The Vodun has Killed Them: *New World/Old World Vodun, Creolité, and the Alter-Renaissance*

Abstract: *Poet and scholar, Kamau Brathwaite, signifies Europe as a missile that thrust itself into the Americas, transformed--"flipped"--and brought with its European passengers, not the glories of the Renaissance from which they came, but a cruel and inhuman "alter-Renaissance" –genocide, transatlantic slavery, the encomienda, a prolonged assault on the environment, etc. Based upon research conducted while on a Fulbright in La République du Bénin, West Africa, this paper proposes that, very early, elements in the culture of unwilling passengers, captive Africans, also sustained profound changes. At the same time, I demonstrate that vodun (as vodou is called in Benin) takes different forms, depending upon when its adherents came to the Americas. Noting what changes were or were not likely carried across the Atlantic, I first examine the theological adjustments instituted by the historical southern kingdom, Dânxomɛ's, Fon ruler, Tegbesu, and his kpojito (queen mother) to bolster their power in the mid- to late 18th century. Some "adjustments" were derived from long association with Yoruba neighbors, some not; and both transported elements continued to evolve along a certain trajectory profoundly affected by the Middle Passage and the exile from the motherland. African vodun went on to develop on its own, as did vodou in the Americas. Neither were static.*

Backgrounding certain vodun practices in Bénin; I then focus on a rarely seen, rarely conducted Yehwe initiation ceremony, "raising the dead," which I witnessed not too far from the old Fon capital of Dânxomɛ. The initiates (those whom, as my title states, the vodun "has killed") had been kept in a state resembling death and then awakened into a new life as a vodunsi (a vodunon *is a leader, guardian or assistant in facilitating practices within the 'house' or temple and a* vodunsi *is an initiate into the religion.) Though I, myself, am an initiate in another culte du vodun, I do not presume a full "take" on this practice, but the essay may suggest relevant areas for further investigation.*

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is not to catalog or enumerate specific traits as having a single uncontaminated origin, nor to risk what Price and Price took Herskovits to task for--"trait-chasing."[1] Rather, this essay seeks to describe changes in African vodun that may account for some of the beliefs and practices that made the Transatlantic journey to the Americas, some influenced by beliefs and interactions between the southern Fon kingdom of Dânxomɛ and the Yoruba; some changes being stories--narratives—fashioned and refashioned by Dânxomɛ to buttress royal power; some, the results of resistance to religious and political changes in Dânxomɛ and the resulting exile of those who resisted. Creolization was at work in vodun even before it was brought to the Americas and underwent further creolization as vodou. In neither form--vodun or vodou--was the religion static.

In Part I, I consider historical material pertinent to the evolution of vodun in Dânxomɛ--now, together with the northern part of the country, called La République du Bénin--with various aspects of the religion which were altered there in Bénin, and/or as they reached the Americas. As for Brathwaite's metaphor of the missile, I shall connect that with material in Part II of this essay when discussing the "raising of the dead" ceremony I witnessed in eastern Bénin, a ceremony whose origins are suggestive but tantalizingly ambiguous. The ceremony is, in my view, a creolized practice, directly related to the encounter between various myths of power, and which appear only artifactually in New World vodou, in quite different form than in its original.

N.B.: Please note that in keeping with La République du Bénin, and my contacts in that country, I use "vodun"[2] when referring to African vodun, and "vodou" when referring to it in the Americas. When using direct quotes, depending on the author, spelling may vary. I also attempt to use Fongbe spelling when possible.

Part I: Manipulating Mawu

> The *vodun* came into the world because of Agadja. The *vodun* came from Adja [present day western Bénin and parts of Togo]. There was a woman who was called Hwandjelè. She brought all the *vodun* from Adja.
>
> - Herskovits, "How the *vodun* came to Dahomey"[3]

As a literature person, most of my work is filtered through the lense of metaphor and simile, useful filters in a context where fiction--myth and story--mingle with fact, and particularly useful when considering the culture and religious practices in La République du Bénin (in Herskovits' time, Dahomey, as the French rendered the Fongbe name, Dânxomɛ.) The quotation above invites such filtering; for Herskovits' story, while distorted, alludes to important perceptions about Dânxomɛ's *vodun* legacy. Indeed, the southern kingdom of Dânxomɛ dominates the history of Africa's vodun and its reach overseas. Through the revisions which I have alluded to, specifically initiated by Dânxomɛ rulers and, in turn, heavily influenced by Yoruba beliefs--and through the effects of more "natural" phenomenon (the passage of time, etc.,) vodun emerged as a composite, multi-layered religion on both sides of the Atlantic.

A Warrior Kingdom

Scholars have struggled to put together oral accounts and fact to arrive at some idea of Dânxomɛ's rapid expansion after it first located itself at Agbomɛ, on the Agbomɛ plateau, in the 17th century, some 100 km inland from Bénin's littoral. While "in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, [Dânxomɛ had been] warring with some success in the Weme valley.... [to] secure a trade route east of Allada to...the sea east of Lake Nokoue," from 1724 - 1727 under King Agaja, Dânxomɛ spectacularly doubled its territory, first conquering Allada in 1724. However, in 1726, the Yoruba-speaking Oyo attacked and razed Agbomɛ, Agaja's capital, forcing the new king to pay tribute in order to "buy peace and the right to occupy Allada;"[4] still, Agaja successfully conquered the Huedans' capital, Savi, and their kingdom up to and including Ouidah, a thriving town [in]famous for its profitable slave trade.

Scholars explain the decisive Dânxom□an victory against the Huedans, despite Oyo incursions, in several ways: that there were clear internal weaknesses within the Huedan capital, Savi; that the Sacred Pythons failed to protect Savi's boundaries (Snelgrave's account has the pythons decapitated and grilled for the Dânxom□an's supper); or that, as per Snelgrave, Dânxom□ made an attractive deal with the Europeans vis à vis the Transatlantic Trade, so the latter would not intervene but allow a Dânxom□an victory.[5] Dânxom□ entered Savi in only three days, thus acquiring profitable access to the European slave trade and making Ouidah a much larger, prosperous town.[6] Subduing the kingdom, however, was much less a fait accompli than many accounts would lead one to believe. Nearly every dry season, the Yoruba Oyo overran Dânxom□'s Agbom□ plateau, retreated, then threatened Dânxom□ once more. When Oyo was strong, Hueda's King Huffon retook territory from Dânxom□; when Oyo weakened, Huffon then

lost territory to Dânxom□.

In fact, Dânxom□'s intermittent control garnered no praise from European traders: Dânxom□ans were regarded as crude, unreliable and disorganized.[7] A famous allegation regarding Dânxom□'s Fon, possibly legitimate, suggest that Dânxom□ had "its origins in a gang of bandits," that the king of "Dahomey" had originally been a trader who formed a gang in the forest, or that Agaja was given a large sum of money "in 1724, "as a mercenary...to assist a rebellious prince of Allada," as Law tells us, "and it was apparently only at a later stage that he broke with this prince and seized power in Allada for himself."[8]

Seeking Metaphors for Power

Clearly, politicians tell stories: in contemporary times, candidates in my country roll up their sleeves and pretend to be "of the people" when they are millionaires. They make sure to be seen in a church so as to appear appropriately pious. In Agaja's time, one needed a convincing tale of a fearsome ancestor and the favor of the vodun of the vanquished, which had been purchased and was now at on your side. Despite initial difficulties in trying to control its enlarged territories, evidence suggests that then the Dânxom□an court quickly began to elaborate itself and become more orderly. After Oyo's 1726 incursion, Dânxom□ situated itself at Allada, rather than Agbom□, till the death of Agaja in 1740, and his successor, King Tegbesu's, ascension. In Allada, Dânxom□ refined its founding myth, coopting it, Robin Law claims, from pre-Fon traditions and adopting it to legitimize its reign. Essentially, this story tells of the royalty's akɔ (roughly "clan") founder (tɔwixɔ) Agasu, who was "supposedly the son of a daughter of the royal family of Tado (west of Dahomey, in modern-day Togo) by a panther."[9] I will be discussing this story further in Part II of this chapter; suffice it to say here that it served a propagandistic purpose: the conquering Fon became "Alladanou,"

the people from Allada.

Enter King Tegbesu (1740 -1774) and Hwangile, the woman of the Herskovits epigram. Women could not rule outright; but they had considerable influence and power among Fon royalty. The wife of the previous king acted in the position of a queen mother, though this woman was not always the ruler's biological mother;[10] and, continuing to claim the myth of the Alladanou, this woman was titled *kpojito*, "one who whelped the leopard." Hwangile, as it turned out, actually was Tegbesu's mother and, as Herskovits' tale above tells us, an Adja woman, a foreigner in Fon terms who was initiated to the level of priesthood. She was supremely knowledgeable and introduced several vodun into the existing corpus: "Mawu, Lisa, Sakpata, Heviosso, Gu, Dan Aidowhedo, the Nesuxwe and todovodun [royal ancestors become vodun,] Fa, Menona, Boko-Legba," according to Bay's reading of Herskovits' *Dahomey: An Ancient African Kingdom.* I question Hwangile as importing Sakpata as, see below, this vodun had prior and particular importance to pre-Royaume peoples before being credited to Tegbesu as the spirit's "importer." Le Hérissé is a bit more conservative and perhaps more on target when he lists Hwangile's contributions as "Mawu, Lisa, Heviosso, H'lan, and the tɔxɔsu."[11]

Tegbesu's ascension was a particularly messy one, in that Tegbesu did not achieve it easily as a younger son, not a legitimate heir as would be the eldest by Fon rules of primogeniture. It required a civil war for him to secure power.[12] One must pay attention, however, to his background: several oral accounts say young Tegbesu was sent as a royal hostage to Oyo, less traditionally that he had spent some time in the Oyo court or, finally, that his kingship was actively supported by Oyo, as they wanted someone they could trust in that position (a suggestion not entirely without merit.) In any case, Tegbesu was familiar with Oyo (Yoruba) religious practices and their vodun. Indeed, Edna Bay goes on to state that Tegbesu returns with "Oyo style clothing, umbrellas, and the gods Heviosso [Shango] and Sakpata

[Shosonna]."[13] Clearly this suggests strong Yoruba input into these spirits' worship, something which should not be forgotten as we consider the theological changes Tegbesu and Hwangile introduced to secure their position as quickly as possible and suppress dissent.

