African Religions in the Caribbean: Continuity and Change

by John Mason

The rivers Niger and Kongo flowed out of Africa and joined sea currents in carrying millions of captive fathers and mothers, sons and daughters across the Atlantic and depositing them on deathcamp shores all over the Americas. These Africans became one with the rich soil and provided the fertile cultural base for their seed togrow in and thrive.

Beginning in the early sixteenth century and continuing, officially, until 1845 in Brasil, 1862 in the United States, and 1865 in Cuba, more than eleven million Black Africans-Yorùbá,[1] Kongo, and other West Africans-were brought into the Americas as slaves. These West African slaves, and their free descendents, taken to work the sugar, tobacco, coffee, rice, and cotton plantations of the Americas, have been preserving and rethinking the fundamental cultural heirlooms that they carried into captivity. The resurrection and application of these ancient and sacred templates assured remembrance and reglorification of the past, endurance in the present, and augmentation in the future.

With the exception of the Africans in Haiti, who created a revolution in 1791 and established the first African republic in the Americas in 1804, Africans gained their emancipation in the Americas in the following order: Jamaica-1838; Trinidad-1838; United States-1863; Puerto Rico-1873; Cuba-1886, Brasil-1888.

Of all the Africans taken to the Americas as slaves it is estimated that ninety-nine per cent[2] came from a corridor approximately seven hundred miles wide by four thousand three hundred miles long[3], on the west coast of Africa, stretching from

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[1] "The term Yorùbá' as a cultural designation dates only to mid-nineteenth century colonialism (Law, 1977, p.5). Individuals identify first and foremost with their hometowns or areas, and being Yorùbá only in relation to outsiders (M.T.Drewal, 1988, p.1)." The more ancient designation 'Lùkù mí was and is still used by the Yorùbá and their descendents in Cuba. Ulli Beier states,"We find it
(Olùkùmí-my friend) on several ancient maps of West Africa where the kingdom of Ulcumi or Lucumi or Ulcami is shown to the north-west of the kingdom of Benin (map). It appears that this was the name under which the early travellers knew the Yorùbá kingdom. It is quite well known, of course, that the term Yorùbá has only of late been used as the common denomination for the Ọ̀yọ́, Ẹ̀gbá, Ìjẹ̀bu, Èkìtì, etc., as the result of the efforts of the Anglican mission in Abẹ́òkúta to create a written language based on the Ọ̀yọ́ dialect (Beier, 1958, pp.238-40)." It appears clear from travellers reporting in the mid-seventeenth century that the lingua franca of the Aja of Dahomey and Nigeria was 'Lùkùmí which is undoubtedly the Yorùbá language (Ajayi, 1976, p.373).

[2] Ibid., p.157.

[3] The distance from Boston, Massachusetts to San Francisco, California is 3,128 miles, and from New Orleans, Louisiana to Louisville, Kentucky is 701 miles.

modern-day Senegal and Mali in the north to Zaire and Angola in the south. This corridor encompasses a multitude of diverse ethnic and national groups all belongin g
to the Niger-Kongo language subfamily, which has its ancient homeland in West Africa.[4] The commonality of ancient language base and woodland tradition promoted the movement and exchange of peoples, goods, ideas in this corridor and aided in the ancient formation of fundamentally similar concepts about God, the universe, social order, and man's place in that order. This millenniums old familiarity was to play a very important role in easing the pains caused by the forced proximity of slavery and the resulting acceleration and distortions of already on-going cultural fusions so vitally necessary to survival and growth in the killing fields of the Americas.

