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Houngas and Mambos of the Diaspora: The Role of Vodou Ritual Specialists in Group Re-integration, Identity Creation and the Production of Health among Haitians in Little Haiti

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HOUNGAS AND MAMBOS OF THE DIASPORA: THE ROLE OF VODOU RITUAL SPECIALISTS IN GROUP RE-INTEGRATION, IDENTITY CREATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTH AMONG HAITIANS IN LITTLE HAITI

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To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Dorcas Dennis, and entitled Houngas and Mambos of the Diaspora: The Role of Vodou Ritual Specialists in Group Re-integration, Identity Creation and the Production of Health among Haitians in Little Haiti, having been approved with respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: 30 March, 2012

The thesis of Dorcas Dennis is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton
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University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to a key informant, Hounga Pierre who did not live to see the completion of this study, but can still read it whenever he comes around from *Giné.*

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

HOUNGAS AND MAMBOS OF THE DIASPORA: THE ROLE OF VODOU RITUAL SPECIALISTS IN GROUP RE-INTEGRATION, IDENTITY CREATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTH AMONG HAITIANS IN LITTLE HAITI

by

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This study argues that as far as Haitian immigrants in Miami are concerned, issues of identity and health are interconnected. This stems from a Haitian understanding that sees health as the totality of wellbeing—material and spiritual. These two concerns merged in the creation of Halouba Hounfo, a ritual space in Little Haiti, where Haitian immigrants meet to produce and perform identity through Vodou ritual practices and meet their health needs at the same time.

Using ethnography, the study traces the origins of Halouba, identifies the actors involved in its creation and the ritual practices performed there. It also analyzes how the rituals facilitate the integration of the group and produce health for them at the same time. As Haitians migrate to America, Vodou is becoming more relevant in their lives, even for American born Haitians because of the pressing need to respond to questions of identity and health.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

South Florida's proximity to Haiti, its tropical climate, the presence of a large Caribbean and Latin American immigrant population, images of glitter and glamour of its life conveyed to Haiti through travelers' accounts and modern media, have contributed to making this region one of the more attractive destinations for Haitian immigrants fleeing to the United States of America. After settling in South Florida, the concern of Haitian migrants to re-group motivates community projects. The aim of these projects is to generate new senses of Haitian identity among segments of Haitian immigrants. Haitian Vodou features prominently in this process, as some groups are formed on the basis of the members' shared affiliation with this religio-cultural heritage. It would seem however that the health problems Haitians face in South Florida also provide a strong motivation for these groups to use Vodou as the symbol of community re-integration. Confronted with a dominant American biomedical health discourse and praxis, which does not only exclude them in terms of cost and accessibility, but also departs somewhat from their indigenous understandings of health, Haitian immigrants in South Florida see the need to tap their own cultural resources in meeting their health needs and Vodou is one of these resources.

This study tells the story of how a group of Haitian immigrants responded to these questions by creating a space for the production and performance of Haitian cultural identity and the production of health. This community is in Little Haiti, a self-contained Haitian immigrant community in Miami. A *Hounfo* (temple) in Little Haiti called *Halouba* is the mainstay of the religious life of the community of Vodou practitioners

living there. Halouba started in the 1980s as a botanica that furnished Haitian immigrants with paraphernalia they needed for rituals designed to help them negotiate their challenges as immigrants in Miami. As Haitians culturally conceptualize various challenges in life as health problems requiring the intervention of loas (spirits), the rituals were recognized mostly, as healings. The rituals initially took place in individuals' homes. Mambos or Houngas (ritual specialists) who the host invited, presided over the rituals and friends, fans, relatives, and acquaintances often rallied to support the afflicted. As the Haitian community expanded and homes became overcrowded during these healing ceremonies, the community moved these meetings to a portion of the Halouba botanica. With this move, Halouba became a healing center too. Because the ceremonies required the assembling of Haitian immigrants, Halouba became a space for the creation and performance of Haitian cultural identity.

The objective of the study was to investigate the events that led to the origins of Halouba Hounfo, the characteristics of the worshippers who assemble there for rituals, the motivations for these meetings, and the functions the Mambos and Houngas play in these processes. The research also sought to investigate how rituals produce identity and health for worshippers. The study employed ethnographic methods to gather primary data. These included unstructured interviews and personal observations. The study conducted unstructured interviews with Vodou ritual specialists at the Halouba Hounfo and twenty-five (25) of their clientele (both male and female). The interviews elicited their migratory stories, information on their experiences as immigrants in South Florida, their reasons for participating in the ritual activities at Halouba, as well as, why they consulted with the ritual specialists on matters concerning their health and wellbeing. In

addition, the interviews elucidated the motives Haitian immigrants have for participating in Vodou religious practices, and how crucial are the roles of Vodou ritual specialists in facilitating their meetings and in providing answers to their health problems. To gather the primary data for the study I also participated in the ceremonies organized at the Halouba Hounfo in order to interact with both ritual specialists and members, observe and have a feel of the experience. The secondary sources for the study include relevant articles, books, journals, dictionaries, newspapers and posters. I drew on ideas from Clifford Geertz, Thomas Tweed, Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere to build a coherent intellectual frame to show how Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti are motivated by a South Floridian ethos, to use Vodou as an insignia of their Haitian cultural identity and in meeting their health needs.

The study found out that because it is an integral aspect of Haitian culture, Vodou flows alongside Haitian migrants to their newly adopted home in America (U.S.A).[1] It reports narratives about the use of magico-religious resources of Vodou in preparation for and during the perilous journeys across the seas, most Haitians undertook to get to America. Even Haitians who were not active practitioners of Vodou in Haiti would have their convictions in its redemptive power deepened through these experiences. The study uncovered how through these experiences, Vodou garnered a greater appeal among the Haitian immigrants as a valuable resource they could fall on, should any crises face them in their newly adopted home.

Life in America has its challenges for Haitians. These come in the form of racism and discrimination against them because of their association with Vodou, which in mainstream American discourse is demonized and their inability to speak English

[1] The abbreviation U.S.A represents the United States of America.

fluently. The fear that those generations born here can lose the Haitian "connection," and their struggles to find work and meet demands of the many destitute family members left back home, are also challenges Haitian immigrants face in Miami. Most important of all is the lack of access to healthcare and the great divide between Haitian cultural understanding of health and the American biomedical model. The latter problem translates into a distrust of the healthcare system in America among Haitian immigrants. These insecurities of life confronting Haitian immigrants in America would precipitate Vodou's relevance as I discovered during the study. Originating as a response to these challenges, Halouba functions as a place where Haitian immigrants mostly from the working class, meet to perform Vodou rituals, revitalize their sense as a people, teach generations in Miami about the Haitian culture, and socialize.

These activities also involve the participation of Vodou loas (spirits) who have always protected them. From *Giné* (West Africa) the loas incarnate through possessions and address the concerns of the immigrants. When they appear, they usher in a sense of security among worshippers. They address specific issues including questions about the physical health of devotees. Aside from these group rituals, individuals who are physically ill or have social problems consult with the rituals specialists at Halouba or in their homes or procure ritual paraphernalia and medicines from the botanica. As an institution, Halouba therefore meets two needs crucial to the Haitian sense of wellbeing as immigrants in America, the production and consumption of heath and the performance of identity.

Life in the diaspora is introducing new elements into Vodou. Many more Haitians are adopting Vodou as both a healthcare resource and an identity insignia. In Haiti,

Vodou is mostly associated with peasants from the countryside. Vodou is also acquiring American elements, and the roles of its ritual specialist have expanded. They have become cultural mediators leading Haitian immigrants as they slip in and out of two worlds—the Haitian and the American. Finally, it would seem that women are assuming a more central role in Vodou rituals in America than they did in Haiti because of the new circumstances of life Haitians face in the diaspora.

Structure of Study

Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on the use of religion as a rallying symbol for immigrants in their host communities, paying particular attention to Haitian migrants in America. In chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical frames that undergird this research. Chapter 4 describes the fieldwork. Chapter 5 discusses the migratory history of the respondents in the study. Chapter 6 describes Halouba and reports narratives on its origins. The focus of chapter 7 is the ritual life of Hounfo Halouba (temple), focusing particular attention on the roles of both Mambos and Houngas in this life and discussing how these activities produce identity and health for members. Chapter 8 discusses the evolving trends in Vodou as I identified in Halouba Hounfo. In Chapter 9, I conclude the study by tying together the strands of the arguments that run through the chapters.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Earlier scholarship on immigrants in America privileged attention on the invasion of European explorers and immigrants.[2] However, recent literature focuses attention on newer patterns of immigration that changed during the nineteenth century, shifting from the group who had first colonized the Americas to newer groups.[3] Starting in the 1840's these newer groups included Chinese, Jews and immigrants from the Caribbean Islands and the New World.[4] Other recent literature explores how globalization facilitates the introduction of different cultures and religions from outside America. More so, some scholarship investigates religio-cultural practices that the newer migrant groups have brought into the country that have drawn substantial number of Americans looking for new, holistic or more spiritual healing approaches.[5]

Since the arrival of the newer ethnic groups of immigrants in America, immigrants and their religio-cultural practices that include identity creation and their production of health and healing have attracted commendable scholarly writings. Against this backdrop, I review in this chapter available literature on themes emerging from the topic for research, "Functions of Vodou ritual specialists in group reintegration, identity creation and the production of health among Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti."

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[2] Linda Barnes and Susan S. Sered eds., *Religion and Healing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

[3] Ibid., 8.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

The objective is to situate the research into the ongoing scholarly discourse on immigrants in the American diaspora. In so doing I will identify the niche intended for my research. The following are the main themes: healthcare for immigrants in diaspora; reintegration and identity creation of immigrants in diaspora; health and healing in Haitian Vodou; and functions of Vodou ritual specialists.

Healthcare for Immigrants in Diaspora

Available literature on healthcare for immigrants in diaspora includes issues on access to quality and affordable healthcare. These scholarly conversations have been well documented throughout the public health and social science disciplines. Such literature explores the barriers to individuals seeking healthcare, particularly the structural issues which may prevent people from seeking healthcare. Most of these researchers have also investigated how these issues vary among different ethnic populations, particularly among immigrant communities who are predominantly non-English speaking and undocumented in diaspora. Among such communities is the Haitian community in Little Haiti. The *Community Voices Miami Project* conducted initial probing this issue through its *Community Dialogue* held in Little Haiti during April 2000. My research project was done to understand the health-related resources available to the community of Little Haiti. The *Collaborative Project,* which included a team of scholars, conducted a survey of the neighborhood's healthcare infrastructure. When this survey of health-related resources was originally completed in March of 2003, it designated several botanicas, six pharmacies, twelve private medical practices, and four school-based clinics within the community.[6] Another issue found emerging from the survey, was the absence of federally

[6] Haitian Neighborhood Center Sant La, *Healthcare Needs and Issues in Little Haiti: A Community Voices Project Report* (Florida: Sant La, 2004), 9.

subsidized health facilities within Little Haiti.[7] While acknowledging that lack of subsidized health facilities and affordable health insurance for immigrants was among major hindrances to healthcare access, the *Collaborative* also recognized that other social and cultural factors affect access to healthcare in America. The researchers discovered that the Haitian immigrants alternatively use traditional herbal medicines from the botanicas as preventive measures. They admitted that the botanicas, which are mainly centers for selling Haitian traditional herbs and Vodou products, are among the health related resources in Little Haiti. Overall, the *Collaborative Project Report* provides a comprehensive background to lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare for Haitians in Little Haiti and their alternative use of botanicas as health-related resources, though not detailed on the alternative use of traditional herbal medicines from the botanicas.

The second literature of interest under this theme focuses on perceptions of Haitian immigrants on the utilization of biomedical healthcare system in America. Ryan and others work, *Perceptions of Access to America Healthcare of Haitian Immigrants in South Florida* provide insight into the attitudes of Haitian immigrants toward the use of America healthcare services.[8] The research inquires about why some Haitian immigrants access biomedical healthcare while others do not. The writers through focused group discussion demonstrated that Haitian immigrants see American healthcare system as highly expensive, besides, they could not afford health insurance. More so, they are afraid of being deported if they try to seek health benefits. These, he argues, results from

[7] Haitian Neighborhood Center Sant La, *Healthcare Needs and Issues in Little Haiti: A Community Voices Project Report* (Florida: Sant La, 2004), 9.

[8]Ellen R. Ryan et al., "Perceptions of Access to U.S.A Healthcare of Haitian Immigrants in South Florida," in *Florida Public Health Review*, 2004; 1: 30-35.

the perception that, in order to protect their eligibility for citizenship, the Haitian immigrants particularly those without legal permission or have vulnerable status avoid accessing biomedical healthcare in America.[9] The writers maintained that the Haitians related their reluctance to seek health services for fear of jeopardizing their opportunities to remain in the country. Even when children born in America who are eligible for Medicaid (medical aid) are involved, parents prefer to see a Haitian doctor who will not report them, in addition speaks their language and understands their concerns. However, the writers comprehensively elaborate on Haitian perceptions concerning the utilization of American biomedical healthcare system, the authors failed to show how Haitian cultural worldview on health could also provide basis for such perceptions.

Another scholarly conversation on healthcare for immigrants in America focuses attention on how certain ethnic communities are delineated and isolated in terms of American healthcare services among other things. Using Little Haiti as a case study, Ana Cruz-Taura and Jessica LeVeen Farr in their work, *Miami, Florida: The Little Haiti Neighborhood,* demonstrated that unlike other ethnic communities that achieved greater integration in South Florida, Little Haiti has remained delineated in terms of access to quality biomedical healthcare.[10] This they admitted is besides being socially and economically isolated from Miami's greater Metropolitan area. Little Haiti they describe, owes its name to the concentration of Haitian immigrants who settled in this Miami neighborhood in 1970s and 1980s. The authors provide extensive background information on how Haitians in Little Haiti fare in accessing quality and affordable

[10] This Case Study was prepared by Ana-Cruz Taura, a senior Project and Communication Supervisor and Jessica LevVeen Farr, Regional Community Development Manager, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

healthcare. However, the writers glossed over how Haitians find alternative healthcare that is Haitian.

Reintegration and Identity Creation of Immigrants in diaspora

Besides, literature on healthcare related issues among immigrants in diaspora, other research carried out in the last couple of years have focused in particular, on the reintegration and identity creation experiences of immigrants in diaspora. Notably, the positive effects of religious networks and the way they make possible a continuity of ethnic belonging. Among such literature is the work of Elizabeth McAlister. In her work, *Rara: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora,* she explores *Rara* rituals and Haitian music as celebrated among Haitians in Miami and New York. She does not only bring the Afro-Creole religious dimensions of the *Rara* festival to light but she discusses the political uses Haitians are making of *Rara,* both in Haiti and America, particularly New York. She describes how *Rara* erupted in Miami and New York at demonstrations against the Duvalier regime in the early 1980's and during strikes involving Haitian labor groups.[11] According to McAlister, Haitian immigrants are appropriating that which is distinct from whiteness yet unique among other African-American groups in diaspora.[12] She maintains that Haitian immigrants who perform *Rara* in New York are continuing an old historical tradition in order to consolidate their community, solidify their vision of ethnic identity and further a political movement,[13] and that *Rara* wins symbolic and actual space for the Haitian community in the United States

[11] Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou Power and Performance in Haiti and Diaspora* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 180.

[12] Ibid., 186.

[13] Ibid., 187.

of America.[14] In other words, the festival is the answer to the alienation and oppression many Haitians face in America. McAlister's work provides commendable insights into efforts Haitian migrants make to embrace, solidify and educate their members of their ethnic identity through popular culture (*Rara*). However, the writer paid little attention to the role of Vodou and its ritual specialists in the establishment and use of such popular culture in diaspora.

Karen McCarthy Brown's article on *Vodou in the Tenth Department: New York's Haitian Community* is another literature that emphasizes on the positive effects of religious networks and the way they make possible a continuity of ethnic belonging. Arguing that Haitian Vodou families in New York are very important to the survival strategies of Haitians, Brown identifies that the functions of Vodou families in New York are related to that of Vodou families in Port-au-Prince.[15] This she explains is where traditional religious ties tend to compensate urban dwellers for the loss of contact with the land and with the built in security of the extended family.[16] Thus, Haitians living and practicing Vodou in America are not so much immigrants in the traditional sense of the term, but a people with emotional, social and spiritual involvement in two places in order to make use of each to compensate for what the other lacks.[17] With this background, she examines how a majority of Haitian immigrants serve the Vodou spirits despite the

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[14] Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou Power and Performance in Haiti and Diaspora* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 180.

[15]Karen McCarthy Brown, "Vodou in the Tenth Department: New York's Haitian Community," in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity,* edited by Jacob J. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 162-171.

[16]Karen McCarthy Brown, "Vodou in the Tenth Department: New York's Haitian Community," in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity,* edited by Jacob J. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 162-171.

[17] Ibid.

various pervasive prejudices against them and their Vodou tradition in diaspora. She argues that in New York the concrete evidence of Vodou practice is kept carefully segregated in the private corners of Haitian homes, often behind closed doors. As a result, Haitian homes such as that of Mama Lola have in the upstairs, on the living room walls, and on her bedside table, the devotional objects for Catholic saints that are the only things an outsider sees. However in the basement of her home are her altars for Vodou loas (spirits).[18] Brown admits that keeping altars for Vodou loas in the basements has become a habit of the Haitian community in New York, to have both a private and public religion but admits to the first only. Brown admitted that in America there is a perverse will to misunderstand Haitians and their religion. Nevertheless, it is not hard to perceive that Vodou in New York is stretching and straining to accommodate new and often alien attitudes ideas and places. Thus, Vodou accommodates itself to life in New York, refuels itself through contact with Haiti, and overall, thrives.[19] She notes that Haitians living in New York who serve the spirits (Vodou loas) respond to prejudice against them by secreting their allegiance to Vodou behind a fabric of half-truths, outright denials and defensive maneuvers. Brown's article is a classic composition of how in the face of prejudices against Vodou, the positive effects of Vodou religious networks are manifest, and the way they make possible a continuity of ethnic belonging results in assisting Haitian migrants in creating alternative social and cultural space in diaspora. However, Brown glossed over the role performed by ritual specialists in this regard.

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[18] Karen McCarthy Brown, "Vodou in the Tenth Department: New York's Haitian Community, in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity,* edited by Jacob J. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 165.

[19] Karen McCarthy Brown, "Vodou in the Tenth Department: New York's Haitian Community, in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity,* edited by Jacob J. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 162-171.

On the other hand, some scholars do not totally agree that the positive effects of religious networks and the way they make possible a continuity of ethnic belonging results in assisting migrants in creating alternative social and cultural space in diaspora. Among such scholars is Heike Drotbohm. He demonstrates this in his article, *Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations in Haitian Transnational Social Fields.* His main argument was that migration does not necessarily imply the desire for continuity and conservation.[20] Drotbohm pointed out that most migrants experience the change in their country and place of residence as a life-and self-transforming moment wherein religion can have a supportive and strengthening role.[21] Using Michel as a case study, he explores how Haitian migrants aspire to a radical rapture with their former life, its constraints and hegemonies.[22] He explains that upon the transitory moment of leaving his country of origin and creating a new life in the unfamiliar environment of Montreal, Michel had tried to break radically with his adherence to the loas (spirits) of Vodou and attended Mass at a Catholic Church instead.

The second part of Drotbohm's work focused on the reasons for Michel's reconciliation to his former religious tradition (Vodou). Drotbohm explains, was after Michel encountered the attacks of pwen (mystical powers) sent from his homeland. The writer through the outcome of Michel's exemplary case noted that religious identities are

[20]Heike Drotbohm, "Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations in Haitian Transnational Social Fields," in *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities,* edited by Gertrud Hűwelmeier and Kristine Krause (New York: Routledge, 2010), 36-51.

[21] Heike Drotbohm, "Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations in Haitian Transnational Social Fields," in *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities,* edited by Gertrud Hűwelmeier and Kristine Krause (New York: Routledge, 2010), 36.

[22]Heike Drotbohm, "Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations in Haitian Transnational Social Fields," in *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities,* edited by Gertrud Hűwelmeier and Kristine Krause (New York: Routledge, 2010), 47.

not easily chosen and arbitrarily changed.[23] But he admitted that certain experiences such as Michel's warrant such changes among Haitians in the diaspora. The case study provides insight into sensitive maneuvers of migrants who make use of religious affiliations for negotiating their transnational belonging. He argued that in Haitian Vodou, the loas (spirits) as well as pwen appear as two different types of mediating forces which impact the migrants' lives, albeit in different ways. On the one hand, pwen as a form of sent sickness pulled Michel to his relatives in Haiti, thus claiming a continuity of his social commitment.[24] He explained that Michel felt threatened by pwen, a particular type of mobile and highly efficient mystical attack presumably sent by malevolent and envious relatives living in the home country.

