre and abroad.

Batuque is based on three main rituals: 1) possession by gods (orixas), 2) animal sacrifices, 3) divination (by cowries).

There are several degrees of commitment with Batuque practice. You can enter the terreiro as a simple customer by consulting individually the terreiro priest, come to public collective ceremonies where "spectators" consult gods embodied in initiates, or become initiated. By starting an initiating process, you become a member of the god family. Priests are called pai-de-santo ("godfather") or mae-de-santo ("godmother") and have their godchildren (filhos e filhas-de-santo), sisters and brothers, between them.

Batuque practices and beliefs often appeal particularly to the lower classes.

Members of Batuque refer to the supernatural beings that possess them as encantados. They include a variety of spirits of the dead as well as deities, but not Catholic saints. Saints are said to live in the sky, while the encantados live in encantarias deep in the forest; under rivers, lakes, and the sea; and even in underground cities directly beneath human cities.

🔥 CANDOMBLE

Candomblé is an African-Brazilian religion. It was born of a people who were taken from their homes in Africa and transplanted to Brazil during the slave trade.

Candomblé is a religion based on African beliefs which is particularly popular in Brazil. It is also practised in other countries, and has as many as two million followers.

It is particularly practised in Salvador da Bahia, in the north east of Brazil. Interestingly, many people from African countries visit Bahia in order to learn more about the faith of their ancestors.

For many followers it is not just a matter of religious belief but also of reclaiming the cultural and historical identity which slavery stripped them of.

There is also some movement to remove Catholic imagery from worship services, in an attempt to return the faith to its more fundamental origins.

The religion is a mixture of traditional Yoruba, Fon and Bantu beliefs which originated from different regions in Africa, and it has also incorporated some aspects of the Catholic

faith over time.

The name itself means 'dance in honour of the gods', and music and dance are important parts of Candomblé ceremonies.

DEITIES

Practitioners of Candomblé believe in one all powerful God called Oludumaré who is served by lesser deities. These deities are called orixas, voduns and inkices. (They can also be called voduns and inkices.)

Orixas are ancestors who have been deified. Orixas are a link between the spiritual world and the world of humans. Voduns and inkices are spirit gods, essentially the same as orixas.

Candomblé practitioners believe that every person has their own individual orixa which controls his or her destiny and acts as a protector. Each orixa represents a certain force in nature and is associated with certain foods, colours, animals and days of the week. A person's character or personality is strongly linked to their orixa.

Collectively, ancestor spirits are called 'Baba Egum' in Brazil. This is also known as 'Egungun' in other parts of South America.

During important ceremonies, priests and priestesses will masquerade as Baba Egum. Specially choreographed dances will be performed in order to become possessed of each ancestor spirit.

CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND BAD

There is no concept of good or bad in Candomblé. Each person is only required to fulfill his or her destiny to the fullest, regardless of what that is. Candomblé teaches that any evil you cause to people will return to you eventually.

The Baba Egum are important in regulating the moral code of Candomblécists. It is their responsibility to make sure that moral standards of the past are continued in the present. This is regulated during the worship ceremonies.

When a person becomes possessed of their ancestor spirit during the ceremony, they may act out scenes from the community to highlight both good and bad actions in a sort of public tribunal.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

Candomblé is an oral tradition and therefore has no holy scriptures.

PLACE OF WORSHIP

Worship services used to be held in the homes of the enslaved.

There is an important distinction between sacred and profane places for Candomblécists.

In profane places, ordinary everyday life occurs; work, play, relaxation and eating.

Sacred places are called terreiro or temples. They are buildings with indoor and outdoor spaces, and special areas for the gods. Worshippers wear clean clothes and splash water on themselves before they enter to rid themselves of the uncleanness of the world.

Followers go to terreiro for a number of reasons. Many go to have their fortunes told. To do this, a priest or priestess casts cowry shells and interprets the pattern in which they fall. Others go for months to immerse themselves in the spiritual and become possessed by their orixa.

Candomblé temples are led by priests and priestesses.

The first official temple was founded at the beginning of the 19th century in Salvador, Bahia in Brazil.

WOMAN IN CANDOMBLÉ

Women are very important in the Candomblé faith. Services are usually led by women,

called 'mothers of the holy one', and it is the women who are responsible for ensuring the training of future priestesses.

RITUALS

The Candomblé ritual has two parts: the first is the "preparation", attended only by priests and initiates, which may start a week in advance of a major ceremony. Second is the main event, a festive public "mass" and banquet that starts in the late evening and ends around midnight.

In the first part, initiates and aides wash and iron the costumes for the ceremony, and decorate the house with paper flags and festoons, in the colors favored by the Orixás that are to be honored on that occasion. They also prepare food for the banquet. Some domestic animals are slaughtered; some parts reserved for sacrifice, the rest is prepared for the banquet. On the day of the ceremony, starting in the early morning, cowrie-shell divinations (jogo de búzios) are performed, and sacrifices are offered to the desired Orixás, and to the messenger spirit (Exú in Ketu).

In the public part of the ceremony, "saint-children" invoke and "incorporate" Orixás, falling into a trance-like state. After falling into trance (the trance is entered by women in the group) the priest-spirits perform dances symbolic of the Orixá's attributes, while the babalorixá or father of saint (leading male priest) leads songs that celebrate the spirit's deeds. The ceremony ends with a banquet.

DANCE DURING WORSHIP

Music and dance are important parts of Candomblé ceremonies. Specially choreographed dances are performed by worshippers to enable them to become possessed by the orixas.

Worship takes the form of specially choreographed dances and hymns. The dance is a call to the spirits. At its height, the worshipper's orixa temporarily possesses the dancer's body and he or she enters into a trance like state and dances alone. Finally the gods are expelled. This is done by singing the hymns again, but in reverse order starting with the last hymn.

The enslaved Africans practised a form of martial art within the dances, seamlessly moving from attacking positions to defensive ones, learning to quickly gauge how to react to their opponent. This dance is called capoeira and has become increasingly popular in the West as an art form.

DRESS

On Fridays, the believers wear white in honor of Oxala, the god of creation. The women's dresses are like frothy meringues, stuffed to their fullest with crinolines and crossed with colorful beads, belts and headdresses. It's a sacred festival day, a day of purification.

Generally, there is no religious dress that is worn on a daily basis, although special outfits may accompany rituals. Candomblé devotees may wear distinctive bead necklaces and bracelets (including ankle bracelets), which act as both a distinctive badge of membership and spiritual protection.