According to pre-Tegbesu tradition, Bay goes on to tell us,

> [t]he followers of vodun were organized into local congregations, each of which was headed by a male-female pair of vodunon ("-non" = owner, guardian, mother). The individual chapter houses in turn kept in touch with congregations in other localities. Because they were extrafamilial, the vodun represented a potential threat to the monarchy. ....[Thus (Bay quotes Herskovits here)]" ....many of the *voduno[n]* and their followers were sold into slavery."

Herskovits suggested people were being swayed by the priests of "the autochthonous gods [sic] to resist the monarch," and that “many plots against the monarchy [were] instigated by the [vodunon of] Sagbata [Sakpata] gods and the gods of the rivers and the silk cotton trees"...and these were the people being enslaved as a consequence.[14] Furthermore, citing Le Hérissé, Law informs us that as early as the conquests of the Huedans and Allada, Agaja had adopted the worship of the vodun Sakpata: "the earth deity: presumably this official recognition of Sakpata was an attempt to defuse the hostility of his priests, who...[even then] had been involved in plots against Agaja's authority."[15] James H. Sweet has put this antagonism between Sakpata vodunon and the royalty in yet another light, directly related to the Fon raids for captives to sell to slavers. The dislocation, he notes,

> in war-torn areas where slaving was frequent and sustained, should not be exaggerated....War, drought, famine, and slaving produced thousands of dislocated peoples who sought refuge in areas protected from these threats....In other instances, refugees gathered around powerful healers who promised redemption from famine, disease, and slaving. In eighteenth-century Benin, such communities formed around vodun priests devoted to Sakpata, the earth deity. [16]

Thus, around the 1740s on into the 1800s, among thousands of captives caught in Dânxomɛ 's raids and shipped overseas, were disaffected Fon *vodunon* and *vodunsi*, especially those serving Sakpata. This occurred despite the fact that under the provisions of Dânxomɛan law, neither

slaves nor free persons born in Dânxomɛ could be sold overseas " unless it was as punishment for a very serious offense.'"[17] It seems likely that the "serious offense" was the charge of sedition.[18]

Verticality

In Dânxomɛ, however, ridding itself of dissidents was not enough. As I have noted, Tegbesu and his kpojito almost immediately set about making key theological reforms. Nicolau Parés writes

> ...it was the Fon kings who were reputed to have established, beginning in the eighteenth century, a highly centralized and hierarchical religious system in Dahomey. Maupoil writes of a "plan of submission from the altars to the throne," and Maurice Glélé, of the state's "control by administrative police" over the vodun congregations. This political control over religious life resulted in the centralization and hierarchical organization of the vodun priesthood. King Tegbesu's mother, Na Hwanjile, is generally held to be responsible for the introduction, in around 1740, of the Mawu-Lissá cult in Abomey, transforming this vodun couple into the supreme creator gods, occupying the apex of an increasingly vertical and hierarchized pantheon. At the same time, the introduction of the male-dominated Fa divination system and the promotion of the Nesuhue cult of royal ancestors into a "national" cult, with precedence over other "public" [inter-ethnic] cults, contributed to a growing pyramidal structuring of the religious system.[19]

Olabiyi Yai objects to the use of the word "pantheon" to describe the multiplicity of vodun, as it implies hierarchy in a system that tended to be horizontal rather than vertical;[20] however, it seems clear that Tegbesu and Hwangile did establish just such a hierarchical system, leading, as per Parés, from altars to throne and "enforcing a new etiquette in the kingdom whereby each person knew his/her place."[21] Indeed, a significant contribution of Tegbesu, Yai tells us, is the cult of Nesuxwe or royal family deity:

> Under Tegbesu, through the Fa oracle, a myth was elaborated which established the ancestors of the royal family as vodun (tɔxɔsu). A priest called *Mivede* was appointed by the king to take care of the cult. This official priest has now precedence, officially, over all the other priests of the inter-ethnic deities. He himself was directly accountable to the *Meu*, the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Kingdom.[22]

Thus a tightly controlled religious hierarchy emerged to mirror the secular one; and an earlier, less vertical verstion of vodun was sent packing.

Back in Dânxomɛ, came the introduction and elevation of Mawu in particular, and the twinned Mawu-Lisa--mirroring as they do the two powers, king and kpojito, and designed by Fon to be paired commoner and royal rulers, mother or mother-in-name and son. But Mawu was not originally a Fon phenomenon: as Bay notes "though brought from an area west of Dahomey, [Mawu-Lisa] were originally linked to Yoruba-speaking cultures to the east." Yai elaborates: "Mawu is a deity of Yoruba origin. It is the Yeye Mowo, the wife of Orisa or Obatala"; and the twin spirits served as an enforced synecdoche for Dânxomɛ's rulers:

> The integration of Mowo (now Mawu) in the new scheme could only make sense if the borrowed deity served the purpose of a rigidly hierarchical social order. I surmise that the myth of the creation of the earth and heaven by the couple Mawu-Lisa is contemporary with the emergence of the state deity. After all, a couple that presides over the creation of the earth and heaven is compatible with and reinforces a political and social order rigidly centralized and hierarchical.

Mawu-Lisa are "no longer the same as Yemowo and Orisa, [but] elevated to the status of creator of the world."[23] Indeed, the political advantages of this move are clear:

> by controlling a cult of Mawu the king could exploit Mawu's supremacy over the other gods (including specifically, perhaps, the recalcitrant Sakpata), securing for himself a corresponding supremacy over the earthly priests and worshippers of those gods. It functioned, that is, as a means of control over rather than a substitute for the traditional religious system. [24]

Thus, the grand metaphor of royal rule was embodied in Tegbesu and Hwangile's restructuring of vodun; since then, the idea of Mawu as distant, creator "ubergött," has become catechistic. This hierarchical structure furnished, as in Brathwaite's missile metaphor, an excellent launching pad. for the Euromissiles leaving from the slave ports to the New World.[25]

Deporting Dissent

Reinforcing the aforementioned idea of exporting diverging theologies, and though somewhat distorted in his view of "voodoo,"[26] as he called it, Roland Pierre notes that in his *Voyage aux Antilles*, in 1722 Labat observed,

> the Fons succeeded in imposing their ritual cadre on Voodoo [sic] more than the other groups did. This preponderance is due, for one thing, to the Dahomean "will to have power" and, for another, *to the number of qualified people and exiled priests from Dahomey who were deported as slaves to the Antilles.* [emphasis mine][27]

It is useful to note Labat's dates. While Tegbesu's rearrangements were profound and, those exiled by him--those he saw as having seditious theologies and intents--often did have divergent beliefs, the practice of exiling those who displeased the royal regime did not start with Tegbesu. Under Agaja, many dissidents serving autochthonous vodun were also his focus for exile. Indeed, resistant Gedevi, sent off by Agaja prior to Tegbesu's reign, brought Gede with them to Haiti (then Saint Domingue,) though when I spoke to the Gedevi at Agbomɛ (descendents of those who stayed behind), their Gede was far from the Haitian cigar-smoking, rum-swilling, ladies'-behind-pinching guardian of the cemetery. The former spoke of Gede reverently as "Gede just *is*," as Earth, as synonymous with it.[28] Indeed, some of Dânxomɛ's perceived enemies remained in Dânxomɛ[29]; yet from diverse if not cosmopolitan Ouidah, at least, even then their vodun seem to have crossed over. Many water spirits, we know, traveled; and among them was Azili, another pre-Tegbesu vodun:

> Other cults were introduced into Ouidah by slaves from the interior who were retained for local service rather than sold into export. An example is Azili, a female water-spirit (the prototype of the Haitian Ezili), whose shrine (in Tové quarter) is said to have been founded by an enslaved woman from Agonli-Houegbo, north-east of Dahomey, who was captured by the Dahomian army and brought to Ouidah under Agaja.[30]

Loko, among the tree vodun, came to inhabit the Americas' silk cotton tree--the ceiba--in the New World forest (or, in Brazil's Jeje terreiros, the gameleira.)