In Jamaica, the Kongo and Yorùbá each accounted for seventeen percent of the African population; while the Akan and Kalabari peoples respectively accounted for twenty-five and thirty percent of that population. It is estimated that in Haiti/Santo Domingo and Cuba some forty percent of those African populations wer ecomposed of Kongo ethnic groups, while fifteen and forty percent respectively of t heHaitian and Cuban Africans were Yorùbá and other related ethnic groups shipped

from the Bight of Benin on Africa's west coast. In the United States, one out of every four African Americans is of Kongo descent and one in every seven is of Yorùbá descent.[5]

Yorùbá are called by different names in various countries. In Brasil, Yorùbá descendents are known as the Nàgó or the Jẹ̀jẹ̀. The Yorùbá are also known as the Nàgó in Haiti. In Trinidad the Yorùbá are called by the name of one of their ancient, deified kings and national heros, Ṣàngó/Shango. In Cuba there are several hundred thousand Yorùbá descendents known as the 'Lùkùmí. The term 'Lukumi (Olùkùmí-my friend) is an ancient name that describes not only the Yorùbá language but also those Africans and their descendents who clearly distinguish themselves as belonging to one of the following ethnic groups: Nàgó, Ẹ̀gbá, Ẹ̀gbádò, Ìjẹ̀ṣà,Ọ̀yọ́,Ìjẹ̀bu.

Also of great importance to this study are the Africans that were brought from Dahomey-the Mahi of the city of Savalu, on the Agbado river, who still are called Mahino, the Arará of Allada, and the Fọ̀n/Dahome of Àgbòmé- who all actively contributed to the restoration and expansion of 'Lùkùmí-Aja culture in Cuba and Haiti and influenced the formation of African culture in Jamaica.

At all times Africans thoughtfully and actively resisted the cultural oppression of the whites. They resisted in the ways they prepared their food, in the colors they selected to wear, the style of houses they built, the way they talked, the music the ymade, the songs they sang, the dances they danced, and the images of God they clung to and re-created. The misinformed use the word syncretism to describe this process when it would be more appropriate to use the term transfiguratívism.

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[4] Cultural Atlas of Africa, ed. by J.Murray, New York: 1981, p.24.

[5] P.Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1969, pp.122-1 98.

The African's presence and resistance has left a vast and indelible imprint on the economic, social, ethnic, cultural, artistic, and religious structure of the Americas in particular and the world at large. This essay will provide an encapsulated review of the religious traditions of Africans in Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad.

Of all the weapons employed in the counter-punching of this transcultural war being waged by Africans in the Americas, **ART has proven to be the most offensively effective**. African art can be argued to be the fundamental springboa rdfor all significant innovations in Western art in the past three centuries. This is unquestionably true of African music, with Yorùbá and Kongo music leading the vangaurd. Negro spirituals, the Blues, Gospel, Rhythm-n-Blues, Bebop, Hardbop, Afro-Latin and Hip-Hop musics are all rooted in West African-Yorùbá and Kongo-sacred and secular music traditions.

The Yorùbá use the word **ỌGBỌ́N** to mean art, intelligence, cunning, wisdom, ingenuity, skillfulness, wit, and invention. This idea coupled with those ideas expressed by the noun **Ìtọ̀n/ìtàn** translated as tale or history and the verb **Tọ̀n/Tàn** for diaspora, to propagate, to investigate, to shine, and to trick helps us to understand that for the Yorùbá (and by extention, all Africans), **Art is the propagation and investigation of wisdom**. It is meant to shine, be seen, be heard, to trick and cause a double-take of the signified, a reinvestigation.

Art is supposed to **Rù**, carry you; **Rú**, stir things up, incite you; **Ru**, move you to

be either angry or sad. By its very definition Yorùbá art is meant to travel, spreading the news about all things sacred and mundane. All art begins with God, the Ideal.

The music of the 'Lùkùmí and Kongo of Cuba continues this classical tradition of dispersing and expounding upon fixed and recurring God generated themes that embody cultural ideals and values central to the lives of the people. A visit to any major music retailer will demonstrate the vitality of these art traditions.

"'Tradition' in Yorùbá is àṣà. Innovation is implied in the Yorùbá idea of tradition. The verb ṣà, from which the noun àṣà is derived, means to select, choose, discriminate, or discern... Something cannot qualify as àṣà which has not been the result of deliberate choice (ṣà) based on discernment and awareness of historical practices and processes (ìtàn) by individual or collective orí (heads). And since choice presides over the birth of an àṣà (tradition), the latter is permanently liable to metamorphosis.[6]

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[6] Yai, Ọlábíyí Babalọ́lá, "In Praise of Metonymy: The Concepts of "Tradition" and "Creativity" in th eTransmission of Yorùbá Artistry over Time and Space," in The Yorùbá Artist, ed. by Rowland Àbíọ́ dún, Henry J. Drewal and John Pemberton III, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994, p.10 9.