DIET

Candomble does not have dietary rules about what can and can not be eaten; nevertheless, food is a very important part of religious practice. Some individuals may adopt dietary restrictions through practices of divination.

FASTING

Candomble does not have fasting practices.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Unlike most religions in Brazil, homosexuality is openly accepted by Candomblé, being

openly discussed by its members.

ABORTION

Condomble religion shares the Christian positioning of being against abortion as the birth of a child is considered to be holly.

🔥 DAHOMEY MYTOLOGY

The Dahomean religion was practiced by the Fon people of the Dahomey Kingdom. The kingdom existed until 1898 in what is now the country of Benin. Slaves taken from Dahomey to the Caribbean used elements of the religion to form Vodou and other religions of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.

The Dahomey kingdom had an all-female military units known as the Dahamoney Amazons Practiced elaborate religious practices of Voodoo.

The Kingdom of Dahomey shared many religious rituals with surrounding populations; however, it also developed unique ceremonies, beliefs, and religious stories for the kingdom. These included royal ancestor worship and the specific vodun practices of the kingdom.

Dahomey had a unique form of West African Vodun that linked together preexisting animist traditions with vodun practices. Oral history recounted that Hwanjile, a wife of Agaja and mother of Tegbessou brought Vodun to the kingdom and ensured its spread. The primary deity is the combined Mawu-Lisa (Mawu having female characteristics and Lisa having male characteristics) and it is claimed that this god took over the world that was created by their mother Nana-Buluku. Mawu-Lisa governs the sky and is the highest pantheon of gods, but other gods exist in the earth and in thunder. Religious practice organized different priesthoods and shrines for each different god and each different pantheon (sky, earth or thunder). Women made up a significant amount of the priest class and the chief priest was always a descendent of Dakodonou.

The centre of its religious and political system is a superstitious veneration for the person of their monarch, whom the natives regard as almost a divinity. It is even accounted criminal to believe that the king eats, drinks, and sleeps like ordinary mortals. It is needless to say that his orders are implicitly obeyed, however unreasonable or tyrannical they may be.

Fetish worship prevails here, as in all other parts of Western Africa, the leopard being their sacred animal. The public sacrifice to this animal consists of a bullock; but private sacrifices of fowls, and even goats, are common, and are offered with great ceremony. When a man dies his principal wives and some of his favorites are offered in sacrifice on his tomb. The priesthood is taken from the higher classes, even some of the royal wives and children being found in the sacred order. To reveal the sacred mysteries and incantations, the knowledge of which is limited to the priestly office, is visited with certain death.

Dahomey religion as a complex system consisting of a several gods, ancestral cults, personal spirits and magical powers. Relations among these powers are viewed as though hierarchical. Yet Dohomean did not worship to a universal God. Instead, each god was

historically associated as the God of a specific community and/or locality.

💧 HAITIAN MYTOLOGY

Haitian Vodou is a syncretic mixture of Roman Catholic rituals developed during the French colonial period, based on traditional African beliefs, with roots in Dahomey, Yoruba, and Kongo traditions, and folkloric influence from the indigenous Taino peoples of Haiti.

The Loa, or spirits with whom Vodouisants work and practice, are not gods but servants of the Supreme Creator Bondye (pronounced Bon Dieu).

In keeping with the French-Catholic influence of the faith, vodousaints are for the most part monotheists, believing that the Loa are great and powerful forces in the world with whom humans interact and vice versa, resulting in a symbiotic relationship intended to bring both humans and the Loa back to Bondye. "Vodou is a religious practice, a faith that points toward an intimate knowledge of God, and offers its practitioners a means to come into communion with the Divine, through an ever evolving paradigm of dance, song and prayers."

<https://prezi.com/wgwfhsghbic4g/haitian-mythology/>

💧 HUDU

Hoodoo tradition emphasizes personal magical power invoked by the use of certain tools, spells, formulas, methods, and techniques. It ascribes magical properties to herbs, roots, minerals, animal parts, and personal possessions. Some spells even make use of bodily effluvia and detritus (menstrual blood, semen, urine, spit, tears, nail clippings, hair...you get the picture).

Hoodoo spells are typically carried out with accompanying Biblical text, usually from The Book of Psalms, but they are generally not performed in Jesus's name.

The intention behind hoodoo practice is to allow people to harness supernatural forces in order to improve their daily lives.

💧 IFA

Ifá is a religion and system of divination and refers to the verses of the literary corpus known as the Odu Ifá.

Orunmila is identified as the Grand Priest, as he is who revealed divinity and prophecy to the world.

Babalawo's or Iyanifas use either the divining chain known as Opele, or the sacred palm or kola nuts called Ikin, on the wooden divination tray called Opon Ifá.

Ifá is practiced throughout the Americas, West Africa, and the Canary Islands, in the form of a complex religious system, and plays a critical role in the traditions of Santería, Candomblé, Palo, Umbanda, Vodou, and other Afro-American faiths, as well as in some traditional African religions.

Within Ifa, there are numerous ceremonies and rituals used for personal protection, improving one's health, achieving goals, preparing for pregnancy, obtaining wisdom and knowledge, removing negative spirit energy, becoming more productive, becoming married, etc.

Ifa may indeed be the oldest monotheistic religion in the world.

Ifa is balanced on three legs; Olodumare (Creator), Orisa (Nature Spirits), and the Ancestors.

The Supreme Being, Olodumare, is without gender and is not an active participant in the affairs of living humans. Olodumare is benevolent and has provided a Universe with all that is needed for humans to be fulfilled and happy.

Ifa is characterized by a deep sense of the interdependence of all life. "Every life form and element of Nature has an inner soul force – including rivers, rocks, clouds, metals, flowers, thunder, and the wind. These natural energies that comprise the Universe are called Orisa ("oh – ree – sha"). Each Orisa has its own specific function.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ff3ZvmG1jc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9lGVF6jYN4>

🕯 KUMINA

Kumina is an African Jamaican religion and practices that include secular ceremonies, dance and music that developed from the beliefs and traditions brought to the island by BaKongo enslaved people and indentured labourers, from the Congo region of West Central Africa, during the post-emancipation era. Is mostly associated with the parish of St. Thomas in the east of the island. However, the practice spread to the parishes of Portland, St. Mary and St. Catherine, and the city of Kingston.