Thus transferences and transformations of spirits brought to the New World are complex and, sometimes, confusing. If we can ignore the word, "pantheon," for a moment, and acknowledge that vodun come in groups or, as Nicolau Parés puts it, "constellations," with a key figure identifying them, clearly some in those constellations may have made the overseas

journey, where others did not. Herskovits "divides the Dahomean 'public' or 'great gods' into four main categories: the sky pantheon of Mawu-Lissá, the earth pantheon of Sakpata, the snake pantheon of Dan, and the thunder pantheon of Hevioso."[31] Of the "public" vodun, some argue, Mawu is the vodou Bondye in Haiti and that in the Jeje Candomblés in Brazil, "Mawu almost disappeared and gave way to the original Yoruba Osala."[32] Sakpata, in the words of a Haitian hougan, "is *hidden* [emphasis mine] in a spirit called Bossou in Haiti."[33] Shango, as Heviosso is sometimes called on this side of the Atlantic, is particularly strong, although Hebblethwaite writes that in Haitian vodou, "Chango" remains separate from Heviosso, "the vodun (lwa) of thunder and lightening in Bénin"--not, as one might assume (also given overlapping iconography and spiritual domains) having merged.[34]

"[D]istinct from [Ouidah's] Dangbe and unlike him not considered to be incarnated in actual snakes" the vodun, Dan, looms large; in fact, the Haitian female spirit, Aiyda Wedo separated from Dan Aido Wedo in the Americas and transformed into the mate to Damballah, the Rainbow Serpent, long associated with Dânxomɛ's Mahi captives.[35] Certainly, in Haiti, both Dan[ballah] and Ayida Wedo were and are key metaphors, quite familiar to Haitian vodou and originally expressing the longing of captives for home, as the Rainbow Serpent stretches like a bridge to Guinen.[36]

The Mahi (also seen in the literature as "Maxi,") were heavily influenced by Yoruba-speakers. Mahi were not of the Yoruba language family; but they were repeatedly subjected to Dânxomɛan raids and, before the Empire's collapse in the late 18th century, to Oyo's incursions; and their people were often sold as captives to slavers. Further, both Constant Legonou, my informant in Agbomɛ, and Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou, an important priest in Agbomɛ and a direct descendent of Hwangile, stated that, to go full circle,the vodun of the Mahi, Dan, as the

Rainbow Serpent, and Sakpata, were purchased by the early Dânxomɛan kings (first under Agbaja's predecessor, Ouwebadja); and their priests, brought to Agbomɛ as the Royaume "needed someone to do the ceremonies." Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou also confirmed that, in addition to paying tribute to Oyo, the nobility of Dânxomɛ did indeed send their sons to Oyo, where they may have worked, but not as enslaved people.[37] Thus, if we are to believe Law's later account of Tegbesu's time with the Yoruba, these exchanges gave the visitors much exposure to Yoruba religious beliefs and to their actual vodun, some of which traveled in varying proportion to the Americas.

Historically, by the 1780s the mortality rate of Africans on Haitian plantations was very high; and it is estimated that at that time the colony imported over forty thousand captives to serve as slaves each year. In 1789 over two-thirds of these were African born. Furthermore, "the height of the demand for slaves by Saint Domingue slave owners during the 1780s coincided with the period when the Yoruba constituted a large share of the trans-Atlantic slave trade."[38] Although we must not forget the early influence of Yoruba beliefs and spirits incorporated into official Dânxomɛan theologies, this new influx of Yoruba captives also opened a window for the entrance of still more ideas and may very well have added even more of a mix to earlier Fon-based theologies. However, given Haiti's early independence (1804), at least some of Tegbesu and Hwangile's adjustments never reached Saint Domingue in any significant way and thus failed to take root. What fact prevails, though, is that early on Old World vodun and New World vodou had already begun to diverge and that, post Tegbesu, earlier beliefs were subject to new Yoruba input, though their content is not always documented.

Class-ifying and Gendering Vodun

Before going on to Part II, I wish to discuss some changes differences between Old World vodun and New World vodou, with respect to class and gender. Noting that, in the 19th

century, Dânxomɛ began its year by honoring the ancestors of the kings, elaborately commemorating each departed king, agasunon (priests of Agasu-Vodun), kpojito, Tɔxɔsu, and Nesuxwe, "offering prayers and sacrifices that reordered and reconfirmed the balance between Kutome and Gbetome" (lands of the dead and living, resp.), Edna Bay then goes on to say

> It was weeks or months later, *after the end of all the royal ceremonies*, [emphasis mine] that commoner families were permitted to honor their ancestors and the priests of popular vodun were allowed to perform their ceremonies....By delaying the honoring of the spiritual forces associated with commoner ancestors and the popular vodun, the monarchy kept the followers of those spirits under a severe constraint....[39]

I reiterate that many among those persons "exported" early on to the Americas--certainly to Haiti --may have been accustomed to a more lateral, less hierarchical structure in their chapter houses, with the men and women priests of a more equal status, as was the autochthonous pre-Dânxomɛ custom. In New World vodou, women do not appear to be as limited as their Old world counterparts; and one wonders if that is not related to the early arrival of captives accustomed to that more lateral structure. In my own experience--much later, of course--women in the *culte de vodun* into which I was initiated hit a spiritual glass ceiling after becoming priestesses: they could never become high priestesses. Further, it is significant that the highly structured vertical system, with royalty as vodun (Nesuxwe,) and their dangerous issue, Tɔxɔsu--these are conspicuously absent in New World vodou. That is, the spirits worshipped by the nobility of Dânxomɛ (and those buttressing their status) did not all cross the Atlantic; many, though not all, of the spirits of the ordinary people did.

Fa (both the spirit of divination and the system) did not have the opportunity to reach Haiti, though Legba, whose face often appears on the divining board, did. (Fa's Yoruba version, Ifa, did reach Brazil.) Despite the legend Maupoil recounted, of two Yoruba diviners arriving in Agbomɛ during Agaja's reign, Fa was not widely known or accepted at that time. Tegbesu, Agaja's successor, was in fact the first king to be initiated--alone, in a forest--into Fa. [40] Like

Parés, Bay pronounces the system "gendered male," and says it was ultimately inimicable to the substantial roles that women played in the Royaume; indeed, it would relegate women, including the Kpojito, to peripheral roles. Further,

> the Herskovitses suggest that Fa itself was encouraged by the monarchy to compete with and discredit the *bokanto* (*bokan* = amulet, *to* = father), diviners association with the indigenous people of the Abomey plateau. Tegbesu is said to have made war on the Baribas [a group to the North] in order to capture Muslim diviners. Hwangile, too, is credited with importing the vodun Bagbo, who reputedly could foretell the future, from the area of Savalu in Mahi country.

Specifically, Bagbo was brought in "as a competing divination system." Of interest, too, is the suggestion that spirit mediumship was discouraged as well. Again, Bay cites the Herskovitses as noting that when a vodunon or vodunsi, priest or initiate, was possessed, they would "prophesy. But the kings did not want this. A man or a woman in any village in Dahomey might then rule in the name of a god,"[41] thus undercutting royal verticality. In terms of Fa, given the early dates of Haiti's independence, "there just wasn't time for Fa to make it to Haiti in any real way; today, they use playing cards, candle scrying [prognostication by lit surface], or spirit possession as forms of divination."[42]

Clearly, the religious adjustments made during the reign of Tegbesu favored the nobility, the *ahosi* [wives of the king, the term wife being extended to all dependents in the king's household][43]; indeed, Nicolau asserts that "the promotion of the Nesuhue cult and its transformations of royal ancestors into a "national" cult, with precedence over other "public" [inter-ethnic] cults, contributed to a growing pyramidal structuring of the religious system."[44] Those who came to the Americas from the plateau appear to have been either *anato* (commoners) or persons who got on the wrong side of the regime. Perhaps some *ahovi* [members of the Dânxomɛan royal family] were exiled; but my sense is that, in fact, the peasantry of Haiti, the keepers of African spirits, were overwhelmingly *anato* (commoners.)

Indeed, the bokor who wound up in the Americas, esp. Haiti, was an herbalist who made, or added the effective parts to, bɔ--power objects for protection, cure, etc.--and divined through spirit possession rather than Fa, who knew what the anthropologists used to call "magic" and seems to have been in the same class as his clientele. Bay's description sums up the commoner's vodun:

> Women were typically the principle followers of vodun and held leadership positions in the chapter houses....Initiated into the sacred knowledge of the god [sic], both female and male adepts [Francophone term for "members," "devotees"] communed directly with the spirits through the vehicle of possession, when the vodun would mount on their heads. The approach to the vodun was public and communal, set in open spaces of towns and villages and accompanied by music and dance that called all to witness. In contrast, Fa was private and hidden" and "demanded the building of an intimate intellectual and emotional relationship between a *male* client and his *male* adviser-diviner [emphases mine][45]

All that transpired was not the work of religious specialists; but changes made for particularly political reasons often arrived in the Americas in an altered state or not at all. The closer one looks at these phenomenon, and accounting for some significant differences in each region's beliefs and practices, clear class and gender divisions in Africa's vodun emerge; and these were not necessarily replicated in the same fashion in its New World version. Adjustments made in Dânxomɛ's vodun to favor the nobility and the rulers of Dânxomɛ were both thorough and complex and the general pattern favored a vertical, highly structured system that bolstered secular power and tilted spiritual puissance in favor of the male ruling class. On the other hand, numerous dissenters were exiled in the 18th century. It appears that those who were sent to the Americas first brought an earlier, possibly autochthonous, certainly less hierarchical version of vodun with them; and with the absence of a Danxomean kingship to bolster, certainly certain elements of that version of vodun became irrelevant. However, that is not to say that the Yoruba influence (Oyo had certainly made incursions into nearby territories up until its fall in the late

18th century) had no impact earlier; for their empire and their sphere of influence had extended even into pre-Dânxomɛ Aja territory. And, later, as noted, numerous captives sent to meet the demands of the plantocracy were Yoruba.

In the following section, I turn to an account of a particular initiation ceremony witnessed while in Bénin. It is probable that the ancestors of the people who celebrate it were originally displaced in the upheaval generated by Dânxomɛan wars and slave raids as described by Sweet above. Given their original location along the Weme (also spelled Ouémé) River, on the border between Bénin and Nigeria, one might speculate a mix of influences; however, what is also interesting is these practitioner's relationship to Danxome's coopted origin myth as well as the fact of the phenomenon of the initiation itself and how that, in turn, generates metaphors for what may or may not have been transported to the New World.

Part II: The Vodun Has Killed Them

Monday 14 JY--Agbomɛ: *Off we go, Constant and I on his moto, with the occasional raptor overhead, the clouds and sky and fresh air, over the red sand, through the fields with the tall, green grass, past people's gardens, people appearing out of nowhere on the roads, women and children with loads on their heads.*

We ride into a small village. Homes surrounded by fields, a settlement here, there, to a place where the walls connect but which is more or less one "maison," as C. explains. Red laterite walls, some roofless and beginning to crumble, mango trees, large "jarres" beside each door for water, things simmering in a pot over a clay stand into which sticks of wood had been set--as the wood burns, the sticks are pushed further in. Women. Small children. Some come to stare at you and say, "Bon Jour," in polite little voices. C. pushes the moto through the little alleys to an open courtyard where a rather handsome man with white hair sits in a chair, his feet propped up, listening to the radio under a tree. The man finds us something to sit on, C. and he converse briefly, and then the gentleman disappears for a good hour or more.