On the other hand, the loas (spirits) of Vodou helped Michel to distance himself from Haiti and from the exigent moral demands articulate by his relatives back home, yet stay connected to his cultural roots. Drotbohm noted that in the situation of stress, Michel did not have a clear choice not to serve the spirits; rather the spirits claimed their place in diaspora. Drotbohm portrays the experiences Haitian immigrants face in diaspora because of their effort to discontinue their association with their religious affiliation and moral obligations in their homeland. It also depict how through their reconciliation to Vodou tradition through functions performed by Vodou priests, they receive protection from attacks of malevolent spirits. However, the writer glossed over the functions performed

[23]Heike Drotbohm, "Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations in Haitian Transnational Social Fields," in *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities,* edited by Gertrud Hűwelmeier and Kristine Krause, 46.

[24] Ibid., 47.

by Vodou ritual specialists in providing protection and healing for such Haitian immigrants in diaspora.

Health and Healing in Haitian Vodou

The theme of health and healing in Haitian Vodou has not received much scholarly attention. Throughout much of modern era, religion and healing received attention only when it came into conflict with biomedical practices. However, during 1990, American culture changed tremendously and religious healing became a commonplace feature. Increasing numbers of religious traditions and especially churches and synagogues began to hold healing services and healing circles. The use of alternative and complementary therapies mostly connected to spiritual or religious traditions became widespread, and drew attention to the spiritual aspects of medical care. At the same time, changes in immigration laws brought to the United States new cultural communities, each with their approaches to healing.

Among the healing practices of ethnic communities in diaspora included those practiced by Cuban Santeros, Haitian Mambos and Houngas. These are only a few of the newer types of American religious healings often found practicing within blocks of prestigious biomedical institutions. *Religion and Healing in America,* edited by Linda L. Barnes and Susan S. Sered offers a comprehensive collection of essays examining this new reality. It brings together scholars from a variety of disciplinary perspectives to explore the relatively uncharted field of religious healing as understood and practiced in diverse cultural communities in the United States. A specific essay among the comprehensive collection of essays edited by Barnes and Sered which is of interest to this research, is Karen McCarthy Brown's *Making Wanga: Reality Constructions and*

Magical Manipulation of Power. The writer explores how a Vodou priestess (Mama Lola) in Brooklyn manufactured two types of Wanga (charms) drawn from her repertoire of ritual healing practices. One was on coconut and the other on a pigeon. This was in order to "turn the tables" in the favor of one Abner Louima, a Haitian immigrant who got in trouble with the New York City Police. It was a misrepresentation of the case. Louima was taken to police custody, brutalized and sodomized with a broomstick by a group of police officers in a bathroom. The police officers responsible were later charged with abuse and prosecuted. Against this backdrop, Brown argued that Haitian Vodou healings works almost always deals with personal problems, and it follows that the most respected Vodou healers (Mambos and Houngas) are those who know how to be discreet.[25] Brown's work depicts some of the problems Haitian immigrants encounter and how functions performed by Vodou ritual specialists are geared to finding solutions (healing) to such problems.

Other scholars bring to fore the Vodou worldview on health and healing by examining the Haitian understanding of disease and illness. Max Beauvoir's article *Herbs and Energy: The Holistic Medical System of the Haitian People* examines the Haitian worldview on disease and illness and describes the three major categories of indigenous system of holistic healing among the Haitian people. In the first category, the healer is not expected to be a professional and is thus known as, Phytotherapeutic social system.[26]

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[25]Karen M. Brown, "Making Wanga: Reality Constructions and the Magical Manipulation of Power," in *Religion and Healing in America,* edited by Barnes, Linda and Susan S. Sered (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173-203.

[26] Max G. Beauvoir, "Herbs and Energy: The Holistic Medical System of Haitian People," in *Haitian Vodun: Spirits, Myths and Reality,* edited by Patrick Bellgrade-Smith and Claudine Michel (Bloomington, U.S.A: Indiana University Press, 2006), 112-133.

The second category, known as the phytotherapeutic medical system, is the type of practice by professionals such as Vodou priests. Finally, the third category termed as masterly medical system is based on principles of the dynamism of a life concept named "energy" a force the author explains has no mass but has potentialities. Brown's work provides background into understanding the Haitian way of health healing.

Other literature on health and healing among Haitians focus on the practical aspects of healing, which can be performed by the practitioners. In his attempt to provide practical hands-on exercise in the Haitian way of healing, Ross Heaven (a Vodou priest) demonstrated how to contact the spirit world and communicate with Vodou loas (spirits) for healing purposes. Heaven in *Vodou Shaman: The Haitian way of Healing and Power*, revealed Vodou as one of the most powerful Shamanic traditions. He examines soul journeying and warrior path work in the Vodou tradition and explores the psychological principles that make them effective.[27] He provides exercises in specific spiritual healing techniques, including: the use of herbs and magical baths; ways to read and rebalance the energy of the body; removal of evil spirits intrusions and unhealthy energies; and restoration of "Ashe" (positive spiritual power or energy).[28] The author argues that these ancient healing practices are important for the modern world and thus Vodou healing techniques can be used by anyone as safe and effective means of spiritual healing and personal development. Heaven in this book provides insight into healing techniques employed by Vodou practitioners for creating new realities on health and wellbeing. He

[27] Ross Heaven, *Vodou Shaman: The Haitian Way of Healing and Power* (New York: Rochester, 2003). 11.

[28] Ross Heaven, *Vodou Shaman: The Haitian Way of Healing and Power* (New York: Rochester, 2003), 12.

was however not explicit in his contribution on the roles of the ritual specialist in assisting practitioners in the application of the healing techniques.

Other literature provides background information on what is Haitian Vodou. An example is Leslie G. Demangles' *Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti.* Drawing from first hand fieldwork in Haiti and the republic of Benin, Demangles argued that Vodou is a byproduct of the contact between Roman Catholicism, African and Amerindian traditional religions. She analyzes the mythology of Vodou rituals focusing on the inclusion of West African and European elements in the beliefs and practices of Vodou. She demonstrates that Vodou is a well developed vibrant folk religious tradition that plays a major role in the lives of the common people or peasants in Haiti.[29]

Similarly, articles in *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth and Reality* an edited work by Patrick Bellegarge-Smith and Claudine Michel examine Vodou's role in organizing rural resistance, forming political values for the transformation of Haiti. The contributors to this volume located the potentially radical and transformative possibilities of the ideologies of Vodou within African ethos and heritage.

In addition, the contributors showed how Vodou is valuable in teaching social norms, values and standards; they also show how Vodou merges science with philosophy not only theoretically, but also in both the healing arts and the practices of Vodou priests. Another literature on this theme is *Voodoo in Haiti* by Alfred Métraux. The author using ethnographic approach, not only provides detailed accounts of the history and origins of Vodou but also the beliefs and healing ritual practices in Haitian Vodou.

[29] Leslie G. Demangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Functions of Mambos and Houngas

Finally, there is insufficient literature on the functions of Vodou ritual specialists in the diaspora. Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* is currently the most acknowledged literature on the experiences and healing practices of a Vodou ritual specialist in diaspora. McCarthy Brown describes Mama Lola's impoverished childhood in Haiti, her immigration to the United States, and the path by which she became a priestess in the Vodou tradition in diaspora.[30] Brown admitted that "at the same time and in the same places" she was attempting to understand the Haitian diasporic tradition and culture, the people that constitute this culture were attempting to understand and negotiate life in America.[31] Another characteristic Brown lists as being important in both traditional Haitian Vodou and Mama Lola's practice is that the priestesses (Mambo) and priests (Hounga) are viewed by their religious community as "healers" tasked with performing "treatments" for the faithful." In spite of the comprehensive ethnographic material produced by Brown concerning the experiences and practices of Mama Lola, she does not say much about how functions performed by the priestess aid in the production of alternative health and wellbeing for her clientele. Neither does she associate functions performed by Mama Lola as a rallying point for identity creation and group reintegration among her Haitian clients in diaspora. There is ample evidence that a great number of Haitians in diaspora on regular basis consult Vodou ritual specialists in times of health related crises, not forgetting their periodical

[30]Karen M. Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2001), 12.

[31] Ibid.

visits to Vodou Hounfos (temples) for ritual ceremonies such as initiation ceremonies, also performed by Vodou ritual specialists.

As a point of departure, I intend to draw attention to the emerging trend of Haitian ethnic identity creation and the production of alternative health, healing and wellbeing through functions performed by Vodou ritual specialists among Haitians in diaspora, performed at Halouba Hounfo by Vodou ritual specialists in Little Haiti.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My study suggests that after settling in South Florida, the concern of Haitian migrants to re-group motivates community projects. The aim of these projects is to generate specific senses of Haitian identity among segments of Haitian immigrants. Vodou plays an important role in this process as some groups are formed on the basis the members' shared affiliation with this religious heritage.

In describing the dynamics of ethnicity, Isijaw identifies two aspects: its outward expression on the one hand and its manifestation in more subtle forms.[32] The former embraces a demonstration of such overt traits as the speaking of particular languages, sticking to cultural traditions and taking part in ethnically specific concerted activities.[33] Activities such as patronising ethnic religious groups or educational institutions and participating in ethnic based associations are also ways in which ethnic identity is outwardly, expressed.[34] Internally, ethnic sentiments are expressed in more subtle forms such as subscribing to specific culturally accepted norms, ideologies, or beliefs.[35] Following the above definitions, I describe Haitian immigrants in America as an ethnic group. As a people, Haitian immigrants have all emigrated to America from a common source, namely Haiti. They descend from a common African ancestry, share similar

[32] Isijaw, "Ethnic Identity Retention," in *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City*, Isijaw, Kalbach and Reitz, (eds.), 34-91. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

[33] Isijaw, "Ethnic Identity Retention," in *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City*, Isijaw, Kalbach and Reitz, (eds.), 34-91. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

[34] Ibid., 36.

[35] Ibid.

physical as well as cultural traits, and subscribe to similar religious as well as philosophical ideals and participate in cultural activities as a unit.

One trend of postmodern times is the increase in the rate of interaction between cultures. While this postmodern development can be attributed to improvements in trade, cultural relations and an expansion in international communication,[36] political conflicts and economic hardship are also forcing people to leave their homes for safer and more stable regions of the world. While people move more than ever before, there still are major problems faced by immigrants in the process of adjusting to new social situations in the host cultures.[37] Scholars have enumerated problems such as culture shock, racism, the antagonistic attitudes of host cultures, the immigrants' feeling of rootlessness in the host culture, and the threat of assimilation as attendant to the migratory process.[38] In the face of these problems, there is usually a felt need among immigrants to create in-group support networks, and religion is one of the most important factors helping to consolidate these group networks.[39] Religion helps sustain a group's ethnic feelings, and creates avenues in which members of immigrant communities are able to socialize with each other.[40] Royce describes how the threat of cultural assimilation, and the subsequent fear of losing one's' native cultural values work together to heighten the immigrant's concern with protecting his or her cultural values. Immigrants revitalize their traditional religion in order to nourish and reinforce the cultural values upon which their ethnic identities

[36] A. P. Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 108.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 277.

[40] A. P. Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 277.

depend.[41] Royce's point is that the function of religion as an integrative cultural symbol becomes more vital among the immigrant groups, which feel the strongest need to sustain ethnic sentiments.

I argue in the present study that while scholars of ethnicity assert that religion reinforces ethnic sentiments by facilitating interaction among members of the ethnic community many of them do not explain what in religion enables it to play this function successfully. The fact that religion provides an avenue for the interaction of members of immigrant communities is not in doubt, but in my opinion, it is not simply enough to assert that religion provides an avenue for the interaction of members of immigrant communities. Interaction among immigrants could be facilitated in a number of ways other than through religious activities. The theoretical question therefore should be what is there in religion that makes it the most common means of reinforcing ethnic feelings among immigrant groups? Why is it that immigrants, even those who before migrating might have taken religion for granted, tend to become more religious on their arrival in the host culture?

In the current study, I explain why Haitians turned to Vodou as a symbolic focus of their ethnic identity. I argue that religious activities in the Halouba Hounfo do not simply facilitate the regular interaction of members of the community but that religion as the important unifying symbol is ideally suited for the creation, shaping and sustaining of the community's identity. In making this argument, I engage Clifford Geertz's understands of religion as a cultural symbol.

Geertz asserts that human behavior is informed by cultural meanings or what he calls symbols. Analysis of culture or its aspects such as religion must concern itself with

[41] A. P. Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity,* 277.

interpreting meanings.[42] Religion itself, Geertz argues, is a system of meanings or "symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic."[43] By symbols, Geertz means anything that carries and conveys to people an idea. A Torah scroll, for example conveys to Jews, an idea among others of God's revelation. Geertz's concern is about the functions of Sacred or religious symbols in cultures. Sacred symbols, Geertz argues have an "intrinsic double aspect, being both "models for" and a "models of" culture.[44] In other words he means that religious symbols—beliefs, gods, religious rules, religious artifacts, religious personalities etc,—are embodiments of cultural meanings that provide insights into how practitioners understand their world as well as generate models that help them to deal with day to day happenings. Geertz's idea provides an important lead in exploring the Vodou religious tradition as an embodiment of Haitian cultural meanings.

Engaging Geertz's insights on religion, I demonstrate how Vodou embodies the values and norms of Haitian culture and gives "expression" to them.[45] In the connection, Vodou plays a crucial role in the transmission of Haitian cultural values to Haitian immigrants in Miami who are concerned that Haitian traditional values may gradually fade away among generations born in the diaspora. In its "model for" role, Vodou conditions, directs and guides worshippers by inducing the appropriate dispositions to

[42] Clifford James Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[43] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 93.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 95.

specific situations.[46] In the context of the present study, I show how through rituals a strong feeling of communal solidarity is reinforced among members, which enables them to face challenges as immigrants. In times of stress, which form part of the process of living as immigrants and therefore marginal people in America, the group's show of solidarity is important in cushioning individuals. The study also highlights the importance of Vodou deities (loas) as conveyers of meanings and inducers of moods that speak to a variety of Haitian immigrant concerns. It stresses the roles of loas in providing models for how to address specific issues including health problems. In the chapters that follow, we will read about how the presence of loas such as Papa Ogou and Gede induce moods considered appropriate in dealing with specific situations. Following Geertz's lead, the research will also view the ritual specialists, the hub of the religion, as the mediators of these Haitian meanings and explore how the meanings help their community in negotiating a new sense of identity, new experiences, and new (western) understandings of health and healing in South Florida.

The study also engages Thomas Tweed's notion of religion as part of transmigratory situations. In trying to make sense of the Cuban Catholic ritual he observed during fieldwork in South Florida, the setting of my study, Tweed ventured a journey of theory exploration and construction, of which the result is *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Crossing and dwelling is a relational and dynamic theory of religion which makes sense of the religious life of transnational migrants, in that, it addresses three themes related to transmigratory experiences—movement, relation, and

[46] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 93.

position.[47] Tweed suggests that religions are repositories of cultural symbols and turns to the metaphor of travel, reimagining theories as itineraries. In this regard, Tweed explores how the present age seems to be characterized by accelerated movements of people, cultures and religions across time and space.[48] Tweed argues, religions enable and constrain *territorial crossings*, as devotees traverse natural terrain and social space beyond the home and across the homeland; *corporeal crossings*, as the religious fix their attention on the limits of embodied existence; and *cosmic crossings*, as the pious imagine and cross the ultimate horizon of human life.[49] He defines religion as "confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries."[50]

The crux of Tweed's argument is that religion by its very nature is very suited to trans-migratory processes. His point is that, not only is religion complex, but its fluidity also enables it to easily flow through time and space acquiring new elements as it shapes itself to new times and spaces. Religion also harbors a variety of cultural devices that its practitioners can deploy to express moods such as joy, and in dealing with suffering when it arises in its diverse manifestations. These elements, Tweed argues, make religion a readily available resource for immigrants, whose lives involve moving, crossing into other spaces, settling, and dealing with emotions such as joy and pain, that are occasioned in the process. My study explores Vodou's flow from Haiti to South Florida in

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[47] Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 55-57.

[48] Thomas Tweed, *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion (*London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 22.

[49] Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion,* 123**.**

[50] Ibid.*,* 54.

accompaniment with Haitian immigrants in the context of Tweed's understanding of religion. Vodou's ability to easily move with Haitians and shape itself to new times and spaces lends it to ready usage by Haitians confronted with new situations of life in South Florida. As Haitians would put it "Vodou is our custom, not only religion," meaning, Vodou 'flows' with them. An exploration of Mambos and Houngas and their roles in presiding over crucial rituals such as birth, festivals, healing rites, initiations and death will enable the research to expound on the ways in which Vodou furnishes the contexts for culturally appropriate ways of expressing emotions such as joy, pain, hopes, anxieties and aspirations, all of which are related to health when viewed from Haitian cultural perspective.

My study also engages the notion that "global flows trigger closures of cultural identities" propounded by Meyer and Geschiere. Their approach debunked commonplace assumptions about the homogenizing effects of globalization which argued that through the impact of new technologies of communication and transportation and the intensified circulation of goods, people and services on a global scale, cultural difference(s) was bound to disappear.[51] In their classic work on *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure,* which comprised of contributions from other distinguished scholars, Meyer and Geschiere argued that the homogenizing tendencies that appear inherent to globalization seem to imply a continued or even intensified heterogeneity in cultural terms.[52] Drawing on the various examples of the various contributors, Meyer and

[51] Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds.), introduction to, *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flows and Closures* (U.S.A: Blackwell, 2003), 1.

[52] Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds.), introduction to, *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flows and Closures* (U.S.A: Blackwell, 2003), 2.

Geschiere demonstrate that the process of globalization lead to a hardening of cultural contrasts and even engenders new oppositions.[53] Hence, the global and local culturally homogenizing tendencies of globalization imply continued or even a reinforced cultural heterogeneity.[54] Their varying articulations highlight the paradox that accelerating global flows of goods, persons and images go together with determined efforts towards closure, thus emphasis on cultural difference(s) and fixing of identities. The paradox, according to them is the balance between global flows and cultural closures. In other words the contributions demonstrated that there is empirical evidence that people's awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames as well as determined efforts to affirm old and construct new boundaries. As a point of departure, Meyer and Geschiere show how the notion of globalization not only takes into account the rapid increase mobility of people, images and goods, but also the fact that in many places, flows go hand in hand with closures of identities.

My study builds on Meyer and Geschiere's notion that global flows go hand in hand with closures of identities. Taking a clue from this idea, I view South Florida as a meeting point for different ethnic groups of immigrants in America. Thus, the state is an eclectic mix of different ethnic communities from various part of the globe. There is evidence of diverse ethnic communities in the various counties of the state. Using religion as a rallying point, each of these ethnic communities creates specific ethnic

[53] Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds.), introduction to, *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flows and Closures* (U.S.A: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

[54] Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds.), introduction to, *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flows and Closures* (U.S.A: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

identities. There are Hindu temples, Jewish temples, and Santeria-Lucumi temples in various parts of South Florida such as Miami-Dade County. As a result, Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti are motivated to use religion as an insignia of a specific Caribbean identity, which is Haitian. In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the various theories that engage the data I collected from the field on Vodou practices, identity construction and performance and health in Little Haiti.

CHAPTER IV

FIELD WORK AND METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

A central aspect of this study involved field research. The aim of the fieldwork was to collect data on Vodou ritual specialists and the roles they perform at Halouba Hounfo (temple) among Haitian immigrants in the community of Little Haiti. I was also interested in learning about narratives on how Vodou practices produce health and identity among Haitians in Little Haiti. I conducted the fieldwork during the summer semester of 2011. The fieldwork involved participant observations and interviews. In this chapter I describe the setting in which I did this field study and how I used the methods I have mentioned above to collect the data that went into the writing of this study.

The Geographical Setting: The Community and People of Little Haiti

My main objective in this section is to locate my study geographically. I describe where the respondents involved in the study live and the nature of their lives. This section also sheds considerable light on their religious practices, on which this study focuses. Little Haiti, 33 blocks just north of Miami's Design District was the geographical setting for the study. Little Haiti was originally called "Lemon City." The area was officially christened as Little Haiti during a surge in Haitian immigration in the mid 1970s and 1980s. The community was so named by Viter Juste, affectionately dubbed the "Father of Little Haiti." He was a revered Haitian community leader, and the former publisher of Haiti-Florida (Creole language newspaper).[55] Geographically, this neighborhood is considered to stretch from 54th Street in the South, to the northern city line, or 86th

[55] Haitian Neighborhood Center Sant La. *Healthcare Needs and Issues in Little Haiti: A Community Voices Report* (Florida: Sant La, 2006).