Organization of Kumina communities follows the general local character of African religions in Jamaica. Kumina communities are small family based communities or nations. Some nations include Mondongo, Moyenge, Machunde, Congo, Igbo, and Yoruba. People from Kumina families are given the title Bongo. Marrying into a Bongo family is one avenue to become a part of a Kumina nation; special initiation is the other avenue. Kumina nations are led by a "King" and "Queen".

Kumina is a belief system dedicated to ancestor commemoration. While the human has a spirit that returns at death to its creator, it also has a spirit, kuyu, that bridges the grave and the temporal world. This is the spirit with which the believer interacts as a medium and protégé. Within Kumina, no deities are called upon or worshiped, although a divine

creator is recognized, named Zaambi, Zaambi Ampungo, Kinzaambi, or anglicized as King Zaambi. This is the creator among many Congo subgroups of West Central Africa. His element is thunder.

Spirits are separated into sky bound and earth bound deities. Oto King Zombi is the Supreme Creator. Other sky bound spirits of Kumina are Obei and Shango. Earth bound spirits in Kumina are found in the Old Testament David, Ezekiel, Moses, Cain, and Shadrak. Ancestral spirits are also important in Kumina. The term used to refer to these ancestral spirits is Zombi, the term originates from the Kikongo word "dzambi". Only a person who has been possessed by a Zombi can become a Zombi after death. A Zombi had the privilege of returning to earth to preside over ceremonies and possess dancers and performing other duties. Unlike people who had been possessed by Zombies, those who had not been possessed would simply die and ascend to Oto King Zombi without chance of returning to earth.

Kumina ceremonies take the form of dancing in a counterclockwise circle around drummers seated on two drums: the bandu or kibandu, and the playin' kyas (cask). The single-headed drums are beaten with the palms, and tonal variation is achieved by imposing and releasing pressure on the drumhead with one heel. The bandu keeps a 2/2 hearthrob, while counter rhythms and rolls are slapped on the cask. Short repetitive songs by the dancers use either the Kongo language or Jamaican Creole English. As the dancing and drumming proceed, participants become possessed by spirits of the departed, persons who had in the near or distant past been community members. Possession behavior involves slumping to the ground, rigidity of features, body tremors or stiffness, and climbing up rafters or trees. Possession, called mayal, is interpreted as the return of ancestral spirits to enjoy the life experiences they once knew.

The Kumina ceremony is called a "duty," which translates the Kongo word kamama, "to feel obliged to keep a promise or perform a duty." This obligation can result from a dreamed request by an ancestor, or it acknowledges significant rites of passage for an individual either living or dead, such as anniversaries of birth or death, and the "tombing" of graves (their cementing over) a year or two after burial. "Duties" also mark communal anniversaries such as the turn of the year or Emancipation from slavery on August 1, 1838. Ceremonies can also petition help with physical and mental healing, legal matters, and the like. Upright posts in the shed ("bood," or booth) may be wound with ribbons in colors that signify the spiritual mood of the occasion. The head ties and clothes of the principal participants may also bear emblematic colors.

Kumina ceremonies typically start in the early night and last until near dawn. A major recess occurs around midnight when the "table" is "broken." This is a table bearing candles, bread, cakes, and fruits in a borrowing from the Afro-Christian religion Revival; it replicates a communion altar. A reading from the Bible may introduce the bread-breaking segment. The communal meal also includes meat of a goat that had been fed while being led around the circle before being beheaded publicly during the ceremony. Cooked salt-free meat and rice on banana leaves are sacralized by placement in front of the drums and then sited on the ground at the four corners of the premises as offerings to the ancestors. Early in the ceremony the ritual space of the "bood" is demarcated by the "king" or "queen" of the proceedings, who sprays rum libations from the mouth toward its four cardinal points.

Kumina's ritual language is an intercalation of Jamaican Creole English and Congo words and fossilized phrases.

🔹 MACUMBA

Before it was used for a single religion Macumba was originally used to categorize all religions who practiced or believed in animistic-syncretism during the 1800's. In the 1900's Macumba became a slang term among Brazilians who aren't affiliated with these religions. The religions that are referred to under the umbrella term Macumba are Candomblé, Giro, and Mesa Blanca.

Macumba is practiced in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

There appears to be a relationship with the concept of the Boto (the fresh-water porpoise found in the Amazonas River and its tributaries) having shape-shifting abilities and then while in the form of a human male having sexual relations with young women. This belief was noted in several Indigenous American villages along the Amazonas (Solimões) River, Rio Negro, and Rio Japurá.

African elements in Macumba rituals include an outdoor ceremonial site, the sacrifice of animals (such as cocks), spirit offerings (such as candles, cigars, and flowers), and ritual dances. Macumba rites are led by mediums, who fall prostrate in trances and communicate with holy spirits. Roman Catholic elements include use of the cross and the worship of saints, who are given African names such as Ogum (St. George), Xangô (St. Jerome), and Iemanjá (the Virgin Mary).

Macumba is widely practiced throughout the Southern Cone. Many practitioners continue to practice their traditional religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc.) but also practice Macumba, often in violation of the tenets of their official religious affiliations but which their social environment appears to quietly accept.

Out of all the religions grouped into Macumba only followers of Candomblé sacrifice animals during their rituals. Animals are also sacrificed during Consultas. In Candomblé blood is a very sacred and symbolic item and is used as often as possible. Blood to these followers represents life pure essence and a bond that unites them all together as family.

Giro on the other hand use palm tree oil (azeite de dendé) in their rituals, this is because using blood has formed a negative stigma around Candomblé as many people associate animal sacrifice with savagery and see it as backwards. This dependence on blood and animal sacrifice has led to a loss of converts and a stigma to form around Candomblé and its followers. Since dendé is a similar hue to blood it works well as a replacement in many rituals that would require it. This also allows followers of Giro to practice without fear of being stigmatized.

Mesa Blanca on the other hand believes that blood and dendé can bring evil and misfortune on those who dare to use it in rituals. Dendé for example is linked to aggressive spirits of slaves, as well as other evils that the group has shunned and removed from their practices. The movement away from these two mediums can be seen as a way to distance themselves from Afro-Brazilian religions and the Macumba itself.

Honey is also important to these religions as it represents the spirits of Native Indians, the use of honey can be for healing as well as reconciliation. Honey is an entirely different color than blood and Dendé so it is not associated with the evils of first two liquids.