The shade is just right and the calm soothes the soul. No loud noises, no TV--that local culture killer--blaring next door, just sounds of chickens, roosters, an occasional child crying, someone appearing from a path that opens onto the clearing from the other side of the tree.

This village, says C., is Dokon, where we will find "Bɔsikpɔnou".[46]

Towards the end of my stay in Bénin, with the assistance of local informant and translator, Constant Legonou, I was introduced to a special group of people in Dokon, a village near Agbomɛ. Aware that the interplay of metaphor with ceremony, with history itself, and in the stories people tell themselves can shed fresh light on old subjects, I now want to revisit that experience. First, let me clarify the term "Yehwe." In the Old World, this term can be a bit general: thus Herskovits says,

> ...in Dahomey there is no secret Yehwe cult....It appears in Dahomey that every deity [I would use the word "spirit"] is not only Vodū but Yehwe as well. And it also appears from a consideration of the details of the data of Spieth and Westermann, that the ceremonies which they describe as those of the Yehwe secret society are almost identical with those of the various cult groups vowed to the several Dahomean pantheons, especially that of Xevioso.[47]

Nicolau Parés notes that among the Yoruba, spirits are referred to as "orixa"; among the Gbe-speaking groups, "vodun"; and he continues:

> of the majority of the Gulf of Benin societies, the linguistic boundary allows one to trace the borders of a hypothetical area of vodun cults between the Mina-Gen yehwe cults and the Nagô. In the extreme western part of the Gbe-speaking area, primarily in Togo, the voduns are designated by the term yehwe. Among the Gen, yehwe seems to be applied to deities of the sea and thunder pantheon of Hula and Aizo origin. In those parts of the Gbe-speaking area where Yoruba-speaking groups live, it is possible to find orixá cults. The orixás are not deities of Adja origin as occurs with the yehwe.[48]

Nicolau concurs with Herskovits, above, and adds that there is "less separatism in the worship of other affiliated deities (such as Gbade, Loko, or Dan)" and that among some "Hevioso congregations, the thunder voduns are called yehwe, suggesting an interpenetration with the Togoland Yehwe cults." Further, "the integrated thundersea vodun group, such as in Abomey, presents an apparent hierarchical superiority of the thunder side."[49] Finally, Hebblethwaite, though generally focusing on the New World side, adds, "In the Fon culture, Yèhwe is also a vodun (lwa). Yèhwenò originally referred to the priests of Vodun, but over time it has come to

refer to Catholic priests, while vodunò now refers exclusively to the priests of Vodun."[50]

The people I visited pay special attention to Heviosso (associated with thunder; sometimes assumed to be Shango) and indeed may come under the umbrella of Nicolau's "integrated vodun thundersea group near Agbomɛ." However, as Nicolau and Herskovits suggest above, the term is also used loosely to signify "vodun" or all vodun. Given their association with the leopard-vodun that I shall describe below, rather than refer to them as "Yehwe," I prefer to call these folk Bɔsikpɔnou (as they call themselves.)

Myth and Story

Now, to turn to the founding myth of the former Dânxomɛ kingdom:

> All agree that the kingdom [of Dânxomɛ] began in Wawe, now a village approximately midway between Abomey and Cana.... The myth tells the story of a line descended from the mating of a princess of the royal family of Tado, in what is now Togo, with a leopard. The princess's leopardlike son, Agasu, became the tohwiyo (mythical founder) of the clan of the Agasuvi (children of Agasu). Migrating from Tado, the Agasuvi settled in Allada, where they became the ruling lineage and hence took the name Alladanou (people from Allada). After a succession dispute, three Agasuvi brothers separated. One remained to rule in Allada, a second went southeast to found the kingdom of Porto Novo, and the third traveled north to found Dahomey.[51]

Who are we? posed the first Dânxomɛ kings--or, perhaps, *Who do we want to be understood to be?* In either scenario, *We are children of the leopard,* was the answer. As discussed in Part I, the actual Kingdom of Dânxomɛ was an aggressive warrior kingdom and one of the major players in the Transatlantic slave trade, with its Fon traders operating in several Slave Coast ports since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century.[52] Before Dânxomɛ's Agaja initated conquest of Ouidah/Glexwe (see Part I) in 1727,[53] Dânxomɛans had earlier established themselves on the Agbomɛ plateau; and thus, the other myth cited by numerous scholars to illustrate Dânxomɛan bellicosity as provided by J.A. Skertchly's original European account of the mythic third brother and his conquest of the Agbomɛ plateau:

> Daho, who was an artful designing fellow, asked permission of Danh or Dah [Dan], the king of the neighbouring state of Gedavin [the autochthonous Gedevi], to allow him to build a house on a small portion of his land. This was acceded to.... As the followers of Daho increased in number, his incessant demands for more land became intolerable to King Danh, who, when impertinently requested to assign a portion of land near his capital, exclaimed in a tremendous passion, "What! have I given you so much land and yet you want more? Must I open my belly for you to build your house upon?" Daho thereupon declared war upon Danh on the grounds that he had been insulted and, aided by the Uhwaweh [Wawe] people, totally routed the forced of Danh and took the latter prisoner....[he then killed his prisoner] and the foundation stone was laid over his corpse.[54]

Daho thus called his kingdom Dan-xo-mɛ, meaning, "Dan for the victim, xo meaning 'stomach,' and me [sic] meaning 'inside' in Fongbe, the branch of the Gbe language cluster spoken by Dahomeans." Specifically dating this event as occurring in 1625, Skertchly declares it fact, and the incident, a cornerstone of Dânxomɛ's founding. Monroe adds that this name "would forever memorialize the fact that the Fon rulers usurped autochthonous Guedevi 'rights of first arrival,' a guiding principle in the political organization of peoples across sub-Saharan Africa."[55]

Germane here is Suzanne Blier's assertion that both the unfortunate Dan and pre-Dânxom□, King Ouwebadja's mother (Aligbonu) were among the ancestors of the Bɔsikpɔnou.[56] Here, we again encounter some confusing terminology: contrary to Monroe's assertion that the Bɔsikpɔnou are Gedevi[57] (the group living on the plateau at the time of Fon conquest as "ayinou"--owners of the land[58]) the present day Bɔsikpɔnou themselves have told me that they were Ouemenou--that they came from the lower Ouémé River area north of Porto Novo.[59] However, the name Gedevi is both applied to a specific group and, according to Blier, was used as a general term "for those who left the Guinea Coast area from the port of Ouidah."[60] Further, before the Fon conquest, the Gedevi--in the narrow or broader sense, we are not sure--are named as having their own distinct leopard vodun.[61] To complicate matters further, and although most of the published accounts locate the Fon royal leopard-Princess Aligbonu myth as beginning

in Tado, there is much disagreement between scholars and others about the origin myth itself. (I have earlier referred to the possible coopting of that myth by the Fon from conquered Allada in Part I.) Blier references Maupoil, in his *Geomancie*, who clarifies: "the Kpo-vodun [the pre-Dânxom leopard vodun] should not be confused with the royal leopard of Abomey."[62] To quote Maupoil directly, in *Geomancie* he refers to the origins of that leopard as, "...le leopard, *tɔxwiɔ* bien postérieur d'un group dissident d'*Aja*...." (loosely, "...the leopard, founding ancestor well after [the appearance of] the dissident group of Adja...")[63] Further, as Blier points out, he not only says that "the Kpo-vodun [the pre-Dânxom leopard vodun] and the royal leopard of Abomey are distinctly different"; but Maupoil goes on to note that,

> Le lèopard-*vodū*.... Avant l'arrivée des *Aja* qui le prirent pour blason, était considéré comme une divinité par les *Gedevi*. Son culte se célèbre encore; il possede des *hūkpam* où les novices sont , et comme tous les *vodū, un roko.* Mais nul de doit prononcer le nom de *kpo-vodū*, car *Agasu* seul porter ce titre.[64]
>
> I translate loosely: The leopard vodun...Before the arrival of the Aja who took it as their symbol [coat of arms], it was considered a divinity by the Gedevi. Its cult is still observed; it possesses the *hūkpam* [convent] where the novices are, and like all the vodun, a roko [iroko or cotton tree, the ceiba in the Americas.] But one must not utter the name, kpo-vodun, because Agasu alone holds that title.

Not only is the nature of the "leopard-*vodū*" a source of much discussion, but its declared Gedevi association may confuse. While Blier has identified the pre-Dânxom leopard with the autochthonous Guedevi, she also notes the claim of the Bɔsikpɔnou, who deny they are Gedevi:

> The importance of this pre-Agasu leopard god is discussed by the residents of the area today....[says one informant,] 'It is not the same leopard, but it is also a leopard." says Victor Awesu, who resides *in Dokon where one of these early leopard temples (called Bɔsikpɔn) still exists* [emphasis mine] suggested [that, when Agasu arrived the two were merged...]
>
> When they brought [Agasu], Bɔsikpɔn had the power here, and one put [Agasu] in the temple of Bɔsikpɔn. Why were the two tohuio [tɔwixɔ, founding ancestors] put together? The other tohuio came to see the tohuio who existed here. The one who arrived did not yet have a place, thus the one who was here and who governed, one put the new one

beside him.[65]

Thus we can establish the fact that an earlier, distinct leopard spirit preceded the leopard ancestor of Dânxomɛ's royalty, in turn quite possibly cadged from conquered Allada peoples. Clearly, more research would be valuable here: in Dokon today, Bɔsikpɔnou apparently houses a "leopard temple" of the pre-Dânxomɛ version, as described by Maupoil above; if so, "Bɔsikpɔnou" would literally translate as "the people from the leopard temple."