Street.[56] The neighborhood boundaries are roughly bound by Little River to the North, I-95 to the west, Florida East Coast Railway to the east, and 101 NE 54th Street to the South.[57]

Fig. 1 Geographical Setting (Little Haiti)

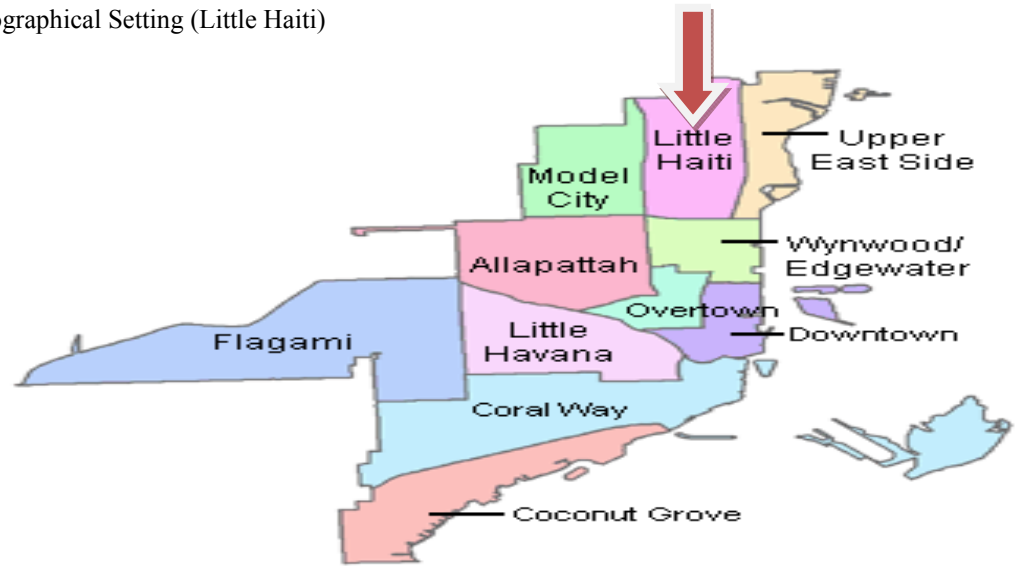

Fig. 2 A Typical botanica in Little Haiti

[56] City of Miami, www.ci.miami.fl.us/haiti 2010.

[57] Haitian Neighborhood Center Sant La. *Healthcare Needs and Issues in Little Haiti: A Community Voices Project Report,* Florida: Sant La, 2004.

Figure 1 shows a Map of Miami and its Neighborhood including Little Haiti, while figure 2 shows a typical botanica in Little Haiti.

The neighborhood's history is the story of hundreds of Haitian immigrants who established new lives in the Miami-Dade County. Socially, this ethnic community has withstood great physical, emotional and social stress prior to migrating to America. Upon their arrival, they encountered more challenges as persons of color, who speak a foreign language, and carry cultural beliefs and practices, alternative to mainstream North America.[58] In terms of issues of healthcare among Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti, it is estimated that many lower income individuals arrived in America with existing medical problems or without standard America immunizations and preventive healthcare histories.[59] Other studies have also indicated that Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti are delineated in terms of healthcare facilities and services.[60] Besides, lack of health insurance, documentation requirements and high cost of healthcare services are among health related issues that affect Haitians in Little Haiti.[61]

Religious Life

Haitians are extraordinarily religious. Nearly 75 percent of Haitian immigrants in South Florida reported in 1985 that they attended church at least weekly. Already by the mid-1980s, nearly 40 percent of then-recent Haitian refugees in South Florida were

[58] Haitian Neighborhood Center Sant La. *Healthcare Needs and Issues in Little Haiti: A Community Voices Project Report (*Florida: Sant La, 2004).

[59] Ryan, Ellen R. et al. "Perceptions of Access to U.S. Healthcare of Haitian Immigrants in South Florida," in *Florida Public Health Review*, 2004; 1: 30-35.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

Protestants.[62] Storefront Protestant churches abound in Little Haiti. Yet, in spite of the explosion of Protestant sects in Haitian Christianity, the most visible and important religious institution in Little Haiti is the Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church and the adjoining Pierre Toussaint Haitian Catholic Center.[63] Among the religions of Haitian immigrants is Vodou and a sprinkling of botanicas (stores that provide ritual paraphernalia, herbs, and various ritual services by Vodou priests and priestesses) round out Little Haiti's remarkable religious landscape. Vodou is a religion of survival, and it counsels what it must, to ensure survival.[64] It is estimated that today some 25,000 Haitians in Miami, or 10 percent of the total Haitian population in Miami-Dade County, regularly practice Vodou.[65] It is also acknowledged that thousands of others occasionally consult a Mambo (priestess) or Hounga (priest) for spiritual guidance, healing, or "luck" (*chans*). Aside from the three or four small quasi-public temples in the city such as Halouba Hounfo, Vodou in Miami is largely underground, or home-based. Practitioners have altars erected in their homes where a Hounga and/or a Mambo might visit to preside over occasional ceremonies, usually either rites of passage or feasts for the loas (Vodou deities/spirits).[66]

Religion (Catholic, Protestant, Vodou, or any mix thereof) thus plays a central role both in shaping Haitians' understanding of suffering and in fortifying their struggle

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[62] Stepick, Alex and Alejandro Portes, "Flight into Despair: A Profile of Recent Haitian Refugees in South Florida," *International Migration Review*, (1986), v. 20, no. 2, 329-350.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Haitian Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 256.

[65]Terry Rey and Alex Stepick, *Visual Culture and Visual Piety in Little Haiti: The Sea, the Tree, and the Refugee*, 2006.

[66] Ibid.

to survive and advance. Praying to *Bondyè/Mawu Liza* (God) and the Catholic saints, being baptized in the Holy spirit or serving the Vodou loas, whether for protection, forgiveness, fullness of life, deliverance, or salvation, are done out of an unflinching faith that these spiritual beings can and do respond to human needs, and that religious practices/rituals elicits their response. Overall, the utilities and applications of religion among Haitian immigrants in Little Haiti are consistent with those that predominate in the general history of immigrant religion in the United States.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was one of the methods I employed to collect data for this study. The participant observation involved making trips to the Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti where the selected Vodou ritual specialists perform ritual functions. I also visited the home of Mambo Ingrid the priestess who leads Halouba and her husband Hounga Pierre in Miramar, to have conversations with them and observe rituals they organized for their clients. I also visited the bookshop of Jean Mapou in Little Haiti, to learn about the history of Haitian migrations to America.

During these visits, I made effort to observe and understand the significance of the rituals and ceremonies performed for the members and established rapport with them. At Halouba Hounfo, I observed the arrangements at the setting and the effigies of loas on the wall. I also observed the paraphernalia involved in the rituals as well as the moods and actions of the participants during worship. I participated in the singing and dancing during ritual ceremonies at the Hounfo. Though I am not fluent in Creole, I hummed along as worshippers would sing a song I had become familiar with. My status as an African made it easy for me to blend in and participate as well as observe the functions

among Haitians. They did not view me as a stranger at all; rather they saw me as part of them. I recorded my observations during these visits in a field notebook that I carried along.

Interviews

In complementing the participant observation method, I conducted interviews too. Mostly they were unstructured, some were scheduled others were not. The scheduled interviews followed prior notices to research respondents. These included my gatekeepers, Jean Mapou and Mambo Ingrid and other selected Vodou ritual specialists. The unstructured interviews took the form of casual conversations with clients and other participants at the Halouba Hounfo and the home of Mambo Ingrid, or in their homes. The aim of the interviews was to collect data on views from Vodou ritual specialists concerning the functions they performed at Halouba Hounfo. Data were also collected on views of the clienteles of the ritual specialists, about the functions performed at the Halouba Hounfo, their evaluations of these services, their personal histories from their childhood days in Haiti until their migration to America. Normally I would spend time with clients of the ritual specialists and engage them in conversations after the rituals were over. In this way, I was able to make friends who also became my regular informants. Many ended up providing me with very valuable data. I also conducted some interviews during my visits to the community's rituals at any time it was convenient, that is, during initiation ritual ceremonies, during interludes, and after rituals.

Some respondents volunteered information to me on their own. One incident I recall was at Mambo Ingrid's house. During a ritual performance where loas (Vodou spirits) were consulted, a young woman who sat by me willingly narrated and explained the

ongoing ritual to me. She later shared with me her own Vodou experience, without me asking her anything. Though I did not prearrange any conversation with her, yet she voluntarily conveyed information about Vodou spirit possession performed by Mambo Ingrid to me and offered to explain further any questions I might have concerning Vodou rituals performed by Mambo Ingrid and the other ritual specialists at Halouba.

An interview guide, guided my interviews that included questions covering the range of topics I was interested in, because I did not religiously follow my interview guide, interviewees had control over the interview situation, they felt free to talk about their experiences. The longest interviews lasted from forty minutes to about one hour. Such interviews were conducted mostly with the ritual specialists on days when they were not very busy. Shorter interviews often lasted about twenty minutes or less and were mostly conducted with the clientele of the ritual specialists during or just after ceremonies. I made a number of follow-up interviews too, by going to the homes of some worshippers. These were mostly for purposes of seeking clarification on issues we had discussed sometime earlier at the Halouba Hounfo. In my interviews with the Vodou ritual specialists, I asked them questions about the community's origins, history, and their functions at the Halouba Hounfo. Interviews with the clienteles delved more into health and identity issues and how the rituals performed by ritual specialists at Halouba, were important to them.

Lessons from my field research class at Florida International University helped me in the course of doing my interviews. I probed extensively, commenting on my curiosity and seeking the help of the person, in sorting out what I felt were inconsistencies in the narratives.

I showed patience and was careful not to interrupt with questions when a respondent was talking, lest this would distract me from listening, and the interviewee from talking, affecting the smooth flow of our chats. I always waited for every detail they might share. But I was persistent and very relentless in my pursuit of information. I listened with care, was attentive, pensive, and expressed great interest in all facets of their narratives. I would often ask them to explain further an earlier point whenever they would pause. At the end of each interview day, I would read over my notes and fill in the missing details.

The Field Experience and Challenges

Having been born into a Christian home and becoming the wife of a Pentecostal/Charismatic preacher in Ghana, I embarked on this field research on Haitian Vodou with a great deal of apprehensions. My fears arose because everything about Vodou is demonized or labeled as "evil or occult" in my Pentecostal tradition. As a result, I was not supposed to have anything to do with the tradition. A class I took at F.I.U titled *Rasta, Vodou and Santeria* allayed my fears and thus motivated me to embark on this research. The professor who taught this course explained the Vodou tradition from an objective perspective. He said that just like other religions, Vodou provides spirituality for its members. His explanations enlightened me about what Vodou is and what it is not. In order to appreciate the tradition of Vodou, and with the encouragement from the professor to "try something new and open your eyes," I plunged into this research with the same passion with which I had disliked Vodou when I was in Ghana. My first step towards making entry into the Haitian community was to inquire from the Religious Studies department's secretary who a Haitian, whose voice in the Haitian community was

an authority enough to educate me on Vodou. She directed me to Jean Mapou, a respected member of the Haitian community in Miami who in turn linked me up with a Vodou priestess: Amelia Ingrid Llera, popularly referred to as Mambo Ingrid or the "authentic servitieur" in Little Haiti's circle of Vodou practitioners. My first encounter with Mambo Ingrid was on the evening of April 2, 2011. She had invited me to her house at Miramar (22nd Ave. on 62 Street). Her reception was warm. We traded our anticipations of each other. I told her I thought she was an elderly Haitian woman in her late fifties. She also indicated that she thought I was a Caucasian-American curious to know about Vodou as I might have seen in the media. I wasted no time in letting Ingrid, a mid-40s, stunningly beautiful fair complexioned Haitian-Cuban, know about my surprise at meeting such a young Mambo, and she also mentioned how surprised she was, but glad that for the first time, someone from Africa would be interested in researching the Haitian portion of the African religious experience. The good rapport between Ingrid and me on the first day we met, set the tone for the rest of the research.

Following the visit to her house, she would invite me for Vodou ritual ceremonies anytime she felt I would learn something new from it. She introduced me to her husband, a Hounga and my association with them gave me a status that enabled me to interact freely with worshippers at Halouba Hounfo. I was a beneficiary of the good reputation they have garnered for themselves within the Vodou community. Fig 3 shows a picture of Mambo Ingrid besides an altar (for *Erzulie Freda*—a Vodou loa) in her home.

Fig. 3 Mambo Ingrid

This is not to say that there were no difficulties in my research. My initial apprehensions aside, there were challenging moments. One had to do with my back and forth movements to the Hounfo and Ingrid's home, as I had no vehicle of my own. My professor (main supervisor) however stepped in to help with rides, as he was also researching an aspect of the tradition in Miami. Another difficulty had to do with the secrecy that shrouds Vodou beliefs and practices. Practitioners were not always willing to divulge information about their experiences because of the stigma attached to the practice and sometimes it took several trips and my professor's experience with interviewing, for me to elicit information from them. Some spirit possessions were scary and some evenings I left the field believing I would not have the courage to return, such as the day *Erzulie Dantor* (Vodou loa) mounted Mambo Ingrid and she walked menacingly towards me with a sharp knife, I was terrified and wanted to hide behind my professor who was

there with me. To my relief she put the knife away and embraced me warmly.

On many occasions, some young men that I met and interacted with in the Hounfo (temple) asked me out on a date, and I had to fall on my traditional Ghanaian feminine diplomatic skills to turn down the invitations without offending them and jeopardizing the research. I was not daunted by these challenges. I saw them as part of the challenges that accompany field research. Gender, ethnicity, age and status, I had learned in my fieldwork class are variables that affect one's field research and sometimes they pose challenges.

Overall, it was a good experience. I cannot say I have left the field, as I am still assisting my professor in his own project, but I am quite happy to have gathered enough of the data that I needed to complete this research. More importantly, I discovered some new themes I could work on for my dotorate. I took the phone numbers of most of the members and the Vodou ritual specialists in order to contact them in case I needed to.

CHAPTER V

COMING TO AMERICA: HAITIAN MIGRATIONS

Introduction

The history of Halouba Hounfo as a religious institution in South Florida has not been treated in this study as an isolated incident but is examined within a broader context of the migratory experiences of Haitians as an immigrant group in South Florida. The temple assumes a central role as a symbol of identity for the Haitian immigrant community, as well as a space for providing alternative health and healing in Little Haiti. More importantly, its origin is closely linked to the situations of Haitians as an immigrant group in South Florida. It becomes necessary therefore to discuss the nature of the migration experiences in this chapter.

Reviewing earlier studies on the connection between religious practices and migratory processes, Ebaugh and Hagan argue that religious practices and migratory processes analyses have overlooked religion's role in all the phases of migration.[67] Such studies, they argue further, tend to emphasize the roles of churches and other religious institutions in the settlement of immigrants in their host communities, and the role of religion in the propagation of transnational activities. To expand this narrow focus, Hagan and Ebaugh suggest the need to examine how immigrants use religion in all phases of the migratory process; deciding to migrate, making preparations for the trip, during the journey itself, arrival in the host community, joining an ethnic church or

[67] Jacqueline Hagan, Helen Rose Ebaugh, "The Future of the Second Generation: The Integration of Migrant Youth in Six European Countries," in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2003), 1145-116.

religious institution and developing transnational linkages.[68] The burgeoning analyses of African immigrant religions in the recent African diaspora in Europe and North America have invariably followed the line of inquiry suggested by this schema. The main pre-occupation of the authors is to demonstrate the role of churches or other institutionalized religions in the pre-departure preparations of immigrants, through the material and spiritual support of religious leaders and followers as well as the support churches or mosques provide for immigrants who often encounter unforeseen marginalization, underemployment, bigotry and intolerance in the new society. Other scholars describe forms of spiritual support and revitalization these communities provide African immigrants in the West, which they consider arid spiritually, and the transnational linkages especially with their homelands, but also with other diasporas which they furnish immigrants.[69] My treatment of Haitian migration to Miami in this chapter follows the lead of these scholars. The narratives of migration that I examine reveal the role of religion throughout the phases of the immigrants' experiences.

My main argument in this chapter is that Vodou ritual practices provide a context for some Haitians to tap into the powers of the loas for supernatural help throughout all the phases of their migratory processes. From the preparation for the journey, the perilous trip across the Atlantic, the arrival and the struggles to settle in the new home, they depended on Vodou. Their experiences with Vodou's ability to provide assurance and ritual devices for negotiating their problems motivated the search for a space where they

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[68] Jacqueline Hagan, Helen Rose Ebaugh, "The Future of the Second Generation: The Integration of Migrant Youth in Six European Countries," in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2003), 1145-116.

[69]Moses Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: Spirituality, Communality and Identity in a Ghanaian Immigrant Congregation", in *African Immigrant Religions in America*, eds., Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani (New York: New University Press, 2007), 259.

could gather regularly and press their ritual devices into service in dealing with their challenges. Underlying the narratives is a sense of the urgent need for a ritual space such as Halouba. In the face of the harsh realities of immigrant life in South Florida, the dreams of grandeur and a life of abundance that had motivated the journeys were quickly replaced by the struggle to survive for these immigrants, many of whom lived without the requisite documents for a long time. The need for the loas, the narratives reveal, was even more urgent here than it was at home. Halouba, the chapter concludes, was born out of this need**.**

The United States of America was not a favored destination for Haitian immigrants until Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier assumed power in 1957. Most Haitians fled to neighboring countries in search for better living conditions, because the political, economic and social conditions in Haiti deteriorated under the Duvaliers. Since then, Haitian citizens from all levels of society fled their homeland to America and other countries. In keeping with their aspirations for employment and the enjoyment of higher standard of living, the Haitian earlier immigrants settled in the urban centers such as New York. An earlier generation of Haitian immigrants who had trickled into America had settled in New York where it was easier to blend in with the heterogeneous immigrant populations there, until one secured the necessary documents to legitimize one's stay in America. This population of Haitian immigrants in New York was the basis of New York's attraction to later arrivals. Their presence in this new home cushioned the entry for the later arrivals. Significant numbers of Haitian immigrants are also in Chicago and Boston.[70] South Florida has also been noted as attracting a good number of Haitian

[70] See Buchanan, 1979; Laguerre, 1984; Glick, 1974; Souffrant, 1974; Dejean, 1978.

immigrants and pockets of them settled in Little Haiti, Miami Dade County. Haitian immigrants had largely ignored Florida as a migration destination until the early 1980's.[71]

From the 1980s on, many Haitian immigrants arrived in the United States by boat on the shores of Florida and were known as the "boat people." The daring ocean transit reflected the urgent need to flee political persecution and the deplorable conditions created by corrupt leaders. The United States president at this time, Jimmy Carter, gave such refugees a legal status similar to Cubans in 1980 with his *Cuban-Haitian Entrant Program*. Eighteen months later, the tides turned against the Haitian refugees in America, as president Reagan subscribed to a policy of interdiction and indefinite detention for Haitian boat people refugees. There was a brief relief six months later, in June 1982, when a federal court ruled against such detention and several thousand Haitian refugees were released. In 1986, 40,000 Haitians who came to the United States seeking political asylum were given permanent resident status. A similar pattern of events occurred in the 1990s. When Aristide was removed by military coup in 1991, there was another wave of Haitian "boat people." Nevertheless, under presidents Bush and Clinton, many of the boat people were not allowed to reach the shores of the United States. Instead, they were stopped at sea and returned to Haiti. Others were held in detention camps.[72]

Between 1995 and 1998, 50,000 Haitians were given asylum and temporary legal status, but not permanent residence like many of their Nicaraguan and Cuban

[71]Alex Stepick and Alejandro Portes, Flight into Despair: A Profile of Recent Haitian Refugees in South Florida, in *International Migration Review,* Center for Migration Studies for New York (vol. 20 no. 2 Summer 1986), 329-350**.**

[72] Alex Stepick and Alejandro Portes, Flight into Despair: A Profile of Recent Haitian Refugees in South Florida, in *International Migration Review,* Center for Migration Studies for New York (vol. 20 no. 2 Summer 1986), 329-350**.**

counterparts.[73] The lack of consistency in the policies on how Haitian immigrants should be treated in America is a crucial source of worry for many. They feel they are not wanted here, yet Haiti is not a place they would like to return to now, generating fears and anxieties among them. The uncertainties that characterized the treatment of Haitian immigrants are an important backdrop for understanding their anxieties and fears in the new home. The rather sordid history also foreshadows many of the challenges many Haitians would face settling in America. As the study is focused on the Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti, our account will be based on the migratory experiences of its Haitian members.