Africans did not compromise with the white man's images they transformed them. The Yorùbá use the words ìparadà or Paradà (mask or act of masking) when talking about things and actions that transform and conceal power. Catholic statues and chromoliths were transformed into masks/costumes for the òrìṣà (deities). The statues became ère, dolls, playthings, childish spirit deputies of the òrìṣà. In the Americas, the Lùkùmí, Kongo, and other Africans not only had to transform the whiteman's icons but had to re-think and re-design their own milleniums old sacre dimages. Shrines for the òrìṣà (deities), Ojú òrìṣà (face of the deities/ancestors),[7] were re-thought as portable masks that could dance around the house, from room to room, or from house to house as the dictates of new world secrecy and survival demanded. Fish crates and hoe-blades were converted into the drums and bells ofcelebration and resistance, etc..

"The malleability of Yorùbá ritual practice has enabled it to tolerate both Christianity and Islam. It also had the capacity to survive in the oppressive slave societies in which it landed in the New World, operating clandestinely initially and now more openly."[8] This characteristic adaptability in the African mentality springs from a **respect for spiritual power wherever it originates** and accounts for the ope nnessof African religions to syncretism, parallelism, or simultaneous practice with oth er
traditions and for the continuity of a distinctive religious consciousness.[9] The unifying themes of African systems of worship focus on the relationship of the individual to the spiritual realm populated by unseen powers, those yet to be born, and the ancestors. They can be summed-up as follows:

1. Africans believe there is one God who created and controls the universe and all that is contained therein;

2. Africans believe there are selected forces of nature which deal with the affairs of mankind on Earth and govern the universe in general;

3. Africans believe the spirit of man lives on after death and can reincarnate back into the world of men;

4. Africans believe ancestral spirits have power over those who remain on Earth, and must be remembered, appeased, honored, and consulted by the living;

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[7] The word Ojú can be translated to mean: eye, face, presence, imprint. The shrine can be thought of as a two-way mirrored mask where one can look into the eyes of the òrìṣà (deities) or egún (ancestors) and see their "soul" as well as be seen by these powers concealed. As a mask it is a work of art in progress. All the priests that I know collect keepsakes that have special meaning in regard to their lives and the òrìṣà and egún and add them to their masks/shrines. This adding on/improvisational process extends tradition and definition to include new fashion, materials, and images.

[8] Drewal, Margaret T., Yoruba Ritual, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p.27.

[9] Raboteu, Albert J., Slave Religion, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

5. Africans believe in divination. They believe that with the correct knowledge, investigation, implementation, and sacrifice, the means to solve all problems and cure all ills are within our grasp;

6. Africans believe in the use of offerings and blood sacrifice to elevate their prayers to the spiritual powers and the ancestors;

7. Africans believe in magic. They believe that magic occurs when we use our heads and our abilities to become dazzling so that we can counter or frustrate evil, thus illuminating the source of the problem. Magic is the ability to transform things (i.e. negativeness into goodness);

8. Africans believe in the magical and medicinal use of herbs;

9. Africans believe that ritual song and dance are mandatory in the worship of God and ancestors; and

10. Africans believe that mankind can commune with God through the vehicle of trance-possession.[10]

Cuba

We will examine four African religious systems that were continued in Cuba-Lùkùmí(Yorùbá),Arará/Vodun-Mina(Gbè-Akan), Ẹ̀fìk-Ìbìbìò (Abakuá/Carabali),a nd Kongo (Bantu).

In the Americas certain West African ethnic ideologies attained hegemony in places like Cuba, Haiti, and Bahia. The òrìṣà/vodun of Yorùbá and Gbè (Arará/Fọn) -speakers predominate over other African divinities. The later arrival and greater concentration, than other groups, of Yorùbá and Gbè speakers to the Antilles and Bahia are two possible, partial answers.