Returning to my journal, the man who had left us so abruptly has finally returned with a fellow with a moto; following him, we walked back through the alley

> *... and into the dappled sun and shade, hop on the backs of the motos and ride off. We arrive at a set of walls painted with several vodun--notably Heviosso, a few other unfamiliar ones; and we are greeted pleasantly but coolly by a man in with a wrap around his waist who asks that we take off our shoes before entering. It is an open courtyard with one big tree [an iroko] in the middle, a piece of another downed tree, and a round building also in the middle which is "our couvent--" he says, our convent--where adepts stay in training. It is awfully small to house anyone, but the vodun are there at least, in a shrine. A small group of people are sitting around a very much older man, who is in the process of taking several medicines. They are waiting for young Bɔsikpon priest, Da Sovenɔ Alɔkpayi, son and successor to the now deceased priest whom Blier interviewed several years ago.*

Meeting the Dead

What I saw in that inner courtyard in Dokon was constructed much as the Bɔsikpɔn of Maupoil's description: a round building in the center, the iroko tree standing over it...

> *More waiting.... A group of men, including our guide, are lined up against the wall of the sanctuary and one gets up to tend to C., who is sniffling from what appears to be a very bad cold.*
>
> *To one side there is an odd arrangement of several mats over what appear to be two longish lumps. C. tries to explain that they are two adeptes who have died. Ceremonies will follow at a future date. Watching the sun creep slowly over what I imagine to be the corpses' toes, I wonder what effect the sun will have on the bodies. It can't be good. A small man in a yellow print arrives and sits to one side of the group, near the two lumps.*

> *Finally the Da arrives. He is tall, dark and has a very round, broad face. I proffered the usual courtesy--a liter of gin plus a 2000 CFA note, partly and neatly tucked under the bottom of the bottle. Apparently I get one question with a bunch of kibitzers along for the ride.*
>
> *Comment est la vodun arrivé?*
>
> *The Dah proceeds to give a lengthy dissertation on the wanderings of his group from Oueme--a river valley near Porto Novo--to downwind of Abomey and the then Gede occupants. He finally arrives, "We all came here to Dokon and the ancestors came with the voduns. The big tree here, it is an iroko, it was here when we came. All the voduns are here in Dokon[66], interred here; all the powers, and each has its priest. No one was here before us; it was just the bush. He motions to the lumps, "the Vodun killed them."*
>
> *This last statement refers to the two vodunsi qui "sont mortes."*
>
> *It is very close to my departure from Bénin, yet I have been invited to come to the "ceremony" (they do not use the term "funeral"); anyone who is vodunsi can attend [and I have been initiated into a Glovodun temple in Cotonou.] One does not have to be Bɔsikpɔn.*

That evening as Constant and I went over our notes, the full realization of what was going on in the Bɔsikpɔn became clear. For all my talk about metaphor and simile, I, in my naievete, had not grasped the full meaning of what the Da said. Those "lumps" as I had referred to them, were vodunsi--adepts--in a state of near death. No food. no water. They were to be left there, covered by the mats, then in two weeks there will be a ceremony in which the vodunsi will be "revieller" --awakened. When I asked Constant if the Da used some kind of medicine to effect this state, his reply was succinct: "Feuilles." (Herbs, that is.)

Now in the beginning chapter of her book, *Africa's Vodun*, Suzanne Blier discusses the Fon term *hun*, which she sees as "used a synonym for *vodun* in many contexts":

> Thus *fon hun* ("to awaken the *sacrâ or god")* is the *Fon* name for the ceremony to resuscitate a novice after this person's ritual death....*Hun kpame* ("fence of *hun*") is the convent [Maupoil spells it *hūkpamɛ*.] *Hun gan* ("chief of the *hun*") is the principal priest. *Hunsi* ("wife of *hun*") is the male or female novice.

She adds that the word has a number of ancillary meanings, including one for the "cotton tree," which I believe to be the Iroko; and she goes on to note that, whereas the word *vodun* is linked to calm, coolness, the word "*hun,* like the blood that pulses through the veins (and the rhythmic

beating of drums and bellow), carries with it a message of agitation and response."[67] In these two concepts we can see the balance of repose and acceptance with activity and response, perhaps a hint of the dynamics of *les voduns les tuent* (the vodun [who] kill the initiates,) then that of *revieller*, awakening. Furthermore, if my reading of Maupoil was correct, the spirit occupying the couvent--the *Hunkpame*--would be that of the leopard, indeed.

At the time of my stay in Bénin, Dr. Tim Landry, then a graduate student from the University of Illinois at Champagne was also in Bénin, doing research primarily in Ouidah. We would occasionally run into one another at overlapping functions. Landry had been initiated in Haiti as houngan; and, subsequently, in Bénin as Bokono/Babalawo in Fa/Ifa.[68] When he heard of my witnessing the Bɔsikpɔn ceremony, he remarked that it sounded like "zombification in Haiti," and said he has seen the powders for it. Now I had observed one odd fellow standing by the side of the road on the way to Glexwe (Ouidah); and another translator, whom Tim and I sometimes shared from the Glovodun community, pointed him out, saying that, in some people's view, the man might be considered *a dead person, a zombie*. Then she added, "but he is more likely just 'a crazy person'."[69] Nonetheless, her comments illustrate the fact that, even in Africa, the practice of the vodun "killing" a person has been largely cast in the framework of zombification, for the most part coming out of a stereotype of Haitian vodou.

In *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which made Wade Davis infamous in the late 80's for his studies of the suggested pharmacology of zombification, and in his more scholarly *Passage of Darkness*, even Davis points out that it is not pharmacology alone that can give a full picture of the phenomenon. Davis has made a number of valid points; and, again asserting that chemistry does not necessarily account for the zombism phenomenon, he notes that the person fingered to be "zombified" has behaved badly within a family and/or community context. Thus his/her state

is punishment:

> The victim has shared an uncompromised belief, engendered since childhood, that illness or death will befall anyone who transgresses the societal code of behavior; and his or her acceptance of the supernatural power behind the instigator of the curse is equally fixed and unshakeable. [70]

Indeed, in some manifestations, the darker side of that process was not unheard of in Bénin. For, the day after our first visit to the Bosikpon, we interviewed Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou, 92 years old, a priest and descendent of royalty who had, according to Constant, "tous les Tɔxɔsu (ancestral spirits) ici" (all the ancestral spirits [that are] here):

> ***Journal (Tuesday, JY 15--Cana)****: ...thinking of the "anti-feudalism" campaign of the Marxist-Leninist past President Kerekou, I asked him about sorcery--*
>
> *"is there sorcery here?"*
>
> *"Yes. They are bad, they use bad "bɔ"[--power objects constructed out of various objects, herbs, and other substances]…. To kill someone the sorcerers must first transform a person into an egg.... To protect yourself you need certain herbs, black soap with things put in it. " He takes a swipe at "Adjavodun" or Tron, the Glovodun folks, saying that they protect from sorcery but sometimes they bring harm so that you must spend a lot of money to undo or protect yourself from it.*
>
> *Here he goes on to add that the sorcerer will arouse the dead, Koulitɔ (he who is accustomed to walking on the road of the dead; that is, a dead person,) and use them to do evil.*

Da Agbanou does not specify if the aroused person has done anything to anger or hurt someone in the family or the community, nor if they are any kind of outcast. He has simply described different kinds of witchcraft, or sorcery.[71] The notion of bɔ, and its manufacture, is also pertinent; and on our next visit

> *someone has put a "bɔ" in the middle of the road...*
>
> *Why?*
>
> *Constant: Well, perhaps it is because someone is in the hospital after an accident and not doing well so they want to increase the chances of a speedy recovery. Or perhaps it is where a bad accident happened and they want to make sure another one doesn't happen there again.*
>
> *The "bɔ" is a sausage-shaped thing covered with white cloth, stuffed with some kind of*

> *herbs, no doubt, and daubed with red spots. Certain other herbs and broken pottery lie scattered around in careful randomness.*

This particular bɔ is in no way connected to the Bɔsikpɔnou; but the creation of bɔ, like the paquets Kongo, the pwen, the varied practices in the New World involve a bundle or hollow/ed receptacle filled with potent substances, even objects, in order to affect activity, change. Ergo, if the focus of power needs be rested upon the active to still them, or if it needs to be rested upon the still to awaken them--as Da Ahoussou's comments about the sorcerer's malevolent use of bɔ implies--am I sure there is no pharmacology of initiation with the Bɔsikpɔnou novices?

In Brazil, Candomblé Jeje has been identified as Candomblé with a Fon/vodun base; and Robert Voeks has noted that in Candomblé terreiros, "novices pass their months of initiation sleeping on beds of sacred leaves and learning the fundamentals of their religion." In another instance, Voeks cites the effect of herbs in an herbal bath that is part of the initiation: "the leaf bath has a profound psychological impact. Years after initiation has been completed, just the aroma of this leaf combination can induce possession trance."[72] In Bénin, the "feuilles"--literally, leaves--that Constant referred to at my initial questioning above, do they effect the "death" of Bɔsikpɔnou initiates?[73] Their priest denied the use of herbs when I asked him directly and indicated that it was all in the ritual. In terms of aesthetics Blier has written brilliantly of bɔ, in particular; but more investigation of that and "fueilles," here and in terms of spirit, is waiting.

However, the comparison of raising up someone from the dead "to do evil" and the awakening of the Bɔsikpon adepts ends here. The bodies under the Bɔsikpon mats were not being punished, nor had they been ostracized for anti-social behavior, as Davis suggested is the case with Haitian "dead." No one indicates that they were crazed, nor gone beserk. They are not zombies. No, the Bɔsikpon "dead" are undergoing this process as part of their initiation, as part of their *joining* a community and, one might add, sustaining it. At the time, I had not heard of

other similar initiations: I have since been told by Constant that, "il y a le vodun Sakpata aussi qui tue ses adeptes comme ca et apres les cérémonies les prêtres réveillent encore le mort" ("There is also the vodun Sakpata also who kills his adepts like that, and afterwards ceremonies [when] the priests raise them from the dead.") It is a similar "killing" by Sakpata as part of initiation.[74]

Shortly after returning to Cotonou, Constant called me to say that the vodunsi at the Bosikpon would be awakened on the 26th. I am invited to attend.