Period of Migration

Historically, there are five major documented periods of Haitian migration to the United States: the period of French colonization of Haiti; the Haitian revolution (1791-1804); the United States occupation of Haiti (1915-1934); the period of the Duvaliers (1957-1986), both Papa Doc and Baby Doc; and the overthrow of President Aristide (1991).[74] For almost three decades, from 1957 to 1986, when François "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier were in power, political persecution and economic instability caused Haitian professionals, the middle class, and students to leave the island in large numbers. Most Haitians emigrated in search of political asylum or permanent residence status in various countries such as the United States.

A striking characteristic of the Halouba Hounfo community is the relatively long duration of stay that majority of the Haitian worshippers claim in America. In fact, the

[73] Rose-Marie Cassagnol Chierici, *Demele "Making It:" Migration and Adaptation among Haitian Boat People in the United States* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 1-12.

[74] Rose-Marie C. Chierici, *Demele "Making It": Migration and Adaptation among Haitian Boat People in the United States* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 1-12.

average number of years of a typical worshipper's stay in America is between ten and forty years. It follows that majority of the Halouba Hounfo members arrived in America within the period of heavy migration between 1971 and 1981 (during the Jean Claude Duvalier's regime) with a few from slightly earlier times. Not all of them came to America because of political persecution or socio-economic problems, as we will see in this chapter. Some of them said they are the relatives of earlier arrivals. The earlier arrivals sponsored their entry into America. Others said they fled to America due to the 2010 earthquake that devastated their living conditions in Haiti. Some of these "latecomers" arrived as late as a year ago. Some described themselves as Haitian Americans, children of earlier Haitian immigrants, or born in America. We may presume that as the secondary migration to America is continuous, new members of the Haitian community must be arriving in America every day.

Reasons for Migrating to America

In one of the few studies on Haitian immigrants in America, Chierici mentions some important factors as being responsible for their migration to America. The first is political and the second was economic. According to the writer, every wave of migration from Haiti has come during political turmoil there.[75] However, economic malaise has always accompanied such turmoil so it has been difficult to distinguish political from economic migrants. More so, some of the Haitian refugees were thought to have left their homeland because of economic rather than political reasons. In terms of their expressed reasons for migrating to America, members of the Halouba Hounfo dramatically reiterate some reasons including the two reasons identified by Chierici. The majority of the

[75] Rose-Marie Cassagnol Chierici, *Demele "Making It": Migration and Adaptation among Haitian Boat People in the United States (*New York: AMS Press, 1980), 8.

respondents explained that the primary consideration underlying their migration into America was the desire to flee from Duvalier's political turmoil. Others narrated economic as well as social tensions as reasons, the need to find a better job and enjoy a higher standard of living, which they often refer to as "the good life." The expression "good life," a common cliché among the worshippers, refers invariably to the "benefits" supposed to accrue from their coming to America.

- ***Economic Reasons***

The story of Amalia Ingrid Llera, who from time to time performed Vodou rituals and ceremonies at the Halouba Hounfo is a good illustration of how deplorable socio-economic conditions in Haiti drove some Haitians to America. During a conversation with her at her Miramar home, one evening. Ingrid described in horrific terms the unhappy life in Haiti that made her join the "boat people" to come to America at the tender of sixteen (16). What triggered the events that made her unhappy was the death of her Italian foster father and her mother's decision that she should live with her biological father (a Cuban). She contrasted the poor quality of her life with her biological father to the comfortable life she had lived with her foster father: "My foster father really took good care of me, took me to the best of schools in Haiti, and gave me all that I asked for. But my biological father, even though he was an engineer, he could not give me that life I was used to living when I was with my foster father."[76] She attributed this situation to "the times." "This was when Haiti was under Duvalier, 'Baby Doc'"! She exclaimed in anguish and narrated amidst tears in her eyes:

> That man was wicked... He cared about himself and his family only. So many Haitians, especially the young men and those of us teenage girls who could afford the journey were leaving Haiti for America because we

[76] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at her home in Miramar, 11/24/2012.

> could not take the hardship anymore! Those who were well-connected to people outside Haiti and had money, managed to secure visas, bought tickets and fled. The rest of us, (pointing to herself), we had no choice we had to come by boat.[77]

Figure 4 shows a picture of Haitian migrants who came to Miami on boats.

Fig. 4 Haitian immigrants at the shores of Miami on boats

- ***Desire to flee from Duvalier's political turmoil***

Another factor respondents mentioned was the desire to flee from Duvalier's political turmoil. An elderly man known as Jean-Marie Denise Mapou, a renowned playwright and a Haitian cultural activist, said he had to flee for his life from the Duvalier (Papa Doc) regime, the father of Baby Doc, Jean-Claude Duvalier. "You don't go into Duvalier's prison and come back alive!"[78] He mused as he reached out for an old photograph of him and his friends, most of whom he said died in Duvalier's jails. Mapou said the reason the security agents were after him was his cultural activities. Working as a Radio journalist in Haiti, he advocated for the Haitian Creole language to be taught in

[77] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at her home in Miramar, 11/24/2012.

[78] Interview with Jean Mapou Denis at his bookstore in Little Haiti on 10/19/2012. He was the one who introduced me to Mambo Ingrid.

schools so that students could understand "things in their own terms," French was imposed on them and it distanced them from their own cultural language and realities. It was difficult to learn for many who did not have a good background and some gave up on education all together, Mapou explained. However, the government (Papa Doc's) of the day was not happy with that, he added. He was branded a communist. He was then arrested by Duvalier's *Tonton Macoutes* (police) tortured and sent to jail for four months. "I knew that, that was it for me!" He exclaimed and narrated. "Why should it have been different? Everybody who went there was killed! But one morning, 'they' called me and said I was going to be let go and one of the guards cautioned me, 'if you get out shut your beak! and if you can, leave the country, if we get you here again you won't go back!'... there and then, I was released from jail." After he was released from jail, for fear of being arrested again and perhaps killed in the process, his relatives raised money for him to leave the country. He decided to go to New York to further his education. He indicated that he did not come by boat, but his well-connected and wealthy father managed to secure a visa for him and he fled to New York. He would relocate to Miami later when his work places requested that he lead a unit in Miami. Fig. 5 is a picture of Jean Marie Denis (Mapou) on the left and my Professor (right) at his bookstore in Little Haiti. Fig. 5

- ***Social Tensions***

For Nicolai, a 50 year old mechanic in little Haiti, his escape to America in the 1980's was motivated more by social tensions than socio-economic problems or political persecution. Amidst spontaneous outbursts of laughter, he narrated how he cuckolded a middle-aged man at the age of 16 and became the target of the man's wrath. "But it was not my fault, the man's wife said she loved me and with my raging hormones then, I could not resist her," he explained. News of this affair and the cuckolded husband's decision to consult a sorcerer to "finish" Nicolai with magico-religious powers soon spread through the village. Fearing for the life of his son, Nicolai's father paid some "boat people" to ferry his son across the Atlantic to safety in America. Not every respondent migrated to America, because of the perilous state of the socio-economic life or political persecutions. Some came to America voluntarily, lured by the visions of a life of freedom, affluence and plenty. Grandma Cynthia, a 60 year old caretaker of the Halouba botanica (an outlet for selling Haitian traditional herbs and Vodou religious paraphernalia attached to the Halouba Hounfo) recalled the visions of grandeur conveyed to her about America through narratives from those who lived here whenever they visited Haiti. "Aah I always wanted to come here and see for myself!" She stated, sipped a glass of water, then continued. "We heard there was a lot of money here. We saw the tall buildings in the media, the beautiful cars and the roads that seemed like they were constructed in the skies. I would tell myself, what kind of land is this? This looked like heaven." she said smiling and looking closely at me, as I inquired. She narrated how her husband would be "lucky" to make it to New York and later sponsor her coming to America. However, after living for close to twenty years in New York she decided to move to South Florida,

because settling here offered a sense of closeness to home and the tropical climate that South Florida has to offer, was a welcome escape from the harsh winters of New York.

Similarly, Kerlyne, a middle-aged woman who regularly participates in ceremonies at the Halouba Hounfo explained how her auntie sponsored her to come to America at the age of 16. Other members of the temple explained that they originally came to America through student scholarships or through the American lottery program, then extended their stays after finding jobs in America. A middle-aged female worshipper called Neilys recounted how she had come to America as a student, but did not return to Haiti. She came to America in 1991 on a student visa and extended her stay after she found a job in New York as a healthcare assistant. She became a green card holder. In our chats, many of the worshippers recounted stories of the difficulties they went through trying to obtain visas or bribe the "boat people" to get them a place on the boat. However, while recounting these stories often their initial facial expressions of bitterness would change into a broad smile when they got to the climax of the story, the point at which a visa was finally granted by the officials of the American Embassy, or when an agreement was arrived at with the organizers of the boat trips. There, their whole life story came together in the "once in a lifetime" opportunity to come to America. For these worshippers and other Haitians at home therefore, America symbolised a place of unlimited opportunities and hope, and the chance to come to America to "enjoy the good life" seemed for many as a "life spring."

The Ritual Preparations and the Journey across the Atlantic

Many of the respondents painted a clear picture of the apprehension that characterized their pre-departure feelings. The themes that emerged from these narratives

of migration to America by boat were the pain the narrators felt leaving home and loved ones behind, a sense of the desperate need to escape the horrors of the life in Haiti, and the fear that one might not even make it to America, but perish somewhere on the high seas. Narrating the reminiscences of his past and reflecting on the experience of the boat journey to America, during an interview with him in the Halouba hounfo, one of the Hounsies (choir) said:

> Haiti is home, it is not paradise though, but we love it. If conditions were not that bad, we would not leave. But it was so bad, so bad that we had to leave. At that time as Haitian, you had to make a choice and it was a difficult choice. You could decide to stay and die at the hands of 'Papa Doc' or poverty or take the 50/50 chance to flee to America. It was 50/50 chance, because there was no guarantee that you will get to America. All we had was a raft, little food and we depended on the wind...hope that the American immigration will not get you!..You could die on the way, but it could be worse if you stayed, so you had to do something that will help you survive the journey and even after.[79]

Stories about boatloads of Haitian migrants capsizing and almost everyone on board perishing on the seas reached Haiti almost every day. These were the topics of the rumors and daily conversations and news, which floated about in cities and villages. While these accidents could be explained in physical terms, such as the failure of an engine, or the un-safety of the raft's "unseaworthiness," the roughness of the seas or the weight of the boat, traditional Haitian understandings linked these accidents to spiritual forces. It would be said that these accidents were caused by the anger of the loa of the sea, the failure of someone on board to adhere strictly to specific ritual rules, or the curse "on the head" of an individual. It is in the light of such explanations and the fears that "boaters" made a point of investing a good deal of time and other resources into preparing

[79] Interview with a Hounsie, Etoile at Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti, 11/23/2011.

themselves, the boats, the seas, the perilous journey, and the uncertain life that lay ahead if one survived.

The narratives described how the preparations for the journey involved performing elaborate Vodou rituals and how the rituals ensured their safety during the journey. Families of the individuals involved also made a point of fortifying their members spiritually. These rituals often involved making sacrifices to *Agwe* (Vodou loa of the sea) and *Lasiren* his consort, too. The sense was that once a boat sets off everything was in the hands of *Agwe.* Nicolai narrated how his grandfather fortified him spiritually for the journey:

> Me, I did not believe in those things. But my grandfather…he was a Hounga. And before I came, he prepared pwen (protecting charm) for me. When I went and told him I was on my way, he tied the pwen to my wrist and said 'with these charms you will overcome the perils of this journey and succeed in your mission in America.' The things that happened on the way… I don't even know where to begin…but they strengthened my belief in Vodou. At a point we were sinking!… we were screaming!... some of the men started throwing our belongings into the sea in order to prevent the boat from sinking. It was then that others including myself began to pray and call on the names of the loas...and particularly *Agwe* and *Erzulie Dantor*. Then suddenly my friend turned and looked at me and said, 'Look there!' And what did we see? Some dolphins! They appeared as if they were guarding the boat. They guided the boat until we got ashore here. And they just vanished! You don't need anyone to tell you that this was not real... you will say that this was not real, but this happened to me and the people I came with, we saw it...my friend.[80]

Mambo Ingrid recalled how she decided to join the "boat people" to come to America because she did not have money for a visa or flight ticket. She recounted her horrific experience while on the sea for eleven days and her detention in America upon her arrival with other "boat people" at a young age of sixteen in 1981:

> Life was not easy at that time (looking down in a sad mood). When we set off from Haiti many people died at sea (shaking her head as she recounted

[80] Interview with Nicolai, 01/21/2012 at Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti.

> the migration ordeal). It was a terrible experience for a girl my age. We had no good food, drinking water, no place to respond to natures calls. And we had to stand because there was no room to sit. We were packed. But the situation was such that we preferred to die at sea than remain in Haiti. Because we knew life was better here in America… (She sighed), good job and education. I came here to get good education and a better life. But I did not forget Vodou, my tradition and culture. I survived because of Vodou. At a point the boat was taking water and sinking and the wind was so strong, I was praying to the lwas while fetching the water and throwing overboard as others joined in. Then 5 days before we made it to shore in Miami after 11 days at sea—the weather became very beautiful, and from now there a group of big fishes emerge swam alongside the boat. For hours, they swam along side. Their presence was fascinating yet tremendous but infused a sense of calmness in us. We knew they were loas (spirits) and we knew we were going to make it to shore safely. This is part of the reasons I am not ashamed to practice my religion... I knew no one here when I came but these loas have always held my hands and saved me anytime I was in need.[81]

One impression I came away with was that the journey strengthened belief in the powers of the Vodou loas, even for those who were not very active practitioners before coming to America. Their anxiety called on them to deploy Vodou's resources in the context of rituals-prayers, incantations-songs, use of charms. The success of their journeys when others had failed was for them a testimony to the power of the loas. They saw evidence for themselves that the loas were powerful and learned that in the life to come these were the religio-cultural resources they could depend on. In a sense, these encounters with Vodou on the seas foreshadowed the importance many Haitians would attach to it after settling in America when they were confronted with difficult situations. The idea of a space such as Halouba Hounfo for locating the loas and invoking their presence in times of need was indeed reinforced by the harrowing journey to America across the Atlantic from Haiti.

[81] Interview with Mambo Ingrid, 03/27/2011 at Halouba Temple, Little Haiti

Migratory Patterns

A theme that emerged from the narratives of the respondents was the fact that majority of them migrated from countryside families in Haiti, called lakous. Apart from a few who said they had relatives and some friends already in America, most worshippers said they hardly knew each other prior to their arrival in America. As they commonly reiterated, "many of us came here as strangers but from Haiti." The pattern of migration as I observed was for one person to come first, and then literally "pull" other family members to America later. I observed that most worshippers who had not been among the initial immigrants especially the "boat people," were sponsored by their relatives. These ranged from sponsoring a daughter, a son, a wife, husband, an uncle, or an aunt or a brother or sister, mother or father. The obligations on the individual to help fellow relatives in the context of Haitian villages, or lakous where the "family" is defined in the communal sense of an extended network of kin relationships, seems to find an expression in this pattern of chain migratory trend. I also noted a pattern in the places where new arrivals settled first in America.

Those who were sponsored by relatives often settled in with their sponsors, and mostly this was in Miami's Little Haiti. Those who came by boat often left Miami, and made temporary sojourns elsewhere before returning to Miami later to settle. New York was mentioned as a very common destination. There was a growing Haitian population there to cushion the new arrivals' initial stay. It was also easier for them to blend into New York's teeming immigrant populations and find "under the table" work until they secured their papers. It would seem from the interviews that the Haitians saw New York as ideal for learning the ropes of the immigrant culture in America. Many came to settle

in Miami only after they had secured the necessary documents legitimizing their stay in America. They locate Miami's attraction in its proximity to home (Haiti) which they feel the need to frequent as their parents age, the warm tropical weather, and other features of the landscape such as Miami's beaches and palm trees, which conveyed an aura not too different from Haiti's. With time, the growing population of Haitians in South Florida became an important pull factor for many new arrivals.

Haitian immigrants' Experiences upon Arrival in America

In the booming American economy during Clinton's administration, most of these Haitian men and women had relatively little difficulty in finding jobs in factories and restaurants and in the construction and electrical firms of New York, Boston and Florida where most of them first settled. Most of the Halouba Hounfo worshippers explained that they performed different kinds of tasks in these work places: janitors, waiters, factory hands, and security personnel. Others claimed they took on jobs as delivery boys, dishwashers and cleaners in restaurants. Some were also cab drivers. Some explained that in order to save enough money to sponsor their family members they sometimes did two or three jobs. The few very highly educated arrivals initially took on jobs irrespective of their skills and qualifications. Many changed jobs very often in their earlier years.

Mapou also reiterated that he had been in the country for close to forty years and was among the early migrants to America for political asylum, lists a number of jobs that he has changed over the years. He explained that he held some of these jobs simultaneously. He had once been a "pizza delivery boy," driven a cab for a company, worked as a janitor, and as an attendant in a parking lot in New York before landing his current job as a supervisor of parking spaces at the Miami Airport. He recounted how

after working as a Radio journalist in Haiti and obtaining a college degree in America, was unable to easily find a suitable job and he had to make do with whatever was available:

> You must understand why you have come into the system that's all... If you will worry about all your qualifications, you had better stayed put in Haiti…here you must be prepared to do any work that will give you something.[82]

Similar experiences were described by other members as characterizing the first few years of their stay in America. After establishing themselves in America and saving enough money, many of worshippers said, it was only then they sponsored their spouses, children and other relatives to join them in America from Haiti. Respondent also complained bitterly about the on-going recession in America, often comparing the present times to when they arrived.

Choices of Settlements

When I began the study, I wondered why little Haiti in South Florida had a special attraction for the Haitian immigrants in America. My initial impression was that little Haiti was the only close-knit Haitian community in South Florida. In talking to the members of the Halouba Hounfo, I realised that there are pockets of Haitian immigrants all over South Florida, in places such as Delray Beach, Miramar, and Ft. Lauderdale, and that the various Haitian immigrants have created various Haitian *Sosyetes* (societies) including Vodou *Sosyetes.* I also discovered that membership of the Hounfo community have integrated quite thoroughly into other parts of South Florida that are not predominantly Haitian strongholds.

[82] Interview with Mapou in his bookstore, Little Haiti on 6/19/2011.

The strongest "pull factor" in the members' decisions to reside in a particular South Floridian city, I noted was the already established Haitian settlements there. Friends, relatives and acquaintances accommodated them when they arrived in order to cushion the impact of their being introduced to a new society. Some families I interviewed at Halouba Hounfo during an initiation ceremony explained that they remained in Little Haiti because that was the first place they settled in when they arrived in America and it was where they made their initial acquaintances whose ties to them are so strong that they could not imagine leaving. Another factor is the centrality of the neighborhood to both the Dade and Broward counties of South Florida where jobs in the agricultural, health and other industries provide opportunities for gaining employment. Figures six (6) and seven (7) show pictures of Little Haiti neighborhood.

Fig.6 Little Haiti neighborhood

Fig.7 Picture captured by Sant La: Haitian Neighborhood Center

In explaining their choice for Little Haiti, some respondents did express a special preference for its small size and the sense of being connected with other Haitians in contrast to the anonymity one could experience in such big cities as New York, even though there is a big Haitian community there. "We come from lakous (small family communities) in Haiti, and are not used to big city life, where no one has time for another...we like to stay in the smaller places, they are more like home."[83] Explained Cedric, a 24 years old school teacher at Miramar and a member of the Hounto (drummers) that perform at the ceremonies at Halouba. Many of the respondents who offered such explanations were elderly members. The comment "Little Haiti is small and has good weather, and just like home," recurred in the responses of worshippers to questions regarding why they chose to settle in Little Haiti. I came away with the conclusion that for the majority of the members of the temple who migrated from small villages in Haiti, the choice of a smaller location such as Little Haiti was a deliberate attempt in minimising the effects of change and culture shock when they arrived. Others also mentioned that their initial settlement was in places such as Brooklyn, Boston and

[83] Interview with Cedric at Halouba Hounfo on 10/22/2011.