Water is the final liquid and is the main symbol for most religions other than Candomblé (which is blood). Water can be used to gaze into during counseling as it is believed looking into water can help attain wisdom or information. Water symbolizes life as it has the ability to heal but it can also represent the ability to avoid death.

The hierarchy of many of these religions is family based and can be seen by the

addressing of leaders in Candomblé as "mother" and "father". Also many leaders of these religions are female as a mother figure is needed.

Macumba religion usually involves herbs and plants. Herbs are prepared by medical wizards (known as macumberos) and given to those who seek help of any kind, especially monetary, so it is advised to take baths. These herbs are used for 7 days. After this time is expected that the patient becomes richer. This practice is not limited only to the acquisition of wealth, also is frequently used to cause injury or bad luck to someone.

💧 MAMI WATA

Mami Wata is a deity venerated in West, Central, and Southern Africa, and in the African diaspora in the Americas. Mami Wata spirits are usually female, but are sometimes male.

As a special deity, Mami Wata appears as a beautiful creature, half woman, half fish, with long hair and a light brown complexion, and she lives in an exquisite underwater world. She is often depicted with a snake around her waist or across her shoulders or with a comb and mirror. The snake is the immortal messenger of deities and a symbol of divination, which is important to devotees and mamisii. The comb and mirror are symbols of her beauty or vanity. Mami Wata's colors are red and white, which reflect her dual nature as aggressive and yet healing and nurturing.

Followers of traditional African religions, Santeria, and Voodoo comprise Mami Wata's devotees. Her worship is therefore as diverse as her worshippers, though there are many parallels. Groups of people may gather in her name, but the goddess is much more prone to interacting with followers on a one-on-one basis. She thus has many priests and mediums in both Africa and the Caribbean who are specifically devoted to her.

Followers typically wear red and white clothing, as these colors represent the goddess's dual nature. The Mami Wata shrines may also be decorated in these colors, and items such as bells, carvings, Christian or Indian prints, dolls, incense, spirits, and remnants of previous sacrifices often adorn such places.

Frenzied dancing accompanied by musical instruments such as African guitars or harmonicas often forms the core of Mami Wata worship. Followers dance to the point of entering a trance. At this point, Mami Wata possesses the person and speaks to him or her. Offerings to the goddess are also important, and Mami Wata prefers gifts of delicious food and drink, alcohol, fragrant objects (such as pomade, incense, and soap), and expensive goods like jewellery. Modern worshippers usually leave her gifts of manufactured goods, such as Coca-Cola or designer jewellery.

💧 OBEAH

In the West Indies, Obeah is a system of sorcery and religious practices developed among

enslaved West Africans of Igbo origin. Obeah is similar to other Afro-American religions such as Palo, Haitian Vodou, Santería, and Hoodoo. Obeah is practiced in The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, The Virgin Islands, Caribbean nations and by the Igbo people of Nigeria.

Obeah includes both benign and malignant magic, charms, luck, and mysticism. In some cases, aspects of these folk religions have survived through syncretism with Christian symbolism and practice introduced by European colonials and slave owners.

There are no meeting places such as churches, mosques, synagogue or other religious buildings or shrines, or any underlying infrastructure replicating such a system.

There is no any sort of congregation or parishioners, although there are what may be called followers, albeit scattered.

Obeah is a focused application of "occult power" tapping the virulent source of God's own access employed without sanction to facilitate or induce spells, call up answers, predict the future, or garner assist or knowledge from planes other than the conventional and implemented through the individual skill, cunning, and artistry of the Obeah practitioner usually beyond the guidelines of traditional witchcraft, sorcery, shamanism, voodoo (voudon), or tribal magic."

Practitioners of Obeah, called Obeah-men or Obeah-women, learned a great deal about the plants of the region and used them for healing or for rebellious purposes. In the British islands, Obeah, and all similar practices, were outlawed. Witchcraft was important to all of the spiritual (but not religious) beliefs of the transported Africans, while some focused more on the good, or bad, aspects of their magical abilities as practitioners.

Obeah is practice of divination and assertion of mystical power, is the most common and popularly referenced African-derived practice in the Caribbean.

Obeahist are consulted for their clairvoyance and skills in healing and problem solving via herbalism and mystical power.

Obeah is not a religion per se with devotees but a component of classical African spirituality that become equally significant to enslaved African communities in the Caribbean.

Obeah specialist, both male and female, operate as solo practitioners, using diverse elements, state of matter, and paraphernalia to access the invisible world domain, including water, fire/candles, stones, jars, plants, and esoteric writings. Obeah is principally viewed as "evil magic" and feared by the average person until some treacherous personal circumstance compels an individual to forfeit her/his suspicion and seek counsel from the nearest well-known Obeahist.

Obeah owes its negative reputation to the missionaries, Protestant and Catholic, who, in establishing the authority of the Christian church, launched a vehement campaign against all vestiges of African religions in the Caribbean.

Obeah proved to be most troublesome and was ultimately employed as a generic label to signify and discredit all African religious traditions in the region.

The most common manifestation of Obeah found today, although maybe not practiced on an individual basis, is blended with Orisha-worship.

The two main fractions of Orisha in the new world are Spiritual Orisha and Baptist Orisha, both of which, on the surface, carry a very heavy Christian ring or appearance about them.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_z2gjMIEv4

🔥 PALO

Palo, also known as Las Reglas de Congo, is a religion with various denominations which developed in Cuba among Central African slaves and their descendants who originated in the Congo Basin. It is secondary to Lucumí, also known as Santería, among practitioners of African-derived religions in Cuba. Denominations often referred to as "branches" of Palo include Mayombe (or Mallombe), Monte, Briyumba (or Brillumba), and Kimbisa. The Spanish word palo "stick" was applied to the religion in Cuba due to the use of wooden sticks in the preparation of altars, which were also called la Nganga, el caldero, nkisi or la prenda. Priests of Palo are known as Paleros, Tatas (men), Yayas (women) or Nganguleros. Initiates are known as ngueyos or pino nuevo.

Palo has its roots in the Congo Basin of Central Africa, from where large numbers of Kongo slaves were brought to Cuba where the religion was organized. Palo's liturgical language is a mixture of the Spanish and Bantu languages, known as lengua, bozal or habla Congo.

The Palo belief system rests on two main pillars:

- The veneration of the spirits.
- The belief in natural/earth powers.

All natural objects, and particularly sticks, are thought to be infused with powers, often linked to the powers of spirits.