Entering Sacred Space

With my friend and research assistant in Cotonou, Rufin Ahandessi, I leave Cotonou very early via taxi collectif, and, after a fairly dreadful ride--ten people in a small sedan on very rough roads--we arrive three hours late in Agbomɛ.

> ***Journal (Saturday, July 26: Agbomɛ:*** *Dear deeply Catholic Rufin had said he was not much interested in vodun but, in meeting Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou who, R. says, must have "histoires inestimables pour répéter."* [invaluable stories to tell.] *(Da Ahoussou, as I reminded him, is a vodun priest: "Don't worry I can keep the religion and the orature separate.")*
>
> *To my surprise, he* does *want to come along to the Awakening. And by that time we get going, it is about 10 or 11 at night. We ride over eroded dirt roads, two motos in tandem, the erosion carved even deeper by recent torrents, out into the countryside and then onto a path with corn and cassava leaning into it, heavy with water. Brushing the water off in little showers as we pass, we arrive at a clearing. Where are we? I ask.*
>
> *The Da's house.*

About to see something which folds into history and myth, I find confirmation in Monroe's interesting statement of "how historical memory is rendered through spatial practice, an observation with significant implications for our understanding of both the possibilities for, and limits to, political authority in the past "[75] The way in to the Bɔsikpɔn seemed a maze, very roughly, like concentric circles, or, at the least, spaces within spaces. We approached an outer space, entered a space next to the walled-in spot where the ceremony will take place and where

the small round *couvent* stands under the shelter of the iroko tree. However unconsciously, the spatial arrangements remind us that we are only visitors and that our presence is only suffered by a host whose power, here, exceeds ours. I would be lost finding my way out.

Entering, we must once more acknowledge the authority of the priest:[76]

We follow C. through the corridors between low buildings to a door, knock, and are welcomed into a small sitting room, nothing fancy except for a huge, full-length portrait of Da Sovenɔ Alɔkpayi in his priestly finery, with a woman on her knees beside him. He gives us his card: he is both priest and herbalist.

When we offer the customary alcohol, we hit a snag: the Da Sovenɔ does not like the brand. Essentially, C. has bought the cheapest local everything; local firewater, ok, but what is this Beninois whisky, this Dahomey gin? He retreats into his private quarters and brings out a green bottle of imported gin. Constant is resistant--"Da," he begins. I don't understand the Fonbe Da Sovenɔ is speaking, but I feel as though I get the sense of it. R. enters into the discussion. What I believe is happening is that the Da is welcoming other priests to this ceremony and he would like to make a good impression--local booze won't. I can see his point; and Rufin, ever the diplomat, negotiates the change, getting Constant to go back out with a bit of added cash, and get the acceptable kind. Which he does.

In the interim, R. translates for me until we are interrupted by a young man who has evidently just returned home ("I am Bɔskipɔnou") from the U.S. and speaks English, but seems a bit daft.

After the appropriate spirits (alcoholic) are presented, we must wait, as we need a clear indication that the rain has stopped before the ceremony can begin. We are offered lazy-boys to rest in, and at some point nearly the whole room seems to be dozing.

In between the difficult sleep--like sleeping in an airplane, R. says--the rain begins to diminish, start up, then apparently stop.

Writing of the "cool" side of vodun philosophy, Blier is reminiscent of Robert Farris Thompson duscussing this virtue in connection with Yoruba religious philosophies[77]; going on, in her exploration of the varied definitions of vodun, Blier has referred to "the Fon term for pool, *do* (that which one should sit calmly beside in waiting for what life offers.)"[78] In a sense, what we experienced, long wait though it was, was our silence, our meditative rest before the activity commenced:

tng, TNG tng, TNG tng, TNG The faint bell-like sound of an ago-ago, a twinned gong

being struck in the dark. It is time. Three forty-five in the morning; we rouse ourselves, stand up, file outside, follow the group between the buildings and enter the courtyard in the silence of the rain's aftermath and the presence of the bell tng, TNG tng, TNG tng, TNG ...Then a sing-song chant,[79] vocally much like the bell's sound, with a recitatif in between.

The only sound, as we rise to exit and join the others, is the shuffle of feet, shoeless now, as we are entering sacred space.

Bɔsikpɔnou faithful en route to the "reveiller" of new initiates. (my photo 26.07.08)

The Awakening

Inside the walls, I can see that the light is not good for photographs. We still get intermittent raindrops; but the air is fresh and the small crowd, respectful and focused. The mats are being symbolically swept with live chickens, held by the feet--one, two, three women in wraps sweeping them up and down the length of the mats. The birds will not be sacrificed. A man stands at one end, and occasionally in my way, though it is not clear exactly what his function is. He throws a small bagful of corn kernels over the mat, says some things in a language I cannot understand. At the head of the mats the Da, too, has thrown something from a bag that of the same small size; then he goes and sits down along with the visiting priests. The gong--tng TNG , tng TNG--continues to mark the rhythm of a chorus which, C. later reveals, is calling on the 'corpses' ("they continue to refer to them as 'dead' ") to wake. In the background are the peeping of the chickens, who sound like chicks, not grown birds. It is all a very formal yet gentle process.

When interviewing the Da, before the ceremony, I had asked what happened to the novices for those long two weeks. He replied that their souls went to "another place" where they learned about their religion. Presumably that "other place" was, in emic terms, a world of the spirits.

Stroking mats with live chickens. Underneath lie the Bɔsikponou initiates "killed" by the vodun. (my photo)

The novices, awaking. *(ibid)*

Soon the mats begin to heave. Some people, in a group, come close and bow, kissing the ground. The women who have been working with the chickens crowd around the mat as one brown, sand-covered head emerges, then another, then another. [There are three, not two, initiates as I first imagined.] The vodunsi--the initiates--crawl around on all fours, disoriented, a bit agitated it seems, as the women contain their movements by surrounding them, they stand, fixing their dusty wraps around themselves and process around the couvent, the little round building in the center. The women who are containing their activity process behind and before them. Each time, the vodunsi make the turn, they have been cleaned up a bit more; their skin glistens with oil--coconut oil, C. says, not huile de palme*--and then, with others in the lead they start the* agbaja*, the palms down, hips out to the rear, the sacred dance. The drummers beat more vigorously and soon members of the audience are also taking turns doing the dance. Then the elders, the same women who have been helping all along, process with clay containers of "tisane" and with a garland of palm fronds around each pottery neck; and I suddenly flash on that same kind of necklace being put around a Glovudun acquaintance, Sebastian's, neck as, upon reaching another stage in his initiatory process, he grinned happily ear to ear in Aziza's garden behind Papa, our priest's, temple.*

Constant's emphasized assurance that the oil used on the dry skin of the emerging novices is huile de coco, *not* huile de palme, is interesting. I wondered if palm oil was simply not deemed

"pure" enough for the initiates[80], or if in some way the ceremony predated the value or certain uses of the oil and, perhaps, the theological revisions that accompanied Fon raids and rule. Perhaps it was simply too much of a luxury item.

> *What is strikingly different from Papa's temple* [where I was initiated]*--other than the variation in the constellation of beliefs--what is striking is the clear difference of class. The Bɔsikpɔnou are dressed very simply. They are not wealthy. While the priests have some rather interesting hand carved sticks, they wear simple wraps around their waists, white brimless hats, t-shirts: women wear the kinds of patterned clothes you see on the everyday person in Benin; the men, old windbreakers against the rain, or an occasional piece of cloth thrown over their shoulders. Despite the Da Sovenɔ's full length portrait in his living room, there are no cheap reproductions of the symbols of Agbomɛ royalty in his courtyard. The repartee between various officiants and the people is about the simple exigencies of life--humor to ease the tension of the crowd, R. points out, the barrier between person in front of the group and the group broken down by humor, between the drummers and the priests, and so on. Money is collected for the parents of those who are the new initiates: one young man who turns out to be the son of the Da, and two women, who are in turn young adults, not children; and the amount does not compete with what Papa's vodunsi altar boys take up in one Sunday.*

It is impossible to avoid the issue of class, even here, in religion. The legacy of a highly stratified and structured society during the time of the Dânxomɛan Royaume seems to persist, despite Kerekou's quasi-Marxist regime and the subsequent incursions of democratic reforms: the gap between commoner and nobility of older times, the country vs. city, Western education and their intertwining synergies or lack thereof--all these have cast a long shadow indeed. Andrew Apter, in his "On African Origins: Creolization and Conaissance in Haitian Vodou," argues for the creolized and commoner status of Petwo, for example--especially of the secret societies like Bizango, and the more elite status of the Rada groups in what he sees as a reversal of original (if one can hazard such a term) West African class status. Whether this is accurate may spark a number of debates and requires more careful examination exceeding this discussion; however, the point is that class divisions do exist and, to some are very obvious, both in vodou and vodun.[81]

> *The vodunsi will go to the couvent--"convent,"--another couvent behind one of the walls, where they will reflect and learn more about their religion, remaining cloistered there for 6 – 7 months. Then there will be a really big ceremony, says the Da--you can come if*

you like.

After some more dancing and fundraising, it is time to go home. You thank Da Sovenɔ profusely and we leave. It is six in the morning, the dull sky makes it seem earlier; and you hear the countryside's roosters beginning their morning call. We slip down the path on our respective motos, veering off occasionally to make room for people in their wraps walking down the path. When you get back to your rooms you collapse in your respective beds, so exhausted you cannot even dream.