Montreal but they moved to South Florida because they were tired of the cold weather in the aforementioned places. "Aaah... it is the weather here," exclaimed Felix underscoring why he prefers Miami to Montreal from where he had relocated two years ago. "Montreal is great. There are lots of Haitians there. In Montreal, they speak French so you blend in easily. But it is so cold there and the winters are very long. I could never get used to the cold," he concluded.[84] Grandma Cynthia reiterated this theme when she explained why she settled in Miami after leaving New York. "The cold weather in New York was unbearable," she said. She also said there was something about Little Haiti that has made it a second home for her. "First is where South Florida is located. Unlike other states in America, South Florida is like a melting pot for almost every race and culture. It is very accommodating, so a lot of immigrants from various cultures come here."[85] She added that she feels better living in Little Haiti specifically because, there she is surrounded by other Haitian immigrants and she feels more at home among them. "Look, little Haiti is like Haiti. Sometimes you forget this is America," she said. She however noted that most of the younger generations of Haitian immigrants are leaving Little Haiti for the Broward County, upon getting better jobs that can enable them afford homes that are more luxurious. Similarly, when Jean Mapou was transferred to Miami by the New York Company he worked for, he was thrilled by the prospects of escaping from the cold and enjoying all the other benefits Miami held for a Haitian immigrant. More importantly he looked forward to living in a "Haiti away from Haiti" and hence his settlement in Little Haiti. During our conversations, he recalled the experience with the same sense of joy and relief that accompanied the news of his transfer almost thirty years ago:

[84] Interview with Felix at Halouba Hounfo on 10/22/2011.

[85] Interview with Grandma Cynthia at Halouba Botanica on 10/22/2011.

> When I received a letter from the Airline that I worked for to come to Miami, I was excited because not only was the Company going to pay my accommodation and everything…But Miami is closer to home, there were a lot of Haitians here already and a lot of Haitian Soysyete's (societies). I accepted the offer immediately, informed my family and then arranged to move without any hesitations. For me, I was coming home. My family joined me later.[86]

The Haitian Migrant experiences

"Over the years, things have improved dramatically with Haitians in America. It was very bad at first. It was a stigma to be called a Haitian. Many of us hid our identities as Haitians, but with a lot of difficulty because our distinct French and Creole accents always gave us up each time we wanted to hide." These were Hounga Pierre's initial statement, before he started into his account of how far Haitians have come in overcoming challenges as immigrants in America. In an impressive account of the historical and anthropological roots of Haiti's stigmatizing, this Hounga linked it to the Haitian revolution. He argued that ever since Haitians secured their freedom from their slaveholders through a violent revolution, they and their indigenous religion and culture (Vodou) have been ridiculed, feared and demonized. These negative discourses casting Haitian religious culture as one in which fear, lust and violence were core ingredients have shaped America's attitudes towards them, he explained. "Look, they said tuberculoses in America came from Haiti… Then came HIV (AIDS). That too, they said it was from Haiti… Even before, they knew where it came from. They said HIV entered human through Vodou sex with animals…there is nothing like that!... Have you seen anyone here having sex with animals?"[87] He asked me in anguish. For Pierre, these

[86] Interview with Jean Marie Mapou Denis in Little Haiti, on 7/18/2011.

[87] Interview Pierre at Halouba Hounfo on 7/11/2011.

stereotypes set the tone for the way Haitians have been treated unfairly in America by both the general population and the state.

Most respondents expressed some sort of disappointments when upon entering into America they realized that they were not welcomed, and that the streets of America were not paved in gold, and one still had to really struggle. Most accounts of their retrospective experiences in America contain allusions to the "hard days" of shock, racism and blatant discrimination and many other identity issues. Innsolai, an earlier migrant, for instance, recollects how he felt while riding on a subway train in New York in 1979. He described an experience in which an American child kept pointing at him while whispering something to his dad, "I felt awkward and really out of place, it was as if something was wrong with me, either my color or my looks. I just could not tell why the kid pointed at me. But it made me feel really different."[88] Innsolai attributed the incident to racism, which he explained was still quite rife in the 1970s in America.

Others also described the intimidation they faced because of the difficulty with the use of English when they arrived in America from their villages in Haiti for the first time. They explained that Creole was the language they were used to, but upon coming to America they had no choice than to learn the English language or face discrimination and ridicule. Others even recall how people often identified and differentiated them from other blacks because of their Creole accent. "Most blacks are discriminated against," said Ingrid. "But when you mention you are from Haiti, or you speak and the Creole, it betrays your background, you are as good as dead. It means you are Vodou, you have

[88] Interview with Innsolai at a *Bohun* ceremony at Halouba Hounfo on 01/12/2012.

AIDS, you have tuberculosis, no one would want to have anything to do with you."[89] Nevertheless, narratives from a few very well placed members of the Halouba temple were quite general, vague and rather dismissive about their earlier experiences of discrimination in America. Perhaps for them the grim realities of the initial difficulties have become over- shadowed by their success in adapting to America. They tend to emphasize the remoteness of such incidents and down play their effects. "Just one of those things you experience when you come to a new place."They would normally say. Moreover, most respondents seemed to have a fairly positive appraisal of their conditions in America presently. For many of them, the ability to own a home, a car and have a stable job seemed to have special significance. It was the mark of success. Often they would compare their present situation to that of their peers still in Haiti and say, "We wouldn't be able to do these things had we remained in Haiti," or "Our peers are still struggling there."..."We look after them and we are happy to be able to do that even though we still sweat to do it," a typical worshipper would add. There was a consensus, though, that the present times are bad and the community was suffering because of the recession.

Most of the members, especially the elderly, tend to share a common and grave concern for the younger generation of American-born Haitians. Many felt that their children born here had no sense of their Haitian cultural roots and their Haitian identity. They complained about what they described as a lack of discipline among Western children and lamented that their children might grow up emulating these values. In fact, they are quite critical about American or generally Western "moral values." For instance, while recommending what she describes as "extra care" or concern for children in

[89] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at Hounfo Halouba on 10/27/2011.

America, Grandma Cynthia, one of the earliest arrivals and caretaker of the temple bemoans that: "The children are spoilt here…You are even afraid to punish them when they go wrong lest they call the authorities and they will be taken away from you." Comparing this situation to what prevails in their Haitian villages, Grandma Cynthia preferred the latter. "There they grow up learning to respect, and for a child respect is the thing," she maintained. When asked how they raised their children in America, Mambo Ingrid, Grandma Cynthia, Kerlyne, Mapou and others clearly stated that they adopted both the Western style and Haitian ways of raising kids. "They are like coconuts," said Mapou, while describing American-born generation of Haitians. "Inside, they are white (Western). They are Haitians only outside." His analogy of a coconut underscores the experience of Western assimilation that the younger generations of American-born Haitians are undergoing in America.

Expressing concern, Mambo Ingrid explained that she was very particular about raising her two daughters to know that they are as Haitians as they are Americans and they must know about the Haitian side of their heritage, too. Amanda, a 16 years old female who follows her mother (Ingrid) to Halouba, told me of how popular discourses on Vodou demonize the tradition. She explains that this discourages her peers who are Haitians from embracing the heritage and demonstrating it before their non-Haitian peers: "I cannot say I practice Vodou or that my mom is a Mambo for fear that I might lose my friends. My friends who already know that my mom is a Mambo, do not want have anything to do with me and they call me names; even teachers will look at you differently," she commented sadly.

Nadege a 50 year old Mambo who lives in Homestead but worships at Halouba hounfo, mentioned that two of her daughters do not want to have anything to do with the Haitian culture and tradition, particularly Vodou. With a sigh of relief, she clarified that this notwithstanding, one of them has started showing signs of interest in the Vodou tradition and has began to accompany her as she goes back and forth to Halouba and to Haiti to participate in Vodou celebrations, whenever she can. When asked why that situation occurred with her daughters, she admitted that she did not do a good job introducing them well into Haitian culture because for a long time she was not an active Vodou participant. She explains that initially she felt she was protecting them from public ridicule in America. Nevertheless, she realized the urgent need to encourage her children to learn about their own cultural heritage only after she had began to embrace the tradition and became a Mambo in New York. Her own initiation, she explained, "opened my eyes to the positive side of this very rich tradition."

Health Issues

An additional theme that emerged in the course of our conversations was how Haitian immigrants have difficulty accessing good biomedical healthcare in South Florida upon arrival. One reason they mentioned was the lack of modern healthcare facilities in little Haiti where most of them live. In addition, while those who managed to legitimize their stay and found work had access to basic healthcare under their workplaces' health insurance policies, other members of the temple explained that they could not access America biomedical system for fear of deportation because they had improper migrant statuses and documentations, unless it was an emergency. Joan and her husband Damian who are regular members of the temple confirmed that because of the expensive nature of

the biomedical healthcare system in America they could not afford quality healthcare upon arrival until the husband, working two jobs, was able to pay for health insurance.

Other members, including those who had health insurance, reiterated that, the Haitian understanding of health did not encourage their use of the biomedical health facilities in America. They said there were certain health issues that deserved spiritual attention and not biomedical attention. "Yet American trained doctors simply do not get it!" Joan bemoaned. For example, Damien said that health for him as a Haitian meant physical, spiritual, emotional and financial wellness. Not only do American doctors not appreciate how a combination of all these elements affected a person's health, he suggested. "They will simply not listen to you when you tell them your problem had a spiritual dimension to it." He added. As a result, whenever he and his wife had any problems in any of these areas, they first sought the services of a Mambo or Hounga in Miami or Haiti to seek direction and solution. He explained:

> As for me if something is going wrong with me, I take it that it may have two dimensions, either physical or spiritual. Normally, I on call my friend…(pointing to the direction of a Hounga who was at the time performing a Vodou initiation ceremony at Halouba Hounfo) who will talk to a loa and he will tell me what the loa said...if I need to see a doctor or to do something else such as a purification ritual.[90]

He hesitantly mentioned that it could be that he needs to bring something to a loa to give him solution. He narrated what he did at one time when he was ill.

> At one time, I was suffering from a chronic headache and pain in my chest, what they call migraine. I was introduced to Hounga Andre, (pointing to the same Hounga he mentioned earlier) at Halouba by a co-worker who is also Haitian. Hounga Andre just asked me to do some readings and get some things from the botanica for him to remove those bad pains away. My friend consulted Cousin *Ogou* (a loa) and he said I was being attacked by an evil spirit sent by someone who wanted me to fail here. Cousin *Ogou* asked for certain things to be done for me. My

[90] Interview with Damian at Halouba Hounfo on 11/09/2011.

> friend (Hounga Andre) helped me to do them. After he did it, since then… (stressing the point) I have not had that headache or chest pain again! That was how we became friends and I then decided to be coming here (Halouba Hounfo) anytime there is a ceremony.[91]

Sophia, a young woman in her early thirties and a client of Mambo Ingrid, also mentioned the language barrier as a factor when explaining why she in particular, did not feel comfortable as a Haitian immigrant accessing quality biomedical healthcare centres in America. She complained that when she goes to the biomedical health centers, she would rather want to be attended to by Haitian doctors and nurses whom she could trust and know can easily understand her. "Unfortunately, they are scarce!" she exclaimed sounding quite defeated. She did not have the privilege to meet them often anytime she attends a biomedical healthcare. "I would rather see a Hounga and get the help that I am used to when I was in my village in Haiti," most respondents explained. A few complained about the cumbersome beaurocratic procedures they had to endure sometimes for a simple routine check-up, such as having to book an appointment with a doctor and going in there to wait ones turn to see him or her. "Already we Haitians are not accustomed to just seeing a doctor for regular check up. Add the bureaucracy, and that's it for us, we will not go there at all." Said Etoille, a 40 year old female, rationalizing the attitudes of some Haitian immigrants towards modern health care in South Florida.

Earlier Religious Experiences in America

Some members the Halouba Hounfo community describe how they lost interest in Vodou when they arrived in America. Many of them said they were not active practitioners in Haiti and their preoccupation with settling in their host community, having and raising children, did not provide time for them to engage in the rituals

[91] Interview with Damian at Halouba Hounfo on 11/09/2011.

whenever they were organized. Others seemed to have caved in to the pressure of the stigmas attached to being a Vodou devotee in America and distanced themselves from the tradition, aligning more with the Catholic churches to meet their spiritual needs.

Some members however said they had tried to maintain a Vodou religious identity. Many of these were ritual specialists; Mambos, Hounsies, Houngenikoun, etc whose services were needed by others in the community from time to time. Some members said the lack of centralized ritual spaces such as the Hounfos (temples) they had in Haiti, frustrated their efforts to engage in rituals on a regular basis. Many had created small Hounfos domestically at their homes, where they kept effigies of the lwas and other ritual paraphernalia and occasionally performed rituals in honor of the loas. During important festivals in honor of their loas, those of them who had managed to secure residential status travelled back to Haiti to participate. Individuals who needed the services of these specialists would come to them or invite them to their homes. Preparing for an important court case, dealing with a grave illness, and preparing to embark on an important endeavour called for the use of the powers of the loas if success is to be guaranteed. These situations called for rituals. In such instances friends, relatives, supporters and well-wishers will gather in the home of the one hosting the ritual. Such Vodou rituals often involve prolonged sessions of drumming, singing and dances, sometimes for days on end. The ritual performances were seldom a problem in Little Haiti because the predominant Haitian population was already accustomed to such rituals. But in the ethnically heterogeneous communities where some Haitians lived, the noise from these activities often annoyed neighbors who called on the police to intervene, thus interrupting the smooth flow of the Vodou ritual tradition in Miami.

Conclusion

To conclude the discussion on this chapter, I briefly address the fundamental question of what these migratory experiences and backgrounds of members point to, in the light of the focus of the study. The discussion presented here is premised on the fact that, Halouba Hounfo originated as a response to a number of questions confronting Haitian immigrants in South Florida. First, the migratory trend described by the worshippers, indicated that some new arrivals into America are somehow assured of a cushion against initial difficulties, as they are taken care of by the sponsors until they settle down in America. For migrants, seeking mainly for a means of earning a living in an unfamiliar environment, such group networks as they are found in places like little Haiti are important in providing information on available job openings, for example. This nevertheless does not detract from the fact that many still do face challenges linked with being unmoored from a home base and translocated in a context with different conditions. Some concerns about the children becoming totally assimilated into mainstream American culture underscore a deeper concern to protect their ethnic values as a way of ensuring continuity of the Haitian identity and culture in America.

Others have health questions and yet have no access the mainstream healthcare system or do not trust in the ability of this system to speak to the different dimensions of their health issues. Others are confronted with crises that call for the use of the powers of the loas, who demonstrated the efficacies during the perilous journey to Miami. Yet some simply feel the need to extend their religious traditions as an indispensable aspect of their lives into their new homeland. These Haitian immigrants had two options; they could have given up on Vodou altogether or find ways to extend this tradition into their newly

adopted home, America. They chose not to do the former. As we shall see in the next chapter, for the concerns expressed by the immigrants about their lives in South Florida they were, and still are determined to give expression to their own sense of cultural identity and provision of alternative health at the Halouba Hounfo.

CHAPTER VI

HALOUBA HOUNFO AS A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

Fig. 8 Halouba Hounfo (outside-front view)

The physical temple

Vodou Hounfos are venues for the interface of worshippers and the loas. To locate a Hounfo, worshippers consider the needs of these two categories. Worshippers should have easy access to it and the loas need for peace, quiet and serenity should be respected. In locating Halouba, the founders of the temple made a point of meeting these needs. Halouba is located at the confluence of 101 NE 54th Street. This is the heart of Little Haiti and not too far away from I95 the main highway linking Little Haiti to Miami and Fort Lauderdale, locations that are home to many Haitians. The location of Halouba makes it accessible to worshippers from Little Haiti and outside.

Halouba is a long rectangular building and loas are housed at the southern end, which extends into a portion of Little Haiti that is sparsely populated and less noisy, ensuring that the peace and quiet of the loas are not disturbed. In fact, when worship is not in session, life in Halouba is so still that one could even hear the shuffling of leaves as the wind blows through the trees in the neighborhood. Fig. 8 shows a picture of the Halouba Hounfo from outside. On the outside wall of Halouba, which is painted in light green, is the inscription Halouba in dark paint. Two pictures of loas, one, a fading image of two snakes representing *Ayido Whedo/Damballa* (a loa) and the other, a cross

representing *Legba* (loa), greets the visitor. These loas are important in Vodou. In the Vodou myth of creation *Damballa* is the loa that helped *Mawuliza/Bondyé* (God in Vodou tradition) in the creation of the universe. Nothing could have come into existence without this loa. *Legba*, lord of the crossroads is the divine messenger, the one who carries every plea or sacrifices to the loas and God, and who must be greeted first during all Vodou ceremonies. It is therefore not by arbitrary choice that these two loas are on the external walls of Halouba. These are the essences of Vodou. Haitian eateries, drinking spots, homes, and stores that sell a variety of wares flank Halouba. On weekends, this portion of Little Haiti could be swarms with tourists. The traffic on 101 NE 54th Street tends to be heavy and the blaring of horns of Miami cab drivers, notorious for their impatience, literarily drowns the life and activities the Hounfo.

Adjoining the portion where worship takes place is the botanica, which according to narratives inspired the creation of the Hounfo Halouba. The botanica is where ritual paraphernalia can be procured. These include herbs of all sorts imported from Haiti, potions, creams, effigies and pictures of loas, pictures that are believed to incarnate a loa if placed in a spot of one's homes. I saw creams that were supposed to make women and men fall in love, potions designed to make people rich or bring good luck into people's lives and CDs of Vodou ritual music. Some items in the botanica, however, had little to do with rituals, such as fashions from Haiti, displayed and sold to tourist who long for a feel of Haiti in Miami. In the portion of Halouba that houses the images of loas are different chambers for specific loas. The ancestral spirit Gede who takes charge of all the dead is housed in the first chamber. There is another for *Ogou,* one for *Erzulie Dantor*

and one for *Erzulie Freda*. There is in one chamber where all the loas have their images displayed and associated paraphernalia displayed.

Outside the chambers, there is an open space where rituals are performed. The open space is the perystyle. The space is large enough to accommodate a crowd of about 100 worshippers at a time. One section of the perystyle have been cleared to allow for moving around, drumming, singing and dancing which are integral parts of Vodou rituals. In another section, chairs have been arranged for those who are not participating in rituals to sit and observe and/or for congregants, even though sometimes observers do not sit down but stand so they can observe the action going on. I have seen some stand on the chairs even as they crane their necks to catch the action going on, or to take photos. The worship portion has a metal gate that is closed when rituals are not in session. From this entrance, one could see the words "welcome to Halouba" on an inner wall written against the backdrop of a painting of a celestial realm. In this painting is the drawing of an eye-the Vodou symbol for (*Mawu Liza*) God. This is located at the center. Rays are drawn radiating everywhere from the eye, representing God watching over his creatures.

A white pillar with a square base and rising to the ceiling is at the center of the perystyle. This is called the *Poteau mitan*. It has paintings of *Ayido Damballah* on it. In the Vodou ritual culture the Poteau mitan is the center of the universe. It links the ritual space to the realism of the loas in *Giné* or the heavens, which in the Vodou sacred geography is West Africa, or Dahomey to be specific. Its openness, rough walls and the absences of windows, betrays the Hounfo's heritage as a warehouse. An Italian owned it and rented it to Papa Paul the original Vodou priest who founded Halouba Hounfo. There is a large space outside the Hounfo where onlookers, especially the youth hang out during

worship. The air is constantly filled with the smell of cigarettes or tobacco and rising smoke from the crowd of worshipper who step outside to smoke a cigarette before coming back in, as smoking is not encouraged in the Hounfo except for ritual purposes. Even though the gates are opened, the huge crowd and the heat can make Halouba stuffy during rituals, and the aromas of incense are sometimes so strong that I would often have to step out briefly for a breath of fresh air before coming back to observe. "The loas are simple. They do not care where you locate them. They care more about your needs," Mambo Ingrid commented the first time she took me around on a tour of Halouba. It was as if she was reading my mind and was responding to my silent queries about how people could worship in that kind of setting. Halouba indeed is not the most comfortable place to worship in. The fact that worshippers have been able to put up with worshiping here all these years, is a testimony to the modesty of Haitians who come from a place noted for having so little, or to their desperation to just have a place to meet the loas and tap into their powers.