A certain number of spirits called Kimpungulu (singular: Mpungu) inhabit the Nkisi (sacred objects; also spelled Enkisi, Inquice, or Inquise). Kimpungulu are well known in name and deed, and are often venerated as spirits with anthropomorphic qualities. They are powerful entities, but they are ranked below the Supreme Creator Zambi or Nzambi, making Palo a henotheistic religion.

The main practice of Palo focuses upon the religious receptacle or altar known as "la Nganga", "el caldero", "nkisi" or "la prenda". This is a consecrated vessel which serves as a microcosm. Each Nganga is dedicated to a specific mpungu. Often, this religious vessel is also believed to be inhabited by a spirit of the dead (almost never the direct ancestor of the object's owner), also referred to as "Nfumbe", who acts as a guide for all religious activities which are performed with the Nganga.

Colors, clothing, and stylized dances associated with a particular deity, a common feature of Santería and other Yoruba religion, are not found in Palo.

Music in Palo practices begin with wooden percussion instruments followed by drums. Examples are the catá, guaguá, and the ngoma, or conga. The cowbell, hoe, and plow are used as metallic instruments.

Various divination methods are used in Palo. Chamalongos uses shells of various materials, often coconut shells. A more traditional method, Vititi Mensú, is a form of envisioning or scrying using a sanctified animal horn capped with a mirror.

Denominations are further broken down into temple homes known as munansós that are headed by an experienced elder priest or priestess. There is no central authority figure in Palo.

Religious syncretism can be seen in some houses of Palo, called Palo Cristiano, with the use of the cross and images of Catholic saints as representations of the Nikisi. However, in other houses, called Palo Judío, there is no syncretization with Catholic imagery. The name Palo Judío literally means "Jewish Polo", but the term "Jewish" as used here does not refer to Judaism; rather it is metaphorical shorthand for "refusing to convert to

Christianity", that is, in the case of Palo, "Purely Congo".

Many houses of Palo, a spiritual Misa is often held before the initiation, in order to identify the main spirit which will help to develop one's life. These guides often speak through possession, and may give direct advice.

Higher Gods: Nzabi – Lugambe – Kimpungulu – Nkuyu – Kengue – Kobayende – Mariguanda – Gurufinda – Kalunga – Chola - Wengue – Kimbabula – Watariamba – Nsasi - Sarabanda

💧 PALO MAYOMBE

Palo Mayombe is a solitary religion, practiced secretly, with no houses of worship and no way of counting worshippers.

Born of the ancient spirit worship of the Congo, it was brought first to Cuba through the slave trade, then later to the United States.

Members of Palo Mayombe use their forces of darkness to achieve their goals and magic spells.

Palo Mayombe has its own priesthood and set of rules and regulations. Rules and regulations will vary according to the Palo Mayombe house to which an individual has been initiated into.

The main worship and practice is being carried around the Nganga or Prenda, which is a consecrated cauldron filled (amongst other things...) with sacred earth, sticks (palos), and bones, and it is dedicated to a specific spiritual energy.

Palo Mayombe have no explicit, universal dietary restrictions, although some individuals may adopt dietary restrictions through practices of divination.

💧 QUIMBANDA

Quimbanda is an Afro-Brazilian religion practiced primarily in the urban city centers of Brazil.

Quimbanda practices are typically associated with magic, rituals with Exus, and Pombagiras spirits.

Quimbanda was originally contained under the religious tradition of Macumba.

Quimbanda does not worship deities, but exus.

Deities: Ogum, exus, pomba giras

A classic Quimbanda ritual, called a trabalho, consists of several parts: a motive, dedication to a spirit, a marginal location, the metal or clay (earthy) material, an alcoholic drink, scent, and food (usually a peppered flour-palm oil mixture, sometimes called miamiami).

Depending on the purpose of the ritual, aspects of the trabalho will change. For instance,

if one desires to seek justice from Exu they will use white candles, rum and a written request. Therefore, certain colors denote different motives in a ritual: white symbolizing an honest and justice-bound motive and red and black representing an aggressive and illicit motive. Other rituals substitute the harsh or spicy smell of cigars for the sweet smell of carnations, thus symbolizing the transformation between harming and helping rituals. Likewise, rituals involving female spirits (Pomba Giras) are less aggressive in their performance.

Particular elements of an Exu trabalho remain unchanged in the pomba gira trabalho and therefore mark pomba giras as the female counterparts of Exu: the colors, the location (male to female variation), the time of day, the day of the week, the scent (smoky), and the container for the food and the flour/palm oil mixture. In a pomba gira trabalho, another set of elements indicates a gentler coding: from rum to champagne or anisette, from the absence of flowers to red roses, from pepper in the flour/palm oil mixture to honey, and from a fierce initiatory act to a song, which seems to suit the purpose of the ritual: to obtain a woman.

Many Quimbanda rituals are performed at crossroads, as Exu is the Lord of the seven crossroads and Ogum is the Lord of the center of the crossroads. Other marginal locations include the streets at night (since exus are referred to as 'people of the streets'), cemeteries, beaches, and forests, all during the nighttime.

Not all Quimbanda practitioners use animal sacrifices, and their use is according to the level of the spirits. There is no animal sacrifice used for crowned Exus. In certain rituals with Kiumbas (aspiring to become Exus), devotees offer sacrificial pigeons, hens, roosters, goats, sheep, and bulls to help a spirit progress in power and capability. Other rituals use animal sacrifices to enlist the help of a spirit to carry out a deed. Adherents defend the practice because they believe that there is no worse animal sacrifice than in slaughterhouses, since those animals are believed to suffer more than at a proper Quimbanda ritual.

Quimbanda membership has risen since its reemergence in the 1970s, especially in urban areas of Southern Brazil. However, religions such as Quimbanda and Umbanda are a guilty pleasure that people generally are ashamed to indulge in.

Very few educated people are strong believers in Quimbanda, yet it remains popular and people from all social ranks take part in Quimbanda rituals occasionally.

It is not uncommon for a businessman to consult Exus before a major deal.

Athletes and gamblers are famous for calling upon Exus to take their side in a sporting event or betting venture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN98X-D4fGk>

💧 SANTERIA (LUKUMI)

Santería, also known as Regla de Ochá, La Regla de Ifá, or Lucumí, is an Afro-American religion of Caribbean origin that developed in the Spanish Empire among West African descendants. Santería is a Spanish word that means the "worship of saints".

Santería is influenced by and syncretized with Roman Catholicism.

Its sacred language, a variety of Yoruba, is the Lucumí language.