Victor Manfredi points out another reason, "Afro-Cuba reveals a mechanism, which was clearly present in Bahia and Haiti as well. Increased slave imports to Cuba in the early 1800's coincided with the legalization of African naciones or cabildos -associations comprising freedmen and women as well as slaves. Originally promote dby slaveowners in urban areas like Matanzas, with the explicit aim of dividing Africans from each other and from those with dual heritage ('mestizos'), the cabildo became havens for African religious practice and centers for the 'transculturation' o fCuban society as a whole, by the time Cuba abolished slavery in 1886. In paralle l fashion, individual ethnic nations in Haiti and batuques in Bahia came to be identified with particular deities."[11]

Isabel Casellanos reminds us that slaves often formed stable families that were of mixed African ethnicities and heritage with various religion systems (i.e.Yorùbá

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[10] Edwards, Gary and John Mason, Black Gods: Òrìṣà Studies in the New World, Brooklyn: Yorùb á Theological Archministry, 1985, pp.3-4.

[11] Manfredi, Victor, Regarding African English in North America, Boston: African Studies Center -Boston University, 1993, pp.1-2.

-Kongo) coexisting in the same household in a complementary rather than antagonistic environment. "The home domain, in most cases a context of intra-ethnic resistance and retention, thus became a very propitious environment for the development of a cultural realignment, particularly in the area of religion."[12]

Lukumi Religion a.k.a. **Regla de Ocha** (Rules of the Ọ̀ṣà/Ọ̀rìṣà) is based on the

belief in God who is known as Olófin (Law Giver) or Ọlọ̀run (Owner of the Heavens) and the Ọ̀rìṣà (selected heads), God's spiritual agent components-sun, win d,rain, thunder, lightning, rivers, oceans, goodness, wisdom, motherhood, disease, de ath,ethics, men, women, children, trees, rocks, and animals etc.-that are involved in thedaily lives of humans and the administration of the universe. The Lùkùmí sense thatGod and the òrìṣà are distinct from one another is seen in the fact that the òrì ṣà
are called, in Spanish, santos (saints) and not dioses (gods). Some twenty-five òrìṣà-Ọbàtálá, Ṣàngó, Ògún, Ẹlégbá, Ọ̀ṣọ́ọ̀sì, Babalúaiyé, Ọ̀rúnmìlà, Yẹmọja, Ọya, Ọ̀ṣun, etc.-are worshipped in Cuba with scores of others subsumed by them.

The Yorùbá and Arará, urbanized civilizations from the eleventh century, developed Ifá-sacred historico-socioreligious textual systems of verses that were strictly memori zed by full-time priest diviners who maintained this intellectual wealth in trust for the national population-and carried this baggage with them into bondage.

The terms Santero/Santera and Santeria are often used, in both Cuba and the United States, to identify an òrìṣà priest (babalòrìṣà/babalawo) or priestess (ìyálòrìṣà) and the system of òrìṣà worship. The names were coined in the Philippines, when the islands were part of the Spanish Empire, to describe a Philippino woodcarver who produced, in wood, copies of the plaster statues of Catholic saints. The wooden statues were made for devout Philippinos who could no tafford the more expensive plaster statues that came from Spain. This tradition travelled to both Cuba and Puerto Rico. Many traditionalist consider the term

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[12] Castellanos, Isabel, "From Ulkumí to Lucumí: A Historical Overview of Religious Acculturation in Cuba," in Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art, ed. by Arturo Lindsay, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996, pp.44-45.