The community

In Haiti, people live in *lakous* or networks of extended family members who use resources in common and often are served by one Hounfo. This network of extended family members reflects the ethos of communal living that prevails among Haitians. Haitian immigrants in Miami have extended this practice to their newly adopted home. However, in Miami the lakous experience is represented by networks called *Sosyetes* (societies), though unlike lakous, members of Sosyetes can live in far flunged places and come together only when an occasion calls for that. The Sosyetes that initiated Halouba is called *Sosyete Saint Jacques Mejeur*. Mambo Ingrid heads it. Halouba is the home of this

group. Other Haitian Vodou *Sosyetes* such as *Sosyete Makaya* borrow the space for their own activities or join Halouba for the practice of important rituals.

The Hounfo Worshipping Community

Determining the membership of religious communities is often a tricky task. This difficulty issues from the fact that religious communities have different criteria for categorizing membership, and a researcher's concern for consistent members of the religious community might not necessarily share exact information. In the face of such a difficulty, it is often only possible to provide approximations of total number of members in a religious group. In determining the exact number of members of the Halouba community, I encountered precisely this difficulty when I initially enquired about membership.

It would seem that technically there are two categories of members in the Halouba community. There are those who consider themselves full members of Halouba because they are part of the *Sosyete Saint Jacques Mejeur*. Other respondents describe themselves as casual visitors or guests. Full members tend to be regular at events and participate actively as members of a subgroup within the *Sosyete*. Visitors are not obliged to participate. They often sit and observe, or stand outside the Hounfo and socialize. My difficulty in determining the total membership of the community stemmed from the fact that the Hounfo has no record of the large number of members and I could not rely on any list to determine who is really part of the community. New faces came to the rituals each time we would go there and keeping these faces in my memory proved quite impossible. Besides, I had great difficulty in identifying all those who described themselves as full or active members of the society. In the end, in order to estimate the

approximate number of members in the temple community I based my calculations on the average number of people I saw at the rituals. Festivals and other important occasions provided an opportunity to gain a fairly good idea about the total population, in that on such occasions as many members as possible made an effort to attend the rituals. I would estimate this total population of the community at approximately hundred and fifty persons.

The majority of the members live in Little Haiti, but others live in nearby Miami, Miramar and Fort Lauderdale. Occasionally, Haitians from other cities such as New York also visited the temple, especially during Vodou festival celebrations. Even though members mentioned some Catholic churches they also belong to, and said they participated in domestic rituals involving friends and acquaintances, they considered Halouba Hounfo to be one of the few venues where it is possible for the Haitians who are affiliated with Vodou to meet regularly as a group. This fact indicates the central role the Halouba has played in the social lives of the Haitian immigrants.

One conspicuous feature of the worshipping community was the absence of whole family units. Rarely does one see a husband and a wife or family members from different generations such as grandparents, parents, uncles and aunties and children of all ages taking an active interest in worship. Most people came alone. Occasionally, I would come across a husband, a wife, and their children. This might be because most Haitians do not often migrate to America as family units. An individual migrates first and sponsors other family members to join and this might take a very long time.

Members of the temple community cut across all ages and sex lines and at festival celebrations, or important occasions all the age groups are well represented. The sex ratio

of members of the temple community is not very even, as there are as more female than male members. As most of the women are housewives they have more free time to devote to such activities than their husbands who are often out working. Also as the hubs around which the lives of their families evolve, Haitian women are the primary healthcare givers. This role calls for their more active participation in rituals designed to honor the loas who protect their families.

Worshippers range in age from small babies to the very elderly. The majority are however in their early middle age. There is an involvement of the youth who are mostly children or relatives of adult members, but who often stand outside the temple and use the opportunity for important social contacts with their peers during the rituals, rushing to see what is happening when the rising noise points to something spectacular, like a loa possession. Occasionally one would jump into the midst of the singing women and dance to the music and the drumming amidst cheers from his or her peers. I relished the excitement of watching the young men perform American dance styles in response to Vodou music or drum rhythms.

The worshippers belong predominantly to the working class, though many explained that they had been laid off and were looking for new jobs. Most of the male worshippers said before the recession they worked as factory hands, clerical officers, technicians, accounting clerks, janitors and cab drivers. A few of them are self-employed and own convenience stores in Little Haiti, Miramar, Miami or Broward County. Although many of the female worshippers described themselves as homemakers, most of them explained that from time to time they worked outside of their homes to supplement their husband's incomes. A few of the women, especially the younger ones, said they had

permanent jobs. Most are nurses, but others worked as attendants in stores and clerks in offices in Dade and Broward Counties. Most of the youthful members of the Hounfo are students in middle schools high schools and universities in the Dade and Broward Counties, but some are working.

The majority of the adult members of the community said they had some formal education in Haiti before coming to America. Most of them said the education was however only basic and was in French, so they had to go to school and earn a high school diploma when they arrived in America. Haitian Creole is the main language used in the Hounfo. Though often spoken with a rather heavy Creole accent, the English the worshippers speak is intelligible. Members of the Hounfo also speak French.

As indicated in an earlier chapter, the majority of the worshippers have been resident in America for over fifteen years. Some members said they have obtained green cards or citizenship status in America. Others were still undocumented. Although a few of the members expressed an interest in eventually returning to Haiti someday, the majority do not, and consider America their new home. They still maintain some form of regular contact with relatives and friends in Haiti, though. The majority of the worshippers explained that they visit Haiti, from time to time. For instance, an elderly member claimed that he travelled to Haiti at least once every year to visit his aged parents. "When we go back they will be angry with us. We must be here so that they can eat," a worshipper explained, underscoring the strong sense of dependence of Haitians in the homeland on remittances from the diaspora-and a motivation for those in the diaspora to remain and work. I came away with the impression however, that it is unlikely that most of the worshippers will go back to settle in Haiti for good, for they expressed an

appreciable degree of satisfaction with their quality of life in America, irrespective of the difficulties the recession seems to have imposed on the lives of many of them. In an attempt to justify his decision to remain in America, one worshipper said to me:

> Having stayed here for over seventeen years, and currently maintaining a stable job, with a home and with my kids born and growing up here, I doubt if I am ever going back to Haiti. I still do miss my extended family ... and I will visit home occasionally, but never to stay there... I consider Miami to be my home now, besides we must be here so that the people at home can eat![92]

The obvious conclusion one can draw from the expression of such views is that, much as their forbearers did five hundred years ago when they found themselves in Haiti after the forced migration from their African villages, so most of those who migrated to America have now adopted America as their new home. This is very significant as it underscores the fact that, once again as a cultural unit this group of Haitian immigrants are confronted with a social situation that calls for the renegotiation of a new sense of identity and the development of mechanisms for survival.

Halouba's Economy

Hounfo Halouba relies on a variety of sources for its economic survival. From the onset of its founding, the Hounfo has depended largely on the proceeds from the sale of ritual paraphernalia from the botanica, for its up keep. In addition to ritual paraphernalia, the botanica sells artifacts, art works, and textile from Haiti, to boost its profit. It is not clear whether the ritual specialists at Halouba charge clients for their healing services. What was evident during the research was that clients had to pay for the ritual paraphernalia to be used to perform rituals on their behalf, relieving the Hounfo of that responsibility. Mambo Ingrid however mentioned that sometimes worshippers gave her

[92] Interview with Grandma Cynthia at Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti, 12/2/2011.

money as gifts in appreciation for the spiritual services she renders to them. Dues paid by members of *Sosyete Saint Jacques Mejeur* as well as donations from benevolent individuals are also important sources of the Hounfo's income. Other *Sosyetes* in Miami, who rent Halouba periodically to perform public rituals, pay for the time and space for their rituals. In addition, individuals who rent Halouba for *Bohuns* (funerals) for their deceased relatives in Haiti or Miami pay for the time and the space. Some worshippers and Ingrid lamented the poor state of the Hounfo's economy and attributed this to the low wages most of their working class members earned. This situation made it difficult for some members to pay their dues on time. They also explained how the recession has aggravated this situation as it has led to many members losing their employment. It was clear by the closing of the research that Halouba's economic state had become very parlous because of the recession. The owner of the premise had increased the rent and even though Ingrid had offered a substantial donation to help offset the high cost, members were worried about how Halouba was going to survive as a resource for their welfare, group re-integration, identity creation and the space for producing health.

The Story of Halouba's Origins

Fig. 9

Halouba is a testament of the efforts of a Haitian Hounga known as Papa Paul and his wife, also a Mambo, who the memoirs of narrators describe as a priest and a priestess, to establish a centre both for the performance of worship and the procurement of ritual paraphernalia for Haitians who needed them. Fig. 9 (inserted) shows Papa Paul, the originator of Hounfo Halouba. The story

goes that the couple were inspired by the botanicas that earlier Cuban arrivals had established to create one for the use of Haitians. They rented a house with a warehouse attached, for this purpose and used the living quarters of the house for the botanica. With time, they decided to extend their services beyond the sale of ritual paraphernalia to the performance of rituals for members of the community when their numbers had become large. Challenges of life here called for rituals that would enable them tap the powers of the loas**.** Halouba became a centre for the practice of rituals from that time. The narrative on the challenges of life in their new home is the gist of the story. There is no major disagreement among followers on these details, but their versions of how the events unfolded reveal different emphases. For one thing, many of the narrators were not certain about the exact year in which Halouba was created and had hazy memoirs of the sequence of the events that culminated in the Hounfo. "It was a man and his wife who started it." Mapou my gatekeeper summarized his version of the story:

> It was sometime in the 80's—first they were trying a business—they rented a space to sell artworks from Haiti. Later they said they could add some herbs and other ritual devices just as the Cubans were doing. And in the early 90's when they saw a lot of people buying these and going to see other priests to help them use these ritual paraphernalia for a better life they said... why we don't we add a place for rituals at once, and that was how it began. They named the ritual space Halouba, after a certain loa. She is a grandmother. In our Haitian understanding a grandmother, is the one every child will run or go to and feel safe, protected and provided or cared for. So, Halouba as Papa Paul named it, represents the place for every Haitian to come to, for safety, health and wellbeing.[93]

In other words, the space was created by Papa Paul to serve as the "grandmother" of the Haitian community in Little Haiti, a space where Haitians can go to, and feel a sense of safety and wellbeing, modelled after the roles of grandmothers, in Haitian culture.

[93] Interview with Jean Mapou Denis at his bookstore in Little Haiti, 6/19/2011.

"I know them! The man and the woman who started here...the woman is called Mambo Caroline and she is my cousin, and the man, Papa Paul is a powerful and well respected Hounga." Grandma Cynthia, the caretaker of the botanica portion of the Hounfo said this, when I inquired from her if she knew the originators of the Hounfo Halouba, before starting into the narrative as she knew it:

> Papa Paul was born in Jacmel, Haiti on January 15th, 1948. He grew up with his father who was a well-known Vodou priest, Excellent Noel at Cayejacmel. As a child, he participated in all the Vodou ceremonies that, *Excellent,* his father, hosted. Papa Paul became a Vodou priest (Hounga) and was initiated at the age of 12 years by his father. Since that age, he knew that Vodou is a religion, and a way of life... He has used this special gift to help others... He began treating and initiating followers and began to make a name for himself. Papa Paul has helped people all over the world, but his journey began when he left his hometown Jacmel when he was around 20 years old. When he came to Miami in the early 1980's his dream was always to be able to open a botanica in Miami. With the help of his wife...my cousin....well the dream came true, he did open not only a botanica in the 80's but also Halouba Hounfo in 1994 here in Little Haiti. However, in 2008 he relocated to Dominican Republic and established another Hounfo, and named it *Templo Esipuritual de la Paz*. Papa Paul used different herbs and natural remedies to treat a variety of illnesses when he was here, and almost every month there was a ceremony or festivity here in Halouba.[94]

After an afterthought Grandma Cynthia added, "today, my cousin is in charge of the both the botanica and Hounfo Halouba and I help to take care of the botanica. Ingrid and the Sosyete Saint Jacques Mejuer have been using the Hounfo these days for Vodou ceremonies."[95] In her version, Mambo Ingrid added a twist the others seemed to have overlooked—the circumstances in Miami that precipitated the relevance of a worshiping centre. She was narrating her own career as a Mambo when the story veered into a different direction that led her to tell us (my supervisor and I) about Halouba's origins.

[94] Interview with Grandma Cynthia, at Halouba Hounfo on 09/12/2012.

[95] Ibid.

She had just described her spiritual godmother who happened to be Mambo Caroline, the wife of Papa Paul, when she shared with us her version:

> They were the ones who really started Vodou in Miami—people would meet in their homes for rituals and other ceremonies. Or sometimes they will go to someone's house—there they will do the rituals for those who needed them... but you know us...she turned to look at me—our rituals are long and we sing and drum and make noise…so with time neighbors began to complaining about our rituals...disturbing them. Sometimes they will call the Police... and the police too hearing it is Vodou, will rush and interrupt the rituals. It became an inconvenience, so my godmother and Papa Paul whom I consider as a great Hounga, were like, why don't we rather look for a central place where we can meet and practice our rituals. By that time, they had already started the botanica so they said why don't we rent the other section too. So they rented that section and created the space for worship. They brought all their loas from their homes and placed them in the altars in different rooms at the Hounfo... that's how it started... When people needed help they consulted them and they did help—and with time, most Haitians in South Florida got to know and when a ceremony was happening they would all come–this became the only place for them to meet and see each other and socialize too.[96]

Some versions linked Halouba's origins to the growing size of the crowds of worshippers that met in Papa Paul's house necessitating his search for a bigger space. Putting together the bits and pieces of the narratives as I heard from the narrators, I arrived at the conclusion that Halouba originated as a response to a need for a rituals space, and blossomed over the years into something of a community-meeting place. The challenges of life in their newly adopted home called for the regular use of the powers of Haitian Vodou loas. For this need to be met Haitian immigrants created Halouba. Fig. 10

Fig. 10

[96] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti, 09/23/2012.

(inserted picture) shows a picture of Mambo's Ingrid's godparents, the originators of Halouba Hounfo and botanica. In the chapter that follows, I turn my attention the ritual culture of Halouba, which testifies to efforts of Papa Paul, Mambo Caroline and Mambo Ingrid.

CHAPTER VII

RITUAL LIFE AT HOUNFO HALOUBA: PERFORMING IDENTITY AND PRODUCING HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PRAXIS

Introduction

In indigenous African religious cultures and their Caribbean extensions such as Vodou, where religion is viewed as a technique for the production of welfare, discourse is not attached as much importance as praxis or ritual is. Ritual praxis furnishes the context in which magico-religious power, the most important spiritual raw material in producing welfare is harnessed. The sense in these religious cultures is that as an effect of God, who is considered the epitome and ultimate source of all spiritual power, the universe is suffused with spiritual power. Through rituals, human agents equipped with the secrets of its workings can tap into this power to effect good or harm. Rituals also provide the context for practitioners to affirm their loyalties to spirit beings and to revitalize their sense of "we-ness" or togetherness as a group.

In this chapter, I describe the ritual culture of the Halouba temple, emphasizing the important roles that ritual specialists play in this culture. I describe the rituals, showing how they generate a strong sense of being a part of a Haitian community among practitioners. I also show how, through these rituals, the ritual specialists (Houngas and Mambos) press the powers of the loas (spirits) into service in addressing a variety of health concerns that members and even non-members of the Haitian community have. Because they define health in holistic terms, members of Halouba view their constant coming together to revere the loas and initiate members, not only as contexts for the demonstration of cultural identity, but for using Vodou to speak to a

variety of health related needs. The theme that runs through the discussion in this chapter is that the very context in which identity is produced and performed, is the same in which various health concerns are addressed. Vodou furnishes the space and the other resources for meeting these two diasporic needs for Haitian immigrants in Miami.

Ritual Life at Halouba

I will begin the discussion by categorizing the forms of rituals performed at Halouba into two main strands. They are public rituals and private rituals. I will describe the roles of Mambos and Houngans in preparing the groundwork necessary for these rituals, in organizing them, and in presiding over them. I will describe into detail some public and private rituals I have participated in, demonstrating the ways in which they produce identity and health for the participants. I will also report some narratives circulating in the community testifying to the efficacy of Vodou as a resource for the production of welfare in a variety of ways.

As a Christian and a wife of a Pentecostal/Charismatic preacher in Ghana, I had learned over the years that Vodou was the epitome of demonic power. For this reason, I was very apprehensive when I knew participation in Vodou rituals was going to be part of this research. Though this feeling lingered throughout the research I can confidently say I never allowed it to stand in the way of my experiencing of Vodou rituals at first hand. I was in the middle of things. I danced to Vodou tunes, hummed along with the *Hounsies'*(choir) when they sang songs I had become familiar with, hugged people possessed by loas, and greeted loas when they arrived from *Giné* (the abode of the loas in Dahomey-Africa). In doing these, I took a page from one of my professors, that "in field research you need to experience the phenomenon for yourself. Dance when they

dance, sing when they sing-feel the culture for yourself because as a scholar you are also a spokesman/woman for that culture in the academic world and you must know what you are talking about." And truly, the more I embraced these ritual processes the more confidence I gained as a researcher in an alien religious setting. I also realized that all I knew about Vodou before the research was "myth," not reality. In the account of both the public and private rituals at Halouba that follows, I try to present the practitioners involved and the events as I saw and felt them as they were explained to me. Some interpretations are mine own though.

- ***The Public Rituals***

Just as Haitians are organized into extensive networks of blood relations called lakous in Haiti, in Miami, Vodou practitioners organize themselves into *Sosyetes* or societies. Public rituals at Halouba involve the coming together of one or more Vodou *Sosyetes* in South Florida, as well as individuals from all over Little Haiti and beyond who are interested. Sometimes people come from as far as New York or Montreal; often many of these are simply visiting friends or relatives and tagging along them to the ceremonies.

Halouba's public rituals are organized according to a Vodou ritual calendar. Mambo Ingrid has the responsibility of ensuring that this calendar is followed religiously. The public rituals include initiations, periodic rituals in honor of the various loas, and Vodou festivals. Funerals are also public rituals though it cannot be said that they are calendrical. Whenever a person dies in little Haiti rituals designed to bid the person farewell to *Giné,* are organized in the context of funerals. When a great Vodou practitioner or national figure dies either in Haiti or in some other place, the various

Vodou societies meet at Halouba to celebrate the life of the person. The Haitians sense of community, I came to learn, knows no boundaries.

Fig. 11 Public Rituals at Halouba (Some Vodou initiates with Mambo Ingrid and Hounga Pierre)

In the course of my research, all the public ritual festivities or ceremonies were organized by the *Sosyete Saint Jacques Majeur*, which considers Halouba to be its home. Figure 11 shows some Haitian immigrants and Haitian Americans whom the leader of *Sosyete Saint Jacques Mejeur* initiated into Vodou at Hounfo Halouba. Mambo Ingrid and Hounga Pierre [in front] preside over the rituals.

Vodou rituals are designed to invite the loas to the ritual space and to honor them. This demands that elaborate preparations precede rituals. As Mambo and Hounga, it is the responsibility of Ingrid and her husband to prepare the space at Halouba for rituals. Preparations involve the purchase of the necessary ritual paraphernalia such as rum, perfumes, and herbs. Since music is an indispensable aspect of rituals, preparations involve arranging for drummers *(Hountos*) and singers (*Hounsies)*. In Vodou, drummers are not considered an integral part of a Hounfo. They are freelance or independent actors

who are hired to perform during Vodou rituals. Their roles are crucial not only because they keep the ceremony alive through their drums but also because their rhythms facilitate the journey of loas to and from *Giné* till their incarnation at the ritual spot. In Miami, there are different drumming groups and they compete with each other for the attention of ritual specialists looking for drummers to perform at ceremonies they preside over. Ingrid said she relies on the services of a particular drumming group called, Vodou *Sosyete Hountos* because "they are reliable, know the right rhythms, and are considerate with their prices.[97]" Drumming goes with singing during Vodou rituals, and Ingrid makes a point of alerting the Hounsies or singers to the need to be prepared with their songs before the ceremony. "Don't get there before arguing about which songs to sing," Mambo Ingrid would caution Ruby, the leader of the singers. Ingrid also sees to the necessary decorations and preparations at the Hounfo. Sometimes the participants themselves need some form of ritual preparation prior to ceremonies such as during initiations, and Ingrid provides this orientation before the day of the ceremony.