Who practice Santería?

While official figures are hard to find, it's commonly believed that between 75 and 100 million people in the world practice some form of Santería today. It's one of the fastest growing religions in urban areas of the United States, especially cities with large African American and Latino populations. In Cuba, statistics suggest that as much as 80% of the population has some connection to Santería. Globally, people of all races, socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels practice the Lucumi religion. It proudly holds on to its Afro-Cuban roots, but it's no longer limited to people with ethnic ties to Latin America and Africa.

The Orisha:

Santería includes the worship of the Orisha - literally "head guardians," and religious beliefs of the Yoruba and Bantu people in Southern Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea Coast. These are combined with elements of Roman Catholicism.

Arriving as slaves in the Caribbean, Santerians preserved the elements of their religion by equating each Orisha of their traditional religions with a corresponding Christian Saint. Many traditions within the religion recognize different equivalencies. One common example includes:

- Babalú Ayí became St. Lazarus (patron of the sick)
- Shango became St. Barbara (controls thunder, lightning, fire...)
- Elegguá or Elegba became St. Anthony (controls roads, gates etc)
- Obatalá became Our Lady of Las Mercedes, and the Resurrected Christ (father of creation; source of spirituality)
- Oggún became St. Peter (patron of war)
- Oshún became Our Lady of Charity (controls money, sensuality...)

Other Santerian beliefs:

Many Santerian beliefs are not freely discussed outside of the faith. In addition there are many religious leaders whose beliefs and practices differ significantly. The following is a general outline of what is known:

- Deities: God is referred to as Olorún, or Olódùmarè, the "owner of heaven". He is the supreme deity, the creator of the universe, and of the lesser guardians, called Orisha. Each of the latter has an associated Christian Saint, a principle, important number, color, food, dance posture and emblem. The Orishas need food in the form of animal sacrifice, and prepared dishes, as well as human praise in order to remain effective.
- Ritual Sacrifices: These form an integral part of many Santerian religious rituals. The animal's blood is collected and offered to the Orisha. Chickens are the most common animal used. Their sacrifice is believed to please the Saints, and to bring good luck, purification and forgiveness of sins.
- Possession: Rhythmic sounds and feverish dancing during Santerian rituals are believed to lead to possession of the individual by the particular Orisha being invoked. The individual then speaks and acts as the Orisha.
- Veneration of Ancestors: One's ancestors, called Ara Orun (People of Heaven) are referred to for moral guidance and example. Their names are recited at family ceremonies.

Santerian practices:

The following Santerian practices are known:

- Secrecy: Very little information about beliefs, ritual, symbolism, practice are released to the general public. One has to be initiated into the faith before information is freely released.
- Tradition: Santeria is not a religion of a book, like Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Like most Aboriginal religions, it is preserved by an oral tradition.
- Ritual: A ritual typically begins with the invocation of Olurun. Drums provide background African rhythms. The Oru or rhythm changes to that associated with a specific Orisha, who is then invoked as well. Animals, most commonly chickens, are sacrificed during many rituals. Dancing is another main component of the ritual.
- Priesthood: Priests are called Santeros or Babalochas. Priestesses are called Santeras or Iyalochas. The term Olorisha can refer to a priest or a priestess. They are trained for many years in the oral traditions of the faith. This is followed by a period of solitude before being initiated. They learn dance, songs and healing methods.
- Botanicas: These are stores that specialize in providing Santerian supplies. They sell charms, herbs, potions, musical instruments, and other materials used by believers.

There are many national variations to this religion. This is particularly obvious in places like Los Angeles, CA where the Spanish speaking population has many national origins. Mexican Santeria, for example, emphasizes its Roman Catholic roots; it often includes nationally-based icons, like the Virgin of Guadeloupe. Cuban Santeria tends to emphasize its African origins.

Santeria has few buildings devoted to the faith. Rituals often take place in halls rented for the purpose, or privately in Santeria homes which are may be fitted with altars for ritual purposes. During appropriate rituals the Orishas are able to meet believers at these sacred spaces.

Material for use in Santeria rituals can be bought in specialist outlets called botánicas.

BEMBE

One major ritual is a bembé. This ceremony invites the Orisha to join the community in drumming, singing and dancing.

The Orisha may 'seize the head' of a person (or 'mount them' as if they were a horse), and cause that possessed person to perform 'spectacular dances', and to pass on various messages from the Orisha to community members.

DIET

Santeria have no explicit, universal dietary restrictions, although some individuals may adopt dietary restrictions through practices of divination.

HOLY BOOKS

Santeria has no scriptures and is passed on by word-of-mouth.

WEDING

Practitioners of Santeria may have wedding ceremonies that include rituals, prayers, and offerings to orishas (spirits). Some practitioners of Santeria may be licensed by the state to perform marriages, but this is not common, and in most cases a couple has a civil ceremony or a Catholic ceremony in church.

HEALTCARE

Santeria priests have a great knowledge of traditional medicine and herbalism, and often play an important role in the health of their community.

Their healthcare draws on Catholicism as well as African tradition; holy water is an ingredient in many Santeria medicinal formulas.

Santeria healthcare is often combined with conventional medicine.

There is no official churches or temples in the religion. As such, ceremonies and rituals are usually performed at home or in public.

Followers of the religion often wear white as a symbol of purity. It is also customary for Santeria followers to partake in various rituals in order to stay in touch with orishas.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Animal sacrifice is central to Santeria. The animal is sacrificed as food, rather than for any obscure mystical purpose.

Followers of an Orisha will offer them food and sacrifice animals to them in order to build and maintain a personal relationship with the spirit. The process not only brings the worshipper closer to their Orisha, but makes them more aware of the presence of the Orisha within them.

Sacrifices are performed for life events such as birth, marriage, and death. They are also used for healing.

Without sacrifice the religion would die out, as sacrifice is essential for initiation into the faith community and the 'ordination' of priests.

The animals are killed by cutting the carotid arteries with a single knife stroke in a similar way to other religious methods of slaughter.

Animals are cooked and eaten following all Santeria rituals (except healing and death rites, where the sickness is believed to pass into the dead animal). Eating the sacrificed animal is considered a sharing with the Orisha, who only consumes the animal's blood, while the worshippers eat the meat.

Sacrificial animals include chickens (the most common), pigeons, doves, ducks, guinea pigs, goats, sheep, and turtles.