"The cabildos (legally recognized associations formed in colonial Cuba by blacks from roughly the same ethnic background) were instrumental as well in the preservation and transformation of Afro-Cuban religious practices. If the barracón (communal slave household) promoted cultural sharin gand intermingling among slaves of widely diverse origin, the cabildos were places where people of

similar cultural and linguistic origin could worship, relax, and interact. During the nineteenth century the functions and prerogatives of cabildos gradually expanded: membership eventually included not only African slaves but criollos (slaves born in Cuba), as well as free men and women of African descent. In addition, they were able to collect fees, to acquire land and houses for meetings, to organize celebrations, to participate in Carnival festivities, to assist members in need, and, on occasion, even to buy the manumission of a particular member of the group. In other words they were mutual help societies as well as religious associations serving important ritual purposes...Thus cabildos were legally considered Catholic cofradias (brotherhoods) which were placed under the patronage of a Catholic saint. They were registered in the corresponding parish church, and had an acknowledged place in processions and other religious festivities. Underneath this Christian and European facade, the older African mores continued to flourish..."

pejorative. It was used as a derogatory reference first to the Philippinos and then t othe Africans because of the unusual devotion they paid to the saints rather than Christ/God. In Cuba, ethnographers such as Fernando Ortiz, promoted the use of these terms over those used by the Africans and their descendents to describe themselves. A Santero was literally "a maker and seller of saints". The word also denotes the caretaker of a sanctuary. Santeria describes the system of worshippin g,caring for, making, and selling saints.

In the United States, when we speak of the Lùkùmí/Yorùbá, we may not be talkin gabout a racial or national type, or the actual known descendents of Africans from Nigeria or Cuba. The term, Lùkùmí/Yorùbá, as used in the United States, denotes people, regardless of ethnicity, who have adopted and follow the ancient religious views, philosophies and traditions of the Yorùbá/Lùkùmí of Nigeria and Cuba, and teach their children to live in this way. This cultural movement first took firm hold and began to grow in New York City in 1958.

Arará Religion in Cuba is the direct heir to the intermingling of Fọ̀n and Yorùbá religions that had gone on in West Africa for hundreds of years prior to the slave trade. Ọ̀yọ́ influence brought Ifá priests (diviners) to the Fọ̀n kingdom of Àgbòmé b ythe 16th. century; Yorùbá divinities were established there after 1732 by the king

who was himself educated at Ọ̀yọ́. Yorùbá deities were served under different embodiments in Allada before 1659. The essences of important Yorùbá òrìṣà -Òrìṣàńlá, Ẹlẹ́gbára, Ògún, Ọ̀ṣọ́ọ̀sì, Ṣọ̀npọ̀nnọ́, Ṣàngó, Ọ̀ṣun, Òṣùmàrè, Ọya, Ìbejì, and Òrìṣà Oko-were embodied in the Fọ̀n vodun (deities)-Lísa, Legba, Gũ, Age, Sagbatá ,Hebiosso, Aziri, Dã Ayido, Avesan, Hohovi, and Zaka.

Abakuá Religion appeared in Cuba when, "Ejagham and Ejagham-influenced captives arrived in western Cuba primarily during the first four decades of the nineteenth century, as a result of the immense rise in sugar cultivation in that part of the island. The slaves included members of the all-important male 'leopard society,' called Ngbe in Ejagham. These men founded their own 'society,' promulgating Ngbe values of nobility and government and remembering the master metaphor of masculine accomplishment, the leopard, who moves with perfect elegance and strength. Ngbe in Cuba was known by the creole name, Abakuá, after Abakpa, a term by which the Ejagham of Calabar are designated...The Ejagham developed a unique form of ideographic writing, signs representing ideas and called nsibidi, signs embodying many powers, including the essence of all that i svalient, just, and ordered...Nsibidi, in the Ejagham language, means roughly 'cruel letters'...Consider nsibidi writing as justifiable terror in the service of law and government...the intricate diagrams are drawn upon the ground to control a crisis or honor the funeral of a very important person...Nsibidi do not derive from Western writing systems. There are no Arabic or Latin letters in the script. It is wholly African. The invocation of divine beginnings occasions the writing of certain of the most important signs...Nsibidi signs emerged in Cuba no later than 1839...Th esacred signs and signatures of Cuban Abakuá are chiefly called anaforuana, among other names...They are calligraphic gestures of erudition and black grandeur, spiritual presences traced in yellow or white chalk (yellow for life, white for death) on the ground of inner patios or on the floor of sacred rooms, bringing back the

spirit of departed ancestors, describibg the proprieties of initiation and funereal leav e-taking."[13]