At Hounfo Halouba, there are different forms of public rituals—initiation rituals, rituals organized to honor Vodou loas, festivals etc. I had the opportunity of witnessing an initiation ritual. In Vodou, this is called *Kanzo*. *Kanzo* is a formal initiation of the Vodou practitioner into the practice. In other words, it marks the beginning of a practitioner's spiritual journey. From this stage, one can be initiated into different stages on a hierarchy that ends with the Mambo or the Hounga [these are the highest stages one can get to in Vodou]. In an earlier conversation with her, Ingrid described how generally, the *Kanzo* rituals were mostly filled with songs, and drumming. She said Hounsies lead the songs (in Haitian Creole) but democratically sang by all present and Hountos drum at

[97] Interview with Hounga Pierre at Halouba Hounfo on 11/23/2011.

such ceremonies. She described how literally the entire Little Haiti could gather for a *Kanzo* ceremony. Listening to her I envisioned *Kanzo* to be a setting also for the production of identity, for not only will Haitians be gathered there, new members will be initiated into a key Haitian cultural tradition, Vodou, in Miami, impressing upon them a sense of being Haitian.

A week before the *Kanzo* I met some of the neophytes rehearsing in Mambo Ingrid's home. Hounga Pierre was the one teaching them about the tradition and the do's and don'ts in relation with Kanzo. "You don't hold an Assōn that way. You will not be able to shake it well," he reprimanded a young woman as he reached out for the sacred rattle to demonstrate to her the right way to hold it. An *Assōn* is a brown pod adorned with various beads representing the various nations in Africa, and used to summon loas from *Giné.* As the evening wore on, he took them through an intricate process of drawing *Vever* symbols of some loas on the tiled floor. Each loa has these sacred symbols. They are also very powerful energy resources that channel loas to a ceremony, imploring their presence. Therefore, they are always necessary during ceremonies in their honor. Every Vodou practitioner going through initiation must learn how to draw *Vever.*

The night before the *Kanzo* all the initiates gathered in the Hounfo for the final rehearsal before the 'D' day. I saw the excitement on their faces and the care with which they practiced the ritual performances. "I am just making sure I don't goof tomorrow," said one young woman in an American accent. As a public performance, care is taken by initiates not to make mistakes during *Kanzo.* Not only will a mistake bring shame to the person, it might invite rebuke from a Hounga or Mambo who taught the one, after the ceremony. Family members too can be annoyed about the person bringing shame to the

family name at such an important ceremony. The *Kanzo* initiation ritual I observed was scheduled to begin at 10: 00am on September 5, 2011. I arrived at Hounfo Halouba ten minutes late. The parking space in front of the Hounfo was full, and people were looking for spaces around the temple, to park their cars when I got there. At the entrance of the temple I saw men, women, and children all dressed in white. The men wore white shirts and white pants, while the women wore white flowing dresses in different styles and adorned with various types of jewelry. The air was filled with excitement. I stood at the entrance for a while to observe the Hounfo before entering. At the gate were a decorated effigy and altar for Papa *Legba*, the Vodou loa and divine messenger. All ceremonies begin by sacrifices to him because he conveys desires of the practitioners to God and the loas. The upper section of the walls inside the Hounfo was covered in pink and white sheets, and white balloons covered the ceiling. *Vever* drawings covered the walls. The *Poteau mitan* had been decorated with palm fronds, a symbol of *Ayizan* the loa in charge of rituals. The aroma of a mixture of various perfumes filled the air. The worshippers sat on benches and chairs at one end of the Hounfo. The sitting arrangement was such that enough room was left for the rituals. At the opposite end of where the worshippers sat, was an altar adorned with white and pink lace, flowers of various colors, and perfumes for the loas. On the table that carried the altar were various gifts for the loas, including rums, cakes (decorated in blue and red, pink and white and green and white), and various fruits.

Hounga Pierre ushered us [my professor joined me later] into the Hounfo, offered us seats in front, and signaled to his wife (Mambo Ingrid) who was then busy preparing the initiates to begin the rituals that we had come. Singing and drumming filled the

Hounfo and pierced the evening air outside. *Hounsies* led the gathering in the singing, while the hired drummers played the drums. The Hounsies sang and danced around the *Porteau mitan* while the congregants also joined in at their seats. Everyone was involved; participation was democratic; even onlookers and people passing by nodded their heads in response to the drums and sang or hummed along the tunes. I heard a particular loa's name mentioned repeatedly in the songs. This was *Ayizan*, the loa who presides over initiation ceremonies and rituals in Vodou. She was at the center of the events today.

The sight of the rapid up and down movement of the *Hounto's* (drummers) sweat-covered muscled arms (apparently from many years of beating drums), which glimmered in the dimly lit Hounfo, was awe-inspiring. They hit the drums spontaneously hardly looking on them. From time to time, they would wipe the drums dry from the sweat that poured continuously on them. They had been paid and they had to provide Mambo Ingrid, her money's worth of drum beating. "This is Haitian," Nicolai, an onlooker explained, apparently taken away by the performance. "Only in Haiti would you see drummers perform like that," he added. Even the drumming seemed to contribute to the Haitian ambiance the worshippers came to experience. I sensed the "we" feeling in the Hounfo. For a moment, it was as if I was in a Ghanaian village observing a Ghanaian traditional ceremony. I felt so Ghanaian in a Haitian ritual setting, making me wonder how the Haitians themselves must be feeling. Identity is not a thing we see; it is a feeling that can be induced by processes or performances—cooking and eating a particular food, wearing a particular kind of dress, drumming a rhythm and singing a song. *Kanzo*, I came to realize, is one of such processes. But the sense of identity *Kanzo* ceremony generated cannot be said to be only Haitian. It was African too, because it induced a feeling of

being Ghanaian in me. It was Caribbean, because even the Cubans who came there talked excitedly about how these event made them feel so much at home in Miami. And the few American whites who came there too said it made them feel they belonged there. As I write, I reflect on how I went to Halouba to explore how rituals generate the feeling of being Haitian but learned that the feeling spilled beyond being Haitian. It was African, it was Caribbean, and it captured all who were there. We all felt we belonged.

The songs, drumming, and dance continued for a while, while an elderly man, also a Hounga dressed in white came in from the inner part of the Hounfo to draw a *Vever* on the floor at one side of the *Poteau mitan*, with what look like cornmeal on soil. The *Vever* was to enable *Ayizan* the loa responsible for the *Kanzo* initiation and ritual, incarnate. A calabash filled with water was placed under a chair (covered with white cloth) and then placed in the middle of the *Vever* drawings. The Hounga also placed white candles at specific places on the *Vever*. Another Hounga (also dressed in white, with red band on his wrist and a red cloth around his neck) was asked to help. He jerked his way through to the front and greeted the Hounga who drew the *Vever,* in a special way and beckoned on him to assist—they first greeted by shaking each hands, and then followed by touching each other's foreheads, twirling and then hugging each other. "This is how Houngans and Mambos greet," Nicolai explained to me seeing the puzzle in my eyes and sensing the confusion on my mind. Upon taking the floor, the new Hounga held the sacred *Assōn*. He turned towards the North, South, East and the West, waiving the *Assōn* in a symmetrical way to invoke the loas from all parts of Africa to be present. He then took one of the rums that surrounded the *Porteau mitan*, sipped a bit and sprayed it on the *Porteau mitan* three times. The *Porteau mitan* is like a highway linking the ritual

space to *Giné* or Dahomey where the loas begin their journey. This ritual action was intended to facilitate the passage of the loa from ginen to little Haiti. He then invites a *Hounganekoun (*lead singer and a trainee Hounga) to usher in the loa in charge of initiation and ritual (*Ayizan*). The *Hounganekoun* greeted the Hounga and picked a metal cup filled with a liquid ritual preparation. Walking towards the entrance of the inner room of the Hounfo, the *Hounganekoun* sprinkled the content in the cup on the floor and gestured to the Mambo carrying fresh palm branch (yellowish green in color) to come from one of the inner rooms. She was in white and carried a palm branch (a symbol of *Ayizan*). I noted a change in the singing. The leading songster was now a woman—*Ayizan* had arrived and had to be induced to mount the Mambo carrying the palm front. The drums beat harder and at a faster tempo, as did the singing. The Mambo moved quickly in a circular pattern dancing to the rhythm of the songs and drumming. The Hounganekoun stepped in chanting invocations, until it seemed the possession was complete. Figure 12 shows the ritual process of invoking Ayizan.

Fig. 12 depicts the setting as I have described (mounting of Ayizan)

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When *Ayizan* mounted the Mambo, she shook vigorously, her legs could not hold her, and she had to be carried into an inner room by other Houngas and Mambos present. Now that *Ayizan* had arrived from *Giné,* it was time to present the initiates. Seven initiates (two young men and five young women) all dressed in white attires, and socks, as well as raffia hats with palm leaves covering their faces and white towels around their necks were ushered in from the inner rooms of the Hounfo where they had been kept away from the public for seven days and nights. Fig. 13 depicts the initiates as described.

Fig. 13 *Kanzo* initiation at Halouba Hounfo

Initiations are like being born again and beginning one's life as an active practitioner of Vodou. This motif is performed. The keeping of neophytes in-doors for that period was to separate them from society so that they could go through the necessary preparations needed for the *Kanzo* initiation. In the context of the initiation motif, it was like entering *Ayizan's* womb and being born anew, of her, to begin the spiritual journey as an active Vodou practitioner. In this sense, the confinement was a performance of the

belief. Weeks before *Kanzo*, Mambo Ingrid told me of the preparations for *Kanzo*, which involved fasting and purification rituals only meant for *Kanzo* initiates:

> This is the very first initiation for anyone who is called to serve loas or become a Vodou practitioner. For the seven days various rituals are done for them by their spiritual guides, who are normally elderly Vodouissants...we pray and fast with them for the success of the initiation. They are also cleansed of any negative spiritual energy...all during the seven days...and we refer to that as going back to "Mother Nature" to be reborn with all the positive energy one needs to be a true Vodouissant.[98]

That evening she stressed the crucial importance of this ritual, "the initiation ceremony is very essential, we do that because it conveys a sense of who they are to them. As a Haitian you need to be connected to your roots," she emphasized and added the following:

> You need to know who you are, and where you come from. Vodou gives us our cultural identity...we are Haitians, taken from *Giné.* So through Vodou we get the sense of who we are. When you ask some Haitians whether they practice Vodou many will say no, because of the stigma attached to being Vodou due to media projections and Hollywood sensations. But most Haitians here, come here, to go through the initiations.[99]

"You do initiation rituals often?" I asked, sensing how important this process was and seeking to glean insights into how it imbibing in the new generation a sense of their heritage helped produce identity. "You know, at first initiation ceremonies were organized on monthly basis," she started into an explanation. "Today, we organize it as and when there are people to be initiated. It is not only young people some people who were not active practitioners in Haiti can decide all of a sudden to be initiated in Miami. Especially since the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, most Haitian people here, come to see me to get initiated," she explained further. I found the fact that being in Miami precipitated

[98] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at Halouba Hounfo on 9/12/2011.

[99] Interview with Mambo Ingrid, at Halouba Hounfo on 9/12/2011.

the relevance of Vodou to be revealing. The impression I got was that for some Haitian immigrants, the sense of the need to feel and demonstrate one's status as a Haitian acquired some urgency in the diaspora (in Miami) where the encounter with other immigrants from the Caribbean called on them to demonstrate a specific sense of their Caribbean identity, which is Haitian. I was also intrigued to learn that the rate of initiations shot up just after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The earthquake provided an added backdrop for demonstrating ones Haitian nationality. People come together to demonstrate solidarity with the afflicted and suffering when disaster strikes a nation as happened in America after 9/11. For some Haitian immigrants in the diaspora, initiation into Vodou was a way of performing ones Haitian cultural identity—it amounted to renewing one's sense of being a member of the afflicted group. It would seem plausible to suggest that while in Haiti, people seeking to dedicate their lives to the loas, initiate into Vodou, and in the diaspora, the motivation could also be the quest to show that one was a true Haitian. As a Vodou practitioner, *Kanzo,* Mambo Ingrid reiterated, is important for the performance of Haitian identity in Miami.

After the procession of the initiates around the *Porteau mitan*, several prayers were said for them. While the prayers were summons to all the loas from *Giné* so that they can witness the initiation, Mambo Ingrid added that they were also narratives describing historical events involving people who came from Africa through slavery. Thus, in a way, this was a form of introducing initiates to their history. At a point, Ingrid shared her musings about ways of using Vodou as a resource to prepare the children of Haitians for the competitive life in America, with me. "This is a jungle," she said, reflecting on life in America, before adding:

> Your children must be prepared for everything the system throws at them and you need to equip them with resources... The wealthy people …They have money to send their children to the best schools. We Haitians have nothing but our cultural heritage, Vodou... I am going to do something one day. I am going to organize a small *fete* (festivity) for the kids. Each would determine a range of highly respectable professions they would want to go into when they grow up. Then I will invite the loas, and the children will pledge before the loas that they will do all within their means to succeed in these endeavors. The loas will give them their blessings before going, and caution them about the dangers of reneging on their promises.[100]

Mambo's creative idea impressed me greatly. I thought it was an ingenious way to use a religious heritage to instill values in younger generations of Haitians in the diaspora, values that will prepare them for life in their new home.

The initiates were greeted by all the Houngas and Mambos present and given seats to sit on. The *Vever* and other ritual symbols that were initially drawn on the floor to usher in *Ayizan* were removed in order to invoke the presence of other loas. Papa *Ogou,* the warrior loa and the patron of iron was summoned amidst the singing of songs in his honor and drumming. He mounted a Hounga who let out a loud but deep croaked scream. The tempo of the drums and the songs quickened again. The atmosphere was charged with the sense of the presence of warrior loa. *Ogou* is a warrior. Iron and steel tools, which warriors use, represent his essence. Symbolically he epitomizes the iron will to forge ahead in the face of vicissitudes and he is the loa summoned when the task ahead of devotees seem insurmountable. "Papa *Ogou* is here," the worshippers said excitedly. The Hounga whom *Ogou* had mounted moved about shouting utterances that sounded in my ears like "ma che che ma tu la" and moved about like a man searching for something in an aggressive manner. A *Confiant* (one who assist a Hounga) brought a very sharp machete, to the possessed Hounga, which he held in his hands as to signify his presence

[100] Interview with Mambo Ingrid at Halouba Hounfo, on 10/23/2011.

as the loa hose essence is iron. A man also offered *Ogou* a lighted cigar and bottle of rum. In Vodou mythology, *Ogou* smokes and drinks heavily. The sight of *Ogou* brandishing a sharp machete was terrifying, yet fascinating! I thought he would attack someone with the machete. I moved to the edge of my seat, ready to dash out should *Ogou* begin attacking people with the machete. When he started moving around wildly, with the machete, I stood up and got ready to move to the entrance of the Hounfo. But he turned the machete on himself as if to cut himself, still making unintelligible utterances. Maggie, a Santera (a priestess of Santeria religion) who sat by me said, that was the language of loas. "Only Houngas and Mambos understand and can interpret this," Maggie added. Then I heard another scream. It was *Ogou* again. He had mounted another Hounga. This time it was Pierre, Mambo Ingrid's husband. The two possessed Houngas moved from worshipper to worshipper. They had something to say to almost everybody present. They would greet the individual, shake the hand (if a man) or hug (if a woman) before saying reassuring words to them. One could sense relief, joy and calmness on the faces of the gathering, especially after receiving the personal encounter with the Papa *Ogou* who stayed for almost two hours amidst the drumming and dancing. One young lady (Jacqueline) whom I spoke to at the entrance of the Hounfo, when I was scared and attempted to exit, reassured me:

> It is always a joy when the loas come from *Giné*. They know everything and everyone on individual basis and know what is worrying you. They talk to us and give us directions in our lives. It feels as if that they never leave us and seem to know what our worries are, cousin *Ogou*, in particular. He is good. He is strong, like iron. He represents the will to be strong and to fight on in the face of challenges. When he comes, he brings us new strength to go on and real solutions too for our daily concerns. When you follow what he suggests you will be fine.[101]

[101] Interview with Jacqueline, at Halouba Hounfo, on 11/20/2011.

I felt the calming and re-assuring presence of the *Ogou* myself, as he came to me and hugged me, still with his machete in his arms, a lighted cigar in his mouth and holding a rum in the other hand. It was as if a savior had come from the "spirit world" with solutions for everyone present. But this was not my first encounter with *Ogou.* He mounted Pierre at one time, when we (my Professor and I) visited Ingrid at her home in Miramar. That day he hugged me in a warm and fatherly manner. He told me he knew I came from West Africa and was here to study. He said my family was great and that greatness would follow me in whatever I do. To my amazement he spoke to me about my daughter whom I had left back in Ghana, and said she will be just fine. When he left me, he went to my professor gave, him a manly handshake, and started talking to him about his autistic son. I was astonished. Later, he told my professor about *Erzulie Dantor's* love for him. "She wants you to buy her a ring and she will show you success in life," Ingrid said, interpreting what *Ogou* had said to my Professor.

That day I left Ingrid's home feeling so relieved. Thus, I experienced with devotees what it was like to have *Ogou* come into their midst. Struggles to find jobs, the difficulty with raising children in the context of a different culture, dealing with family conflicts, struggling to send part of one's meager income as remittance to relatives back in Haiti, worries about victims affected by the earthquake, and other dislocations that accompany life in the diaspora in the Haitian cultural sense, are health issues. "They cause much worrying and too much thinking, giving you depression, stress and other heart related diseases," as a woman described them. When *Ogou* incarnates and moves from person to person addressing each one's concerns individually, he brings some calm into their lives and the hope for a better life. He also comes with practical solutions.

Devotees go about their lives with the understanding that some powerful force somewhere "looks out" for them. They leave the Hounfo with renewed vigor in tackling their daily problems. I suggest that, these comings and goings of the loas are health-producing processes. They speak to low level psychosocial and mental health issues of the Vodou practitioners. At one time, Ingrid drew a parallel between such encounters and Western practice of consulting psychologists. "It is similar," she said. "They bring you relief just as your psychologist would, by questioning you and suggesting ways to deal with your issues. *Gede* and all the others are always present anytime they are called upon. We feel as if they are with us always and they hear us whenever we call on them, this is what makes Vodou unique," she added.

After speaking to almost everyone, Papa *Ogou* left the bodies of the Houngas as water was poured on the two Houngas. Immediately another loa known as *Gede* mounted the Houngas. He was uninvited, but that is his modus operandi, *Gede* always comes uninvited at the end of ceremonies to crown them with some humor. The presence of *Gede* changed the atmosphere into a more relaxed and fun one. He made all of us laugh with his strange nasal tone and the funny things he said. He was bluntly profane. Every utterance he made contained the word *koko* [vagina] and *zozo* [penis] and occasionally worshippers would burst into uncontrollable laughter. He went round in the bodies of the two Houngas, greeting and hugging all present. "*Gede* makes you laugh your worries off," commented a man who stood by me, before starting into a lecture:

> But through his action, he is telling us something deeper. He tells us to laugh at ourselves and not to take life issues too seriously, and to be relaxed with life. He is the loa of the dead and tells us that whether we worry or not we will come to him someday...He asks us questions such as, why are you so serious about a life that you cannot keep forever? He says we should relax...laugh and make merry even in the face of problems,

> because as the loa in charge of the dead, he had seen both those who allowed issues in life to control them and did not live life to the fullest, and those who enjoyed life to the fullest, die.[102]

Reflecting on these words as we drove home my professor and I concluded that, even the laughter *Gede* generates, has implications for healing. Laughter reliefs stress and make serious challenges seem lighter. Indeed, I laughed the evening away as I recollected his very funny attire. In a Geertzian sense, *Gede* communicated meanings that inform the Haitian understandings of their world. His presence generates moods that make very grave situations seem lighter. I now turn my attention to private rituals.

- ***The Private Rituals***

Private rituals are ceremonies organized for individuals at Halouba, either the homes of the individuals, or a Mambo's/Hounga's home. These rituals do not necessarily follow a ritual calendar but are performed whenever needed. An individual can invite friends, relatives and acquaintances to his or her home to witness a private ritual. Grave illnesses or mishaps, the need to guarantee success in a venture one wants to embark upon, the need to honor or thank a loa for a good fortune, are among the important reasons for private rituals. Whether private or public there is usually a gathering of sympathizers, friends, fans and acquaintances at Vodou rituals.