🕯 UMBANDA

Umbanda is a syncretic Afro-Brazilian religion that blends African traditions with Roman Catholicism, Spiritism, and Indigenous American beliefs. Although some of its beliefs and most of its practices existed in the late 19th century in almost all Brazil, it is assumed that Umbanda originated in Rio de Janeiro and surrounding areas in the early 20th century, mainly due to the work of a psychic (medium), Zélio Fernandino de Moraes, who practiced Umbanda among the poor Afro-Brazilians slave descendants. Since then, Umbanda has spread across mainly southern Brazil and neighboring countries like Argentina and Uruguay.

Umbanda has many branches, each one with a different set of beliefs and practices. Some common beliefs are the existence of a Supreme Creator known as Olodumare. Other common beliefs are the existence of deities called Orixás, most of them syncretized with Catholic saints that act as divine energy and forces of nature; spirits of deceased people

that counsel and guide practitioners through troubles in the material world; psychics, or mediums, who have a natural ability that can be perfected to bring messages from the spiritual world of Orixás and the guiding spirits; reincarnation and spiritual evolution through many material lives (karmic law) and the practice of charity and social fraternity. There isn't uniformity of belief among all followers of the Umbanda religion, yet there certain beliefs that are widely held. These beliefs include faith in a supreme deity called Olorum (or Zambi), who has various representations. Many followers of Umbanda also believe that various Catholic saints emit divine energies and forces called Orixas. It is also common for adherents to seek interaction with the spirits of the deceased. The ideas of karma and reincarnation are also central tenets of the religion.

There are eight primary Orixas intermediaries:

1. Oxala is the chief intermediary. His celestial body is the sun. His ritual day is Sunday. His sacred color is white.
2. Yemanjá represents femininity in the Umbanda religion. Her celestial body is the ocean. Her ritual day is Saturday. Her sacred color is bright blue.
3. Xango is the intermediary of justice. His ritual day is Wednesday. His sacred color is red.
4. Oxum is the goddess of love, money, and waterways. Her
5. ritual day is Saturday. Her sacred color is yellow.
6. Ogun is a defender of soldiers. His ritual day is Tuesday. His sacred color is green.
7. Oxossi is a hunter and protector. His ritual day is Thursday. His sacred color is green.
8. Ibeji are associated with the spirits of children. Their ritual day is Sunday. Their sacred colors are blue and pink.
9. Omolu is intermediary of death, disease, health, and healing. His ritual day is Monday. His
10. colors are black and white or red and black.

Umbanda temples are led by psychics who interact with various spirits on behalf of the living.

Leaders of Umbanda temples are often referred to as priests or priestesses.

The temples are called Terreiro (meaning “backyard” because they once used to be located in people’s homes) or Tenda (meaning “tent” because they once used to be located in tents).

Today Terreiros can be built like homes or Catholic churches.

Gatherings in temples occur often and depending on the particular Terreiro or branch of Umbanda, ceremonies may include chanting, offering food and other items to spirits, dancing, as well as eating and drinking.

If visitors manifest a spirit during the gathering they may be asked to become members of the group.

The three major beliefs claimed by Umbandists are: The Pantheon, the Spirits' World, and the Reincarnation.

Umbanda ceremonies are generally open to the public and may take place several times a week. The ceremonies may include offers to the spirits comprising fruits, wine, farofa, cachaça, popcorn, cigarettes, hard cider and other types of food or beverages. Each Orixá or spirit receives a proper offering, and initiation rites that range from the simple to complex.

During the ceremonies the priests and priestesses (pai-de-santo, mãe-e-santo, filhos-de-santo, initiates) and the public attending the meeting sing together, dance, drink beverages and smoke cigars under the spirit's influence. The priests and priestesses are separated from the attending public, usually by a small fence. The priests, priestesses and some of the public gradually get immersed in the singing and dancing, and suddenly get possessed by deities and spirits, starting to act and speak with their personas. Those in the public attending who become possessed are recognized as owners of special psychic power and, usually, after the ceremony, are invited to become initiates in the Terreiro. Sometimes, an experienced pai-de-santo or mãe-de-santo can dance and sing all night without, for mysterious reasons, being possessed by deities or spirits.

There is also a rite leader called Ogã. His job is to organize the "gira" in a logistic way. He does not incorporate and he is respected by the entities who possess the medium.

Intervention by spiritual beings in followers' daily lives is a central belief, so participation in Umbanda rites is important to appease deities and spirits.

Music and dancing are always present in the Umbanda rituals.

💧 VODOU

Vodou (or Voodoo) is a monotheistic religion that is often misunderstood. Common in Haiti and New Orleans, Vodou merges Catholic and African beliefs to form a unique set of rituals that include Voodoo dolls and symbolic drawings.

However, as with any religion, followers of Vodou cannot be lumped into a single category. There are also many misconceptions, which are just as important to understand. Vodou is also known as Vodoun, Voodoo, and by several other variants.

It is a syncretic religion that combines Roman Catholicism and native African religion, particularly from the religion of the Dahomey region of West Africa (the modern day nation of Benin).

Vodou is primarily practiced in Haiti, New Orleans, and other locations within the Caribbean.

Vodou began when African slaves brought their native traditions with them as they were forcefully transported to the new world. However, they were generally forbidden from practicing their religion. To get around these restrictions, the slaves started to equate their gods with Catholic saints. They also performed their rituals using the items and imagery of the Catholic Church.

If a Vodou practitioner considers himself Christian, he generally professes to be a Catholic Christian. Many Vodou practitioners also consider themselves Catholics. Some see the saints and spirits to be one and the same. Others still hold that the Catholic accouterments are primarily for appearance.

Vodou is a monotheistic religion. Followers of Vodou known as Vodouisants believe in a single, supreme godhead that can be equated with the Catholic God. This deity is known as Bondye, "the good god."

Vodouisants also accept the existence of lesser beings, which they call loa or lwa. These are more intimately involved in day-to-day life than Bondye, who is a remote figure. The

lwa are divided into three families: Rada, Petro, and Ghede.

The relationship between humans and lwa is a reciprocal one. Believers provide food and other items that appeal to the lwa in exchange for their assistance. The lwa are frequently invited to possess a believer during ritual so the community can directly interact with them.

Vilokan is the home of the lwa as well as the deceased. It is commonly described as a submerged and forested island. It is guarded by the lwa Legba, who must be appeased before practitioners can speak to any other Vilokan resident.

There is no standardized dogma within Vodou. Two temples within the same city might teach different mythologies and appeal to the lwa in different ways.