Kongo Religion a.k.a. **Regla Kongo** (Rules of the Kongo) which is commonly known in Cuba as either **Palo Mayombe** (sacred trees/sticks of the Mayombe [a region in Kongo]), **Palo Monte** (sacred trees/sticks of the forest/mountain) or simply **Palo** (sacred sticks) developed from the culture of the Bakongo peoples. Th eBakongo, unlike the Yorùbá, lack a complex pantheon of deities, but have, instead, a complex system of min'kisi (sacred medicines), which they believe were given to mankind by Nzambi Mpungu (God) whose illuminating spirit and healing powers a recarefully controlled by the Nganga (ritual expert/healer), and the ndoki (sorcerer). In Cuba many of theses sacred medicines (min'kisi), which were called prendas (pawns), were aligned with Yorùbá òrìṣà (i.e. Centella/Ọya, Sarabanda/Ògún, Mama Chola/Ọ̀ṣun, PataYaga/Babalúaiyé). The prenda represents a miniature world were the spiritual forces of the cemetary, forest, river, sea, lightning, whirlwinds, sun, moon, and stars are kept tied-up and ready to do work. "The ritual experts, or banganga (plural of nganga), were various. Some healed with charms-these were banganga n'kisi. Others healed with roots and herbs and were called banganga mbuki. Still others, baganga ngombo, ministered to the needs of clients by means of divination. Some, the banganga simbi, worshipped powerful an dmysterious spirits (bisimbi), 'the highest class of the dead,' immortal beings who, because of their good works, are believed to be blessed with the power to resist th eorganic process..."[14]

Haitian Vodou has had the story of its "birth" inextricably tied to the famous August 1791 "ceremony at Bois Caíman" and the role of the slave called Boukman Dutty. The happening at Bois Caíman is said to have been both a religious ceremony and a political event. It is alleged that some of the leaders of the slave revolt attended the ceremony. Boukman Dutty presided in the role of oungan (priest) together with an African-born priestess. A pig, which symbolized the wild, free, untamable spiritual power of the forest and the ancestors, was sacrificed, an

oath was taken, and Boukman and the priestess exhorted the listeners to fight bravely against their oppressors. Days later the Haitian Revolution began.

The Fọ̀n word **vodun/vodou** designates those great mysteries of life and manisfestations of power that surpass our ability to identify them. It follows, that the essence of vodun lies in the need for a person to be calm, patient, respectful and composed, and not to rush through life. In Haiti, chromolithographs of the Roman Catholic saints we seen by the Africans to depict parrallels in the lives of the saints, the vodun of Dahomey, and the òrìṣà of Yorùbáland. In Haiti those spiri tmysteries-Lissa, Legba, Ogou, Gran Bwa, Sabata, Shango, Erzuli, La Sirèn, Agwe, Dambala-Ayida, Gede, Marassa, Zaka, Loko-are called loa, derived from the Yorùbá word olúwa (lords/masters).

"Actually, vodun was Africa reblended. The encounter of the classical

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[13] Thompson, Robert Farris, Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy, New York: Random House, 1983, pp.227-229.

[14] Ibid., pp.106-107.