What is glaringly unique about the Bɔsikpɔnou ceremony, however, is its non-connection with any allegations that the initiates are or were in a state of "zombification." Those undergoing the Bɔsikpɔnou ceremony are anything but pariahs to their community--quite the opposite--and their initiation will place them at its heart. They will have privileged access to its accumulated wisdom. They will be a precious resource.

Da Sovenɔ, who bears the financial burden for their care while in the convent, has said that he must keep careful watch over his intiates--no one must touch them, and it is possible that someone with ill-intent could interrupt the process, that a sorcerer could. When you think of someone who has had their soul deliberately stolen, who is virtually without will or intention, you do not think of these young people. Disoriented and a little confused at first, they came to clear though reflective consciousness within the caring circle of a community; whereas the zombie is isolated, held in thrall, away from any kind of fellowship except cruel dominion.

You have a feeling that the mechanics of that long journey, that long slumber, and the awakening which you saw are not the point. Joseph, whom you meet two days later, says, "you are extraordinarily lucky to have been able to see that. It doesn't happen very often any more." I believe he is right.

"You have gotten the sense of the heart of people here," he adds.

Were I Wade Davis, I would be trying to find out about those "feuilles": how were these initiates "killed" by the vodun? But I sense this is the wrong question. It is not the mechanics; it is something else.

Roberto Strongman at UC Santa Barbara writes of the phenomenon of transcorporeality in Haitian Vodou, as opposed to African vodun, and compares both to what he sees as the Cartesian, Western view of the unitary soul inside, hermetically sealed off from the body and its

temporal seductions (perhaps we can hazard renaming it "the Self"). He believes that, in contrast, there are the multiple souls/selves in Afro-Diasporic thought. Strongman quotes Guérin Montilius, who locates the origin of the multiplicity of the self as coming from Africa:

> The vodu religon 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 survivies 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 the Ancestors, which constitutes the extended family and the clan in their spiritual dimensions.

Strongman's point is useful, though flawed; and, rather than debate authenticity, I would say that there is evidence in West Africa of belief in multiple (and mobile) souls/selves quite unlike the monolithic soul of Western philosophy. For our purposes, it is necessary to consider the more complex configuration of the soul(s) in Haitian vodou, especially the *ti bon ange* and *gros bon ange*; and Wade Davis does it most thoroughly, beginning with the explanation that "the human form is by no means just an empty vessel for the gods." Rather, the "the basic components of man [sic]"...are "the z'etoile, the gros bon ange, the ti bon ange, the n'âme, and the corps cadavre." The last two refer to the "body itself, the flesh and the blood [corps cadavre.] The n'âme is the spirit..." that both animates the flesh and helps the flesh retain its form after death. According to Davis, the etoile is the star of destiny which, for each person, resides in the sky; and finally, is the "ti bon ange, the "little good angel,"

> is that part of the soul directly associated with the individual...the gros bon ange provides each person with the power to act, [and] it is the ti bon ange that molds the individual sentiments within each act. It is one's aura, and the source of all personality, character, and willpower.

Davis goes on to explain that the *ti bon ange* is both that which is displaced during possession,

which can travel when we sleep, and when we pass on, and that which is the target of sorcery and must, consequently, be protected.[82]

It is quite likely that such divisions of self/soul do indeed represent a long, probably creolized African history of thinking about the soul (the reader is again cautioned against assuming that African vodun and Haitian vodou are, ipso facto, absolutely alike in their present metaphors for soul/s.) What Strongman and his sources do suggest, in accounting for possession and trance (and what Davis amplifies, at least in terms of Haitian vodou,) is that African-based religions conceive of the body "as a concavity upholding a self that is removeable, external and multiple."[83] Point well taken. In short, a self or selves, in this view, can vacate the body to allow the vodun to occupy it, not only to use it, but to replenish it. Perhaps that, too, is a metaphor--for endurance, for knowledge, for regaining agency taken snatched by the forces of injustice.

Metaphor of the Missile

When Professor Kamau Brathwaite first lectured on his symbols for certain civilizations, I must admit that I thought the missile an ironic but fitting symbol for the so-called West, a capsule thrusting itself into others' territories in the most intrusive way. Brathwaite is a poet, after all; and he began thinking about this in response to his dismay at the disjuncture between what the Renaissance produced in the West and what people from that time and place did to Africa and to the Americas upon "discovering" them. What Brathwaite suggested was that, "The Euromissile arrived, pushed off from the launching pad. In the crossing, things are turned upside down and inside out."[84]

The metaphor is simple, oddly naive. As I suggested, in Part I, the imposition of theological changes which supported Dânxomɛan hierarchy, to extend this metaphor, provided a launching pad for the Euromissile. Passengers were on a one-way trip: adepts of Sakpata, of Dan

the rainbow serpent of Yoruba-speakers and their neighbors, among people whose dissident views would ultimately provide fuel for the first successful black revolution on the planet. The collective trauma of the passage, its occupants also having to pass through “the limbo Gateway,” as Guyanese writer, Wilson Harris, has called it, created its distortions, as well.[85] Legba was there somewhere, one hoped.

If we are to believe Da Aganou, some persons would have come already equipped to do harm. The navigators were of no help, and little did they realize that their center would not hold. As the missile turned, some practitioners’ goodness soured. Power alone became an exhilarating force. Witchcraft deepened. Sometimes, in the crossing, things got turned around: and perhaps that in itself signifies the reversal that Apter speaks of, the creolized and commoner status of Petwo, of the secret societies, the more elite status of the Rada groups in a reversal of original West African class.[86] The Renaissance becomes a nightmare, an "alter-Renaissance"; “zombification" --the reverse of initiation--and sorcery recreate the experience of enslaving/ enslavement and leads to the death of soul. Despair came mixed with hope:

- Dan separates into two genders and his wife becomes Ayida Wedo.
- Dan, the rainbow serpent becomes a bridge back home.
- Gede gets bawdy and raucous and becomes guardian of the cemetery.
- Among most vodunsi, adherents of other African based beliefs, faiths were forged *in community,* and that got them through and sustained them.

Not all that made the crossing was turned upside down; and thus, other practices have evolved in which initiation and spiritual education lead to life of the soul.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Price, Richard and Sally Price, *The Root of Roots,* (Chicago: The Prickly Paradigm Press), 2003. Like the Prices, Olabiyi Yai has mounted a similar critique of the Herskovits' rather simplistic assumptions in his "The Path is Open: The Legacy of Melville and Frances Herskovits in African Oral Narrative Analysis," in *Research in African Literatures*, volume 30, Number 2, Summer 1999, 1 - 16. Let it be remembered that the Herskovits primary African research was conducted in Bénin when it was the French colony of Dahomey.

[2] The Fongbe pronunciation of the "ou" sound in the word requires a nasalized "ou" in which a virtual "n" sound terminates the word.

[3] Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits., *Dahomean Narrative*: A Cross-Cultural Analysis, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press), 1958, 167.

[4] Edna Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey,* (Charlottesville & London: The University of North Carolina Press), 1998, 56 ff. Not until 70 years later, in King Gezo's time, in 1823, that Dânxomɛ finally defeated Oyo and ceased paying tribute: see Law, Robin, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port' 1727 -1892,* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press; Oxford: James Currey), 2004, 60.

[5] A revisionist version of this period has Dânxomɛ waging war to reduce the loss of fellow Dânxomɛans to the slave trade. See Mazrui, Ali Al'Amin, *The African Predicament and the American Experience: A Tale of Two Eden*s, (New York: Praeger), 2004, 12. See also, Bay, *Wives,* 57: she cites John Atkins, a doctor accompanying a slave-trading mission, as subscribing to this view. Sadly, and with few qualms, Dânxomɛ (and the Huedans before them) did send their fellows across the ocean.

[6] Bay, *Wives,* 56 ff.; Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving Port;1727 – 1892,* (Athens: Ohio University Press; Oxford: James Currey), 2004, 71.

[7] Law, *Ouidah,* 66 ff.; Bay, *Wives,* 56 ff.

[8] "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey," in *the Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue in Honour of J.D. Fagel (1986), 253 – 254.

[9] "History and Legitimacy: Aspects of the Use of the Past in Precolonial Dahomey," in *History in Africa*, Vol. 15 (1988), 434- 50; "Dahomey and the Slave Trade," 253 -254. A leopard features in other versions.

[10] See Bay, *Wives,* 75 - 77; Suzanne Preston Blier, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power,* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 1995, 321 371 n. 29.

[11] Bay *Wives*, 76; 330 n. 24.

[12] Law, "History and Legitimacy," 441.

[13] Bay, *Wives,* 82, 84. 92. The inclusion of Sakpata (Shoshonna) is, again, mystifying, as he clearly existed in southern Bénin before Tegbesu and Ajaja. Perhaps what Tegbesu brought was a Shosonna-inflection to the pre-existing spirit, one more friendly to Dânxomɛ's new royalty.

[14] *Ibid.* As a consequence, it seems clear, these spirits made their way to the Americas.

[15] Law, " Ideologies of Royal Power: The Dissolution and Reconstruction of Political Authority on the 'Slave Coast', 1680-1750," in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (1987), 330.

[16] "Defying Social Death: The Multiple Configurations of African Slave Family in the Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 2, Centering Families in Atlantic Histories (April 2013), 257.

[17] Yai, Olabiyi, "From Vodun to Mawu: monotheism and history in the Fon cultural area," in *L'Invention religieuse en Afrique; Histoire et religion en Afrique noire*, ed. Jean Pierre Chrétien. (Paris: Éditions KARTHALA), 1993, 259. Many captives were Maxi, often adepts of a Yoruba-inflected manifestation of Dan. Here, Yai, mentions this, suggesting that the destination of such folk may also have been Brazil, not just Haiti. Indeed, subsequent research has amply demonstrated a Nâgo/Yoruba presence in Brazil where vodun inflections were called "Jeje."

[18] Law, *Ouidah*,78.

[19] "The Jeje Pantheon" in *The Formation of Candomblé*, (Charlottesville & London: University of North Carolina), 2013, 208.