As such, the information provided in overviews of Vodou (such as this one) cannot always reflect the beliefs of all believers.

For example, sometimes lwa are associated with different families, Catholic saints, or veves. Some common variations are included here.

Animal Sacrifice: A variety of animals might be killed during a Vodou ritual, depending upon the lwa being addressed. It provides spiritual sustenance for the lwa, while the flesh of the animal is then cooked and eaten by participants.

Veves. Rituals commonly involve the drawing of certain symbols known as veves with cornmeal or another powder. Each lwa has its own symbol and some have multiple symbols associated with them.

Voodoo Dolls. The common perception of Vodouisants poking pins into Voodoo dolls does not reflect traditional Vodou. However, Vodouisants do dedicate dolls to particular lwa and use them to attract a lwa's influence.

The primary goal and activity of Vodou is to *sevi lwa* (“serve the spirits”)—to offer prayers and perform various devotional rites directed at God and particular spirits in return for health, protection, and favour. Spirit possession plays an important role in Afro-Haitian religion, as it does in many other world religions. During religious rites, believers sometimes enter a trancelike state in which the devotee may eat and drink, perform stylized dances, give supernaturally inspired advice to people, or perform medical cures or special physical feats; these acts exhibit the incarnate presence of the lwa within the entranced devotee. Vodou ritual activity (e.g., prayer, song, dance, and gesture) is aimed at refining and restoring balance and energy in relationships between people and between people and the spirits of the unseen world.

Vodou is an oral tradition practiced by extended families that inherit familial spirits, along with the necessary devotional practices, from their elders. In the cities, local hierarchies of priestesses or priests (*manbo* and *oungan*), “children of the spirits” (*ounsì*), and ritual drummers (*ountògi*) comprise more formal “societies” or “congregations” (*sosyete*). In these congregations, knowledge is passed on through a ritual of initiation (*kanzo*) in which the body becomes the site of spiritual transformation. There is some regional difference in ritual practice across Haiti, and branches of the religion include Rada, Daome, Ibo, Nago, Dereal, Manding, Petwo, and Kongo. There is no centralized hierarchy, no single leader, and no official spokesperson, but various groups sometimes attempt to create such official structures. There are also secret societies, called *Bizango* or *Sanpwèl*, that perform a religio-juridical function.

A calendar of ritual feasts, syncretized with the Roman Catholic calendar, provides the yearly rhythm of religious practice. Important lwa are celebrated on saints' days (for example: Ogou on St. James's Day, July 25; Ezili Danto on the feast of Our Lady of

Mount Carmel, July 16; Danbala on St. Patrick's Day, March 17; and the spirits of the ancestors on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, November 1 and November 2). Many other familial feasts (for the sacred children, for the poor, for particular ancestors) as well as initiations and funerary rituals occur throughout the year.

WINTI

Winti is the Afro-Surinamese traditional religion. It is about believing in a god called Anana Kedyaman Kedyanpon.

Winti is the cultural-religious heritage and essential product of approximately four traditional African religions. Over the centuries, these have been fused into one as a result of the socialization of Africans from different ethnic groups brought to Suriname during the slave trade. The Winti religion is part of a strong African cultural heritage that has sustained itself in Suriname despite centuries of slavery and cultural oppression. The development and practice of the Winti religion has been attacked, obstructed, and inhibited over the centuries by the colonial culture, in general, and the Christian churches, in particular. Winti was declared taboo; it was associated with the occult and with the calling of demonic powers. The whole Winti faith was put in the sphere of "black magic" and became symbolic of a lower social status in the country.

Despite this, the Winti religion survived and continues to manifest itself in the people's culture. People often practice it in secret and gather in places outside of town. This is how Winti developed a secret character. Many people in the capital practice Christianity by day and Winti in secret at night. Others attempted to forget about it altogether, but were, through cultural circumstances, made to at least respect it. Some upper – or middle – class "creoles" from the capital claim not to believe in Winti, but when they encounter a problem in life that may appear to be a "health" problem, which cannot be cured by Western medicine, their elders usually recommend that they seek resolution through Winti. These days, increasing numbers of people are openly professing their religious beliefs and more easily expressing their feelings regarding their faith in Winti.

The foundation of Winti based on three principles: the belief in the supreme creator called Anana Kedyaman Kedyanpon; the belief in a pantheon of spirits called Winti; and the veneration of the ancestors. There is also a belief in Ampuku (also known as Apuku) which are anthropomorphic forest spirits. An Ampuku can possess people (both men and women) and can also pass itself off as another spirit. Ampuku can also be water spirits, and are known in such cases as Watra Ampuku.

Winti rites are divided into four categories: 1) initiation, 2) prevention, 3) purification, 4) healing rites.

Winti practice includes public and private rites and observances. However, unlike other African religious expressions in Americas, Winti has mostly private rites. The public rites in Winti are known as Winti Prey.

Winti Prey are dance rituals in which Winti can manifest themselves by taking possession of participants in the ritual. The Winti thus manifested are welcomed and appeased by the particular substances and objects associated with them, such as water, perfume, alcoholic

and non-alcoholic beverages, various types of food, and herbs. The participants are typically dressed in color that corresponded to the particular divinity. The instrument played in the typical Winti ceremony are the drums, which are key to calling on the divinities. Winti ceremonies usually last all night.

In the past, due to legal prohibitions, Winti was often practiced in secret. However, it was part of plantation life throughout the period of slavery. Practicing Winti was officially banned in an 1874 law, and the ban was not lifted until 1971.

💧 OYOTUNJI

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the local context in which a project is implemented. This includes a thorough analysis of the social, economic, and cultural factors that may influence the success or failure of the intervention. It is essential to engage with local stakeholders from the outset to ensure that the project is relevant and sustainable.

The second part of the paper focuses on the design and implementation of the project. This involves developing a clear set of objectives and a detailed plan of action. It is important to establish a strong monitoring and evaluation system to track progress and assess the impact of the intervention. Flexibility and adaptability are key to responding to unforeseen challenges and opportunities.

The third part of the paper discusses the importance of building local capacity and fostering community ownership. This can be achieved through a combination of training, mentorship, and the provision of resources. Encouraging local leadership and decision-making is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project.

The final part of the paper provides a summary of the key findings and offers recommendations for future practice. It emphasizes the need for a holistic and participatory approach to development work, one that recognizes the value of local knowledge and the importance of building strong, resilient communities.

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