> religions of Kongo, Dahomey, and Yorùbáland gave rise to a creole religion. This religion has two parts: one called Rada, after the slaving designation for persons abducted from Arada, on the coast of Dahomey, itself derived from the name of th eholy city of the Dahomeans, Allada; and the other called Petro-Lemba, or simply Petro, after a messianic figure, Don Pedro, from the south peninsula of what is now Haiti, and the northern Kongo trading and healing society, Lemba.
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> Chiefly from Dahomey and western Yorùbáland derived the vodun worship of a pantheon of gods and goddesses under one supreme Creator-deities who manif ested themselves by possessing ('mounting') the bodies of their devotees. This aspe ct of vodun was reinforced by contact with French services for Roman Catholic sain ts who were said to work miracles. Chiefly from Kongo and Angola derived vodun
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> beliefs in the transcendental moral powers of the dead and in the effectivness of figurated charms for healing and righteous intimidation.
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> Both Rada and Petro partake of these sources of African influence; neither is traceable to just one source. Both are at once African-inspired and indigenously created. Rada, predominantly Dahomean and Yorùbá, is the 'cool' side of vodun, being associated with the achievement of peace and reconciliation. Petro, predominantly Kongo, is the 'hot' side, being associated with the spiritual fire of charms for healing and for attacking evil forces [liberation theology].
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> It is important to stress, however, that the two fundamental vodun sections fused similar religious aspects of different African cultures. Thus, the 'hot' sorcerou spotentiality of an otherwise cool Yorùbá riverain goddess was reassigned to the Pet roside of the deities. Correspondingly, the cool, creative Kongo simbi spirits were lifted from the realm of Kongo-inspired 'attack' charms and reassigned to Rada, where their positive powers were akin to those of the gods and goddesses of Daho mey and Yorùbáland."[15]

In Jamaica, **Cumina Religion** membership is a matter of birth; membership is implied because the family can be traced back to Africa, and, therefore can be link ed forever to the African deities. There are three ranks of spirits which come to Cumina and dance; Sky spirits, Earthbound spirits, and Ancestral spirits. The Cumina members of the Baptist denomination baptize in the river and are close to the African river deities who come to protect them. The religion of the African Cumina group is primarily a family religion; much depends on knowing where one' sflesh, blood, and spirit came from. Some deities serve special ethnic groups or nations. These groups vary, but the five usually mentioned are Mondogo, Moyenge, Machunde, Kongo, and Mumbaka; other ethnic groups mentioned are Gaw, Ibo, an dYorùbá. Each group has many spirits from its own family or clan which come to

it. These spirits are called ancestral zombies (from the Ki-Kongo words Nzamb i-god and Nfumbi-spirit); many of them become strong and rise to the status and power of a divinity and are summoned by their own special drum rhythm.

Membership and organization of African Cumina center around relationships and neighborhoods. The dead as well as the living, are counted as active members in the religious life of the community. The spirits of dead relatives have the ability to aid or harm the living. Assistance from the dead may be obtained through "concentration," that is, by thinking while alone about a dead relative. If

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[15] Ibid., pp.164-165.

satisfactory funeral and other rite associated with death are not provided, and if th eliving relatives do no "live right," the dead express their displeasure by causing illness and other misfortunes. Unlike Cuba, Trinidad, Haiti, and Brazil, there are no spirit shrine houses in Jamaica. There are however, obeah men who are spiritual specialists who know the drum rhythms, dancing habits, feedings, and methods of controlling large numbers of deities and ancestral spirits (zombies). The word obea his a creolized version of the Bini/Ẹ̀dó word Ọbiha[16] which describes a professionall y trained diviner and doctor who is initiated and an expert in one or more fields o f medicine.

Trinidadians who are associated with **Shango** worship centers (chapelles) refer to themselves as "Yorùbá people," "the Yorùbá nation," or "Orisha people." Many are descended from Yorùbá, who were brought to Trinidad as slaves, and distinguish themselves from the Radas and other groups of Afro-Trinidadians. In Trinidad, Shango is only one of a score or more Yorùbá òrìṣà/powers who are honored with specific chants, drum music, food and blood offerings, and communicated with through the agency of the Yorùbá system of kolanut divination.

African religions in the Caribbean, in order to insure their survival, have adopted the wise tactics of the chameleon and learned to take on and redefine the dress an dcolors of their opponents while still maintaining the distinctness, wisdom, and beaut yof their own cultural identities. The world is so much richer because of their victories in this transcultural struggle.

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[16] Ọbiha (Ọbo+Iha); Ọbo is a professionally trained native doctor who is initiated and an expert in one or more fields of medicine. Iha is what Oguega or Ewawa-two indigenous forms of Bini divination-are called. Iha is also equated with the Ifá divination of the Yorùbá.