[20] Qtd. in *Ibid*, 210.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] "From Vodun to Mawu," 256 - 257. I would also clarify: Nesuxwe are royal ancestors; tɔxɔsu are specifically the vodun of royal children who are so malformed that they could not live *ex utero* or have died soon after birth. Profoundly defective and powerful, they are regarded as having special powers.

[23] Bay, *Wives*, 95; Yai, *"*From Vodun to Mawu*,"* 254, 257.

[24] Law, "*Ideologies,"* 330.

[25] Professor Brathwaite communicated this notion to me as his G.A., over several years, roughly from 2000 – 2004. Though outside the scope of this chapter, it is also noteworthy that Mawu was later seized upon by Christian missionaries by way of demonstrating that the people of Dânxomɛ had a god-over-all comparable to the Abrahamic monotheistic God and that this could be manipulated for conversion purposes. Repeatedly, I heard about Mawu as god in the singular, over all, in Agbomɛ and in interviews with Papa, of my Glovodun temple in Cotonou. Yai asserts that "Mawu is now used everywhere to designate the concept of God." ("Vodun to Mawu," 242.)

[26] Please note that the word "voodoo" is no longer in use. It only appears in this essay when directly quoting a source which still uses it.

[27] "Caribbean Religion: The Voodoo Case," *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1977) , 28.

[28] Author's interview with the assistance of Constant Legonou, 13.07.08.

[29] Practices regarding slaves who did not make the Middle Passage varied from benign to horrid; and should a reader think that this was always a more felicitous arrangement, consider what Orlando Patterson has said. After naming numerous plantation type slavery systems, he notes among them: "in the royal slave plantations of nineteenth century Dahomey and the modern Americas [was where] the spiritual, social, and material condition of slaves reached its lowest level." in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.)1982, 181.

[30] Law. *Ouidah,* 90. Law dates this from his own fieldwork there in 2000.

[31] Parés, Luis Nicolau, "The Jeje Pantheon and Its Transformations," in *The Formation of Candomblé,* 210. Further, the category "public" seems to be the same as the "inter-ethnic" spirits, quite a number of which are noted as Yoruba in origin; see Guy Ossito Médiohouan, "Vodoun et littérature au Bénin," in *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, Vol.27, No. 2, (1993,) 246 – 247.

[32] Hebblethwaite, Benjamin and Joanne Bartley, Appendix A: "Dictionary of Vodou Terms" in *Voudou Songs in Haitian Creole and English*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,) 2012, 220 – 221; Yai. "Mawu to Monotheism," 261.

[33] Hougan Tim Landry, email communication, 19.10.14.

[34] "Dictionary of Vodou Terms," 224, 232.

[35] Law. *Ouidah*, 91. Mahi was a separate territory adjacent and to the northeast of Dânxomɛ, and a frequent source of captives for the Royaume. Also suggested, is Yoruba influence for Aido Wedo, the Rainbow Serpent, Dan.

[36] Most unusual, during my stay in Bénin, I visited a Dan temple in Ouidah in which, I was told, was housed the family vodun of the da Souza clan. On the wall was a simple painting of a boat with a man steering and, in the middle, a serpent, upright on top of what looks like a large anthill: I was told that the serpent represented a Brazilian indigenous serpent cult, as the original da Souza was métis--part "Indian"--and that he had brought back the indigenous serpent to worship in Ouidah. It was described as a "rainbow serpent" brought in the reverse direction and inspiring the vodun in Dânxomɛ. Martine da Souza, personal communication, 05.04.14.

[37] Interview with *Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou*, with the assistance of Constant Legonou. 12.07.08.

[38] C.L.R. James. *Black Jacobins*. (New York: Vintage Press), 1963, 55 -56; Roberts, Kevin. "The Influential Yoruba Past in Haiti," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World.* ed. Toyin Falola, Matt D. Childs. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 2004, 177. Both Law and Nicolau Parés argue that establishing who was "Yoruba" was a bit difficult, as the European chroniclers who reported ethnicity were generally abysmally ignorant of West African languages, let alone how people named themselves as a group. See Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of "Mina" (Again)," in *History in Africa*, Vol. 32 (2005), 247-267, and Parés, "The 'Nagôization' Process in Bahian Candomblé," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, 185 – 208.

[39] *Wives,* 253.

[40] Parés, "The Jeje Pantheon," 210-211.

[41] Qtd. in Bay, *Wives,* 94 -95.

[42] Hougan Tim Landry, email communication. 19.10.14.

[43] Bay, *Belief, Legitimacy and the Kpojito*, 7 – 8.

[44] "The Jeje Pantheon," 210-211.

[45] *Wives,* 256 – 257

[46] Note: all Journal entries will be in italics to indicate that these are not citations from another's work. The "C." is for Constant Legonou, mentioned previously as my informant in Agbomɛ. He is a direct descendent of one of the early Dânxomɛan court priests. "R." is for Rufin Ahandessi, a much appreciated research assistant and friend. The "ou" at the end of a word indicates "from," as in from the place of.

[47] Herskovits, Melville J., "Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology," in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Jul., 1932), 296

[48] Parés, Luis Nicolau, "Between Two Coasts: Nations, Ethnicities, Ports, and the Slave Trade," in *The Formation of Candomblé*: *Vodun History and Ritual in Brazil,* (Charlottesville & London: The University of North Carolina Press), 2013, 14 -16.

[49] Parés, Luis Nicolau, "The Jeje Pantheon," 218 – 219.

[50] *Voudou Songs,* 301. Hebblethwaite also states that vodunò is the only term referring to vodun priests in Bénin, although I have experienced the terminology as more varied.

[51] Bay, *Wives,* 48.

[52] *Ibid,* 47.

[53] Norman, Neil L. and Kenneth G. Kelly, "Landscape Politics: The Serpent Ditch and the Rainbow in West Africa," in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Mar., 2004), 189.

[54] *Dahomey As It Is: Being A Narrative of Eight Months Residence In That Country*, (London: Chapman and Hall), 1874, 86 – 87. J. Cameron Monroe has quoted this, in part, in his "In the Belly of Dan: Space, History, and Power in Precolonial Dahomey," in *Current Anthropology* Volume 52, Number 6, December 2011, 769. but I think it is instructive to include the original and full quote.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Blier, Suzanne Preston, "The Path of the Leopard: Motherhood and Majesty in Early Danhomè" in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (1995), 395.

[57] "In the Belly of Dan,*"* 769 n. 1. The author says that Skertchly and his contemporaries "attribute this event to the reign of King Wegbaja." As I have quoted Skertchly directly, it should be clear that that is not the case.

[58] Blier. "Path," 400.

[59] Interview with *Da Sovenɔ Alɔkpayi*, with the assistance of Constant Legonou. 14.07.08.

[60] *African Vodun*, 368 n.1.

[61] "Path," 400, n. 27. Blier notes that even Sir Richard Burton, who spent time in the kingdom, alludes to this pre-Dânxomɛ leopard cult.

[62] Qtd. in "Path," 397 – 401

[63] *La Géomancie à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves, (*Paris: Institute d'Ethnoligie, Musée de l'Homme.) 1961, 429 n. I.

[64] *Ibid*, 530- 531 n. 2.

[65] "Path," 400 – 401.

[66] As noted above, "Yehwe" is also sometimes used interchangeably with "vodun", to signify *all* vodun.

[67] *African Vodun,* 46 – 47.

[68] email communication, 19.10.14.

[69] Martine da Souza, personal communication, 04.08.08.

[70] *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press), 1988, (Kindle location 2307,) *Kindle edition.*

[71] Da Agbanou Lonyi Ahoussou, with the assistance of Constant Legonou. 15.07.08. Over the time I spent with the Glovodun adepts, in fact, I had also heard gossip about witches who capture children; I had not heard of transforming someone into an egg so as to kill them; and the Da's account of arousing a dead person was the first, and only, time I had heard that mentioned in an African context.

[72] Voeks, Robert A. *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, medicine, and religion in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1997, 67, 95. I have experienced more than one leaf bath in both of my initiations; and, though the experience was profound, and quite beautiful, though as far as I know, no possession trance was induced.

[73] Interview with *Da Sovenɔ Alɔkpayi*, with the assistance of Constant Legonou. 26.07.08. The Da says he uses no herbs.

[74] email communication, 23.09.14.

[75] "In the Belly of Dan," 772.

[76] *Da Sovenɔ Alɔkpayi*, with the assistance of Constant Legonou. 27.07.08.

[77] See Robert Farris Thompson's classic *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. (New York: Vintage Books), 1984.

[78] *African Vodun* 373 n. 43.

[79] Blier, in "Path", 409 n. 69 asserts that Gun ("Hogbonu" in Fongbe) is the liturgical language of Bɔsikpɔn adepts. This might make sense, given their claim to have migrated from Oueme not too far from Porto Novo where Gun is still spoken.

[80] Palm oil has had an unsavory connection with the Saharan Slave Trade; but when the British Industrial Revolution demanded the oil for candlemaking and as a lubricant for their machines, the British began to push for the development of palm oil plantations as an alternative to profits from the Transatlantic Trade. The profits were not as great as for the trade in human beings; nor did the British realize that this crop was farmed and harvested by forced labor as well *The Cambridge World History of Food*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 397.

[81] Andrew Apter, "On African Origins: Creolization and Conaissance in Haitian Vodou," in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (May, 2002), 233-260.

[82] *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Kindle Locations 2087 – 2090, 2098, 2101-2103). *Kindle Edition*.

[83] Roberto Strongman, "Transcorporeality in Vodou," in *Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 2008), pp. 4-29, 27.

[84] Personal communication of several years with Kamau Brathwaite; latest discussion 04.06.10.

[85] See Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, Ed. Andrew Bundy(London: Routledge), 1999.

[86] Andrew Apter, "Creolization and Conaissance in Haitian Vodou," 233-260.