The sense among Haitian immigrants that spiritual causes belie their physical illnesses is so strong that even after visiting their doctors to address the physical aspect of their illnesses they make a trip to Halouba so that Ingrid can diagnose the illness, determine the spiritual causes and prescribe a remedy, before they go home. Visiting the botanica one afternoon we saw a sickly looking teenager lying on a bench placed at one end of the botanica. She was with his parents. It would seem they had just come from a

[102] Interview with a Congregant at Halouba Hounfo, 11/22/2011.

hospital, because I saw a wristband bearing the name of a hospital on her wrist. We sensed they had come to consult with Ingrid. "She will help them… she and her husband, they are good people," Etoille, a 38 years old woman also waiting her turn to consult with Ingrid said to us in a tone that exuded the confidence she had in Ingrid and her husband as ritual specialists. Just as we had started a conversation with Etoille, Ingrid came in to invite us into the inner chamber of the Halouba Hounfo. "We are going to call on a loa today, called *Bossou.* This loa is very strong. The matter we have today calls for the use of a strong loa," Ingrid explained. A man came out of the chambers with a long whip and struck the ground with it. We knew it was a *Petwo* loa because of the whip in his hands. *Petwo* loas are noted for their powerful and aggressive tendencies. They are described as "hot" and noted for the immediacy of their actions.[103] They are summoned when a situation called for prompt attention. Because of their aggression, their possessions are often violent, but they are very effective in providing remedies to serious problems including grave illnesses.[104] We did not know the nature of the young woman's illness but we sensed it was a serious situation calling for the intervention of a *Petwo* loa. Ingrid drew circle on the floor while the man with the whip poured some alcohol on the floor in the circle and lighted a flame to evoke *Legba's* presence first. A flaky substance was poured into the burning flame. Mambo Ingrid explained later that is was salt. Suddenly we heard a growling sound from one of the chambers. *Bossou* had arrived and mounted Pierre. The family of the girl followed him into a room. We could not witness the consultation, as it was held behind closed doors. It was private. After about an hour, the

[103] Ross Heaven, *Vodou Shaman: The Haitian Way of Healing* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 2003), 169-203.

[104] Ibid.

girl walked out with her parents. The look on their faces was a far cry from the worried look they wore when they came in. They seemed relieved.

On another day (10/23/2011), we witnessed possessions by *Erzulie Freda* and *Dantor* during a healing at Ingrid's house. A man there had come with problems that required the invitation of the goddesses. Mambo Ingrid was busily arranging some materials on a table when we arrived at her house. It was as if she was setting the table up for a feast. Among the items were wine, sweet-smelling fragrances, fruits, candles an assortment of cakes—the man who had requested her to invite the loas had purchased the food items. The man was a devotee of the *Erzulie* sisters, *Dantor* and *Freda*, in Haiti. But he had neglected his responsibilities towards them when he migrated to Miami in the 1980s. A series of misfortunes began to dog his way, since he arrived. This included recurring loss of jobs, unexplained illnesses, and a matrimonial life characterized by recurring conflicts leading to his wife abandoning him. "All was not well with him because he had not fulfilled his part of the bargain," a practitioner also present, explained to us. A diagnosis indicated that the root cause was his neglect of *Dantor* and *Freda*, and he had to appease them for his life to return to normal. The neglect of a loa is an important explanation for mishaps in one's life as far as practitioners of Vodou are concerned. The loas abandon a devotee that neglects them and they become vulnerable to evil spirits that cause all sorts of harm to them. These include physical or psychic illness as well as social problems.

When about 10 invited people had gathered, the ritual began with singing in accompaniment with the sound of the *Assōn* [rattle] and a bell. The songs sounded like Catholic hymns during mass but as the singing progressed, it was beginning to sound

more and more like African traditional religious songs. The singing stopped abruptly. A man moved forward, picked the *Assōn*, and handed it to Ingrid. Ingrid passed it on to a lady, who summoned the presence of the loas form *Giné,* by turning towards East, West, North and South, each time bending the knee as a sign of greeting and respect for the loas. Suddenly, she went limp and her personality changed. A loa had mounted her. It was *Erzulie Dantor*, but left as quickly as she had arrived. Another woman was given the *Assōn* and she summoned the presence of Freda. *Erzulie Freda* mounted the woman but looked very sad and started sobbing, as she held on tight to Mambo Ingrid. "You are going to help me hold her, I need to interpret what she has to say," Ingrid said to my Professor, who stood by me, signaling to him to get closer. When the man who had neglected her drew close to *Freda,* she turned away from him and signaled that he should not get close to her. She turned to my professor, hugged him and put her head on his shoulder.

Then, I heard a loud cry, I turned to the direction of the cry, and it was coming from Mambo Ingrid. *"Erzulie Dantor* had mounted Ingrid," Hounga Pierre said quietly. She wore an angry look. Someone amidst the gathering quickly gave her a sharp knife, which she seized from him and moved menacingly towards the troubled man. He sank to his knees imploring *Erzulie Dantor* in Haitian Creole. The angry *Dantor*, ordered him to kiss her feet three times. For the next thirty minutes, *Dantor* addressed him angrily in a language the Hounga understood and translated to him in Creole. She was chastising him for neglecting her. Then she moved away from him and addressed each one of us there, one after the other. *Dantor* had a message for all of us. Hounga Pierre would interpret, as she would speak. When she got to my professor, who at this time had left the lady

possessed by *Erzulie Freda*. *Dantor* hugged him and clung onto to him for about a minute. Then she placed her forehead against his, and said something that Pierre interpreted to mean, she was in love with him, and had been asking him through dreams to buy her a ring, but he would not. "There are doors yet to open for you in life…and I hold the keys…so it is up to you," Pierre interpreted what *Dantor* had said to my professor. After addressing us, *Dantor* turned to the offender, who was still on his knees as she had ordered him. She fetched a substance. It looked like clay. She rubbed it all over the man's body, spilled some on the floor, and ordered him to pick them up, which he did. Then she took a container with a foul smelling liquid and poured it over his head drenching him. All of a sudden, her demeanor changed. She sobered down and began to address him in a motherly tone. She had forgiven him and was prescribing remedies to his challenges. After prescribing to the man the remedies to his predicament and making him promise never to neglect them *(Freda and Dantor)*, Mambo Ingrid walked away and collapsed into a chair. Hounga Pierre washed her face with water and she came to, looking very tired. *Erzulie Dantor* had gone back to *Giné.*

Conversations about the healings of loas

Participation in rituals was not the only way in which we experienced Vodou's ability to produce health for its members. Members of Halouba told us of their own experiences with Vodou's ability to solve health problems. And in the absence of our ability to test the efficacy of a loa's healing powers, such testimonies from them were all we had as evidence.

Jacqueline—a 32 years old elementary school teacher told a compelling story of how a Hounga helped her to solve a problem she had some time ago in Miami and

explained how this incident motivated her to become a practitioner even though she was not an active Vodouissant, but a Catholic. She narrated the incident:

> When we come here, first because of the bad name of Vodou projected in the media, we don't want to associate with it. Me I joined Halouba because when I had a problem it was Vodou loas that helped me out. My hubby and I bought a place at Homestead and rented it out to make some money. There was a section of the house I rented out which was against the law. A guy just came from Jamaica and needed a place badly. So, we rented it out to him at a very cheap price. But we had this other tenant, who refused to pay her rent for months and when I confronted her she reported to the cops that I had rented out a room illegally and it became a court case. The judge ruled in her favor and ordered the place to be pulled down. We were losing our property! I could not sleep or eat for days. What should I do? I was there just thinking. I was depressed. Then a Haitian friend said he knew a man in Haiti who could help, a Hounga. The friend called the man and the man said, 'o.k, me I will help you, but I need some items and some information.' He asked for the names of the people involved in the case and that of the woman who had reported the case and the judge. And he said 'when they come to pull the house down give them food to eat and water to drink and just be nice.' I did as the Hounga asked me to do. And everything just changed! They ate, drank and just chatted. And they went back to convince the judge to change his decision. I don't know what the Hounga did. But it worked! And that is how I turned to Vodou. Anytime there is an issue like this, I consult a Hounga.[105]

For a Kerlyne, a 30 years old woman living in the down town portion of Miami, and unemployed at the time we had the interview, the loas' positive and healing influences on devotees' lives was pervasive. They are in control of all affairs:

> I do not have a job as we speak now, and it has been like this for the past three years. I have looked and looked, but nothing. No work, it was not like this when we came here at first. In Haiti, you don't have to worry about rent, light bill, mortgage. But here it is different and always you are thinking, thinking, thinking. You can go crazy. If not for the loas many of us will go crazy here. They are always looking, watching your back, and talking to you. Now I don't have a job but I know all this is part of a plan the loas have for me. Something bigger is in store for me. In this life, it is not you. It is the loas. They do all for us. You just do your part and leave the rest. That is why we worry little.[106]

[105] Conversation with Jacqueline on Phone on 01/8/2012.

[106] Conversation with Kerlyne at Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti, 10/17/2011.

Kerlyne relocated her unemployment and continuous failed searches for employment, which can be explained by the recession in South Florida, in the context of a grand scheme orchestrated by the loas in her life. Certainly, this attitude seemed to be helping her to cope with her situation. Reiterating this theme, another time, another practitioner described her intuitions and even happenings in terms of the 'silent voices of the loas.' "Sometimes you want to do something and a silent voice says, 'go ahead, do it or don't do it.' It is the loas speaking to you...sometimes they even speak to you through events...Any event, either good or bad that happens to you has the hands of the loas in it."[107]

Conclusion

In the context of ritual practices both at Halouba in Little Haiti and in the residence of the Mambos/Houngas, Haitian immigrants perform identity and produce health at the same time. Every gathering is an occasion for inviting loas from Giné, whose presence generate moods that reassure immigrants struggling to make a living in a different land. Rituals transmit Haitian cultural values to younger generations. For example, during the initiation process the Mambos and Houngas educate the initiates about their Haitian history, so they can know where they came from and who they are. Haitian cultural values and proverbs are also taught to initiates. And during the initiation celebrations where friends and families come to rejoice with initiates, the Mambos and Houngas use the opportunity to showcase the tradition in order to educate and sensitize the congregants to the need to preserve it. These settings are also avenues for socializing. Rituals provide opportunities for catching up on the latest in the community and Haiti, showing off one's new dress, and meeting old friends, striking new Haitian alliances. The

[107] Conversation with Andrea at Halouba Hounfo, in Little Haiti, 11/4/2011.

youth dance to Haitian music and drumming. This environment addresses low-level psychosocial health issues, such as "worrying" and or "thinking" which the insecurities of life in the diaspora generate. But rituals address physical health problems too that are believed to have underlying spiritual courses. From their doctors, patients make a trip to Halouba so that Mambo Ingrid can attend to the spiritual aspect of the illness. As the discussion has shown, healing takes place at Ingrid's home too, for individuals who consult her on a variety of health problems in the Haitian sense, job loss, marriage problems etc. She summons the loas who come to address the specific issues and other questions others who are present have. Vodou social gatherings seldom end without a ritual in which a loas incarnate and when they come, they bring health as the above discussions have shown.

CHAPTER VIII

VODOU IN MIAMI: EMERGING TRENDS

Vodou, like other African originated religions is very flexible in shaping itself to new socio-economic, cultural and historical situations. This means that in Miami Vodou practices will bear the imprints of the American institutional practices, values, mores beliefs etc. I anticipated coming across such evidence when I began this research. Although am not Haitian, and have not yet visited Haiti, I have become familiar enough with the Vodou tradition through readings and encounters with Vodou practitioners to identify changes in its present practices in Miami. I witnessed one poignant example of this during a *Kanzo* initiation ceremony organized for people called into Vodou priesthood. The initiates were given certificates of completion at the end of the ceremony. The writings on the certificates indicated that they had become certified practitioners of Vodou; they held it proudly as they took photos. Fig. 14 shows a picture of some initiates who received certificates of completion after going through *Kanzo* initiation process.

Fig. 14 initiated ritual practitioners with certificates.

Mambo Ingrid admitted that, in Haitian Vodou tradition, a Mambo or Hounga is a holistic healer, and his or her role is to ensure the holistic wellbeing of people who consult him/her.[108] So just as all vocations in America require certificates to show one's status, it has become relevant to issue certificates for the initiates of Vodou priesthood here in diaspora. She explained: "Let me tell you... Here, preachers and teachers of every religion are given certificates after completion of a Bible training course. We have to adapt to our new environment and give certificates too...for us to be taken serious in the diaspora. In our tradition, the holy *Kanzo* initiation is for the 'called,' so why can't we modernize it here in Miami, to blend into the ways things are done here?"[109] This is one sign of the 'Americanization' process that Vodou is going through in the diaspora.

Other changes include, the times for certain rituals. Expediency can determine the day and the time when a ritual can be performed, not tradition. Mambos and Houngas in Miami are not full time, they work in offices and they have time for the various rituals only when they are off work. This plays a crucial role in when an event can be organized. Events are organized when the ritual specialists and practitioners have free time—in the evenings, and during the weekends. Mambo Ingrid explained how her work as a real estate developer largely dictated the times for rituals, "I am a real estate developer as well as and as a Mambo, this means, I have to schedule my time very well, so that it does not conflict with my job here in Miami."[110]

[108] Holistic health is a concept in medical practice upholding that all aspects of people's needs, psychological, physical and social should be taken into account and seen as a whole.

[109] Interview with Mambo Ingrid in her house at Miramar on 11/24/2011.

[110] Ibid.

Another evolving trend in the tradition is that the ritual specialists have restricted their activities to spiritual healing and counseling of the afflicted. They do not heal physically. Physical healings often entail administering herbs, while the spiritual processes deploy divinatory mechanisms to identify the spiritual causes. The institutional requirements that providers of health should secure licenses in America restrict the Mambos and Houngas to spiritual healing or what is referred to as alternative healing. Because they are not licensed, it is illegal for them to administer herbal preparations (medicine). Added to this, is the fact that, some herbs that can be used in healings must be picked fresh and must be used within a short time, lest they lose their spiritual potency. Most of these herbs are not found in Miami. They must be imported from Haiti, and it takes a long time to get to Miami rendering them less useful.

A striking change in diaspora Vodou as seen in Miami is the growing interest in the tradition among Haitians. This includes people who did not want to have anything to do with the religion before the migration. The exigencies of immigrants' life as I discussed in chapter five have indeed precipitated Vodou's relevance for many Haitians. It's role in providing health and more importantly furnishing a context for the performance of identity, has thrust becoming a Vodou practitioners to the fore of the agenda of many Haitians, especially younger generations. The growth in the population of ritual specialists is a response to this upsurge of interest the tradition. These men and women symbolize the presence of Vodou in Miami and their increase points to the growing demand for Vodou. In fact, the Vodou culture of Miami has become so self-sufficient that many Haitians do not need to travel back to Haiti for important festivals and other religious events. Versions of these are springing up in Miami. A practitioner

born in Miami mentioned that, in the past her parents used to take him and his other siblings to Haiti for Vodou cultural festivities such as *Rara* or for celebrations for loas such as *Gede* (Vodou deity), but not now. She adds, "We are glad that it is now possible to attend such ceremonies here in Miami, due to the efforts of Vodou ritual specialists who have formed Vodou *Sosyetes* (societies) that regularly organize such ceremonies here in Little Haiti."[111]

Mambos and Houngas are carving a niche for themselves in Miami, which is introducing a new element into Vodou. They have become mediators between cultures for their Haitian clients, helping them to move back and forth their two worlds—the Haitian and the American. This comes out clearly in their attitudes towards health issues. According to Mambo Ingrid, in their new home, they must mediate between Haitian cultural understandings of health and American biomedical health cultural system.[112] During a conversation with her, one afternoon she explained:

> Haiti does not have a hospital going culture. First, there are not too many hospitals. The few there are not attended. Besides, most Haitians are not used to seeing doctors just for routine check-ups. It is simply not a Haitian thing... They will go to see a Hounga or a Mambo when they are ill. They come to America with these attitudes. They will rush to me with all kinds of health problems, most of which must be addressed by doctors. If we were in Haiti, I could use herbs to take care of that, but I cannot do so here. Some of them will have cancer, wait until they are near death, and then rush to me, by which time it is too late. So, when they come to me, I tell them... I will take care of the spiritual aspect of the problem. You go, see the doctor and let him take care of his area of expertise. And they listen to me, so they go.

She told me of an incident to illustrate:

> A certain lady came to see me, she had goiter, and you know with that, you have palpitations, right? This lady said, Ingrid, I know I have a bad

[111] Interview with Irene, at Halouba Hounfo on 11/9/2011.

[112] Interview with Mambo Ingrid, at Halouba Hounfo, on 6/19/2011.

> spirit within me causing this problem... (touching her throat). Should I have sent her away? (She asked)...no, knowing very well that she might go somewhere else that they may take her money and she might die... I cleansed her spiritually, aligned her with her ancestors, and went with her to see a biomedical specialist concerning the goiter... Generally, in Haiti, Mambos and Houngas operate as healers, chiefly on the supernatural level. Prayers and revelations from dreams are combined with local plants... herbs, tree barks and root remedies, used both internally and externally.[113]

The most visible change one can observe in Vodou as it is practiced in Miami is the predominance of Mambos in the performance of Vodou rituals. It would seem that women control the affairs during ritual practices. In my observation of the ritual life of Halouba Hounfo and conversations with the ritual specialists, I identified that the Mambos play various important roles in the ritual life of Hounfo Halouba; they are the life-wire of the Hounfo. There is no ritual function at Halouba without the Mambos playing key roles, as has been shown in the previous chapter. Their roles include rallying congregants, preparing and decorating spaces for ceremonies/rituals, hiring *Hountos* (drummers), training the initiates and performing the various rituals. In all the Vodou ceremonies I witnessed at Halouba Hounfo, there were thrice as many Mambos as Houngas. It would seem that life in the diaspora precipitates the relevance of Mambos. Actually, the gendered aspect of Vodou praxis was not on my mind at the time I was proposing this research and in our conversations prior to the research, my main supervisor did not identify gender as an area to consider. He would reflect later on that he was not sensitive to the need to explore the gendered aspect of Vodou. We happened upon the gender question in the field when it was clear that there were always more women, than men, at the rituals and they seemed to control affairs.

[113] Interview with Mambo Ingrid, at her home in Miramar, 11/13/2011.

I interviewed Mambo Ingrid and some female worshippers to know their views on why Mambos seem to dominate the ritual life at Halouba Hounfo. The consensus was that as women they must be the advocates for the continuity of Vodou. As nurturers and transmitters of cultural values, they are the most concerned about the continuity of the Vodou tradition as a cultural heritage among Haitian immigrants and the American born Haitians. Many of them include some who were not Vodou practitioners in Haiti, but became more active in Miami in order learn about the heritage and to encourage their children to cherish it. Many of them emphasized how as Haitian women they know that they are *Famn se Poteau mitan* (women as the backbone of the family and community). This is a Haitian concept that captures their self-understanding of their central roles as the hubs around which the family and community must turn. This concept motivates Haitian Mambos' understanding of their roles to promote change, a change that is directed towards the continuity of Haitian cultural heritage among Haitian immigrants in South Florida. The Haitian woman therefore is the one on which everyone is counting on, like the backbone, she is. The reality, Mambo Ingrid explains, is that, in the diaspora, both men and women are out working in industries and firms and always busy. However, as mothers it has become incumbent on the women (Mambos) to take upon themselves the extra responsibility in raising the children the Haitian way and what better way to do that than introducing them into a setting where other Haitians meet regularly to perform a core aspect of the culture, which is Vodou.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In concluding this study, I tie together the seams of the arguments that run through the chapters and discuss the broader implications of some of the findings. Drawing on participant observation and interviews, I have tried to explore the extension of Vodou from Haiti to Miami, and its growing relevance to Haitians in this study and the context in which it is becoming relevant. This extension is linked to migratory flows from Haiti to America and is a result of the fact that Vodou is an integral part of Haitian cultures and so flows along with Haitian migrations. I have argued that as a religio-cultural tradition, Vodou seems to be assuming a greater relevance for Haitians in the diaspora than it did in Haiti. This increased relevance of Vodou stems from the new questions that face Haitians fleeing political persecution and poverty in the home or merely fulfilling a dream of working and living in a land reputed for its freedom, plenty and glamour, that is, America.

These questions mostly evolve around identity and health, defined in a Haitian sense as the totality of wellbeing. In little Haiti a community of Haitian immigrants would create a worshipping center as a way of addressing these questions, the Halouba Hounfo. They had migrated from Haiti due to economic and political turmoil as well as social tensions. They would have to endure an unpleasant migratory experience and a deplorable state as immigrants in the new home calling on them to create a space to integrate as a group and fall on their religious mechanisms as coping mechanisms. This included the lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare facilities in their new home. Halouba Hounfo, the space where the Haitian immigrant community of

worshippers meet, the study identified, originated out of the quest for a Haitian cultural identity and the production of holistic health for its members.

One implication of the findings of the study as discussed above is that, in diasporic religious contexts, concerns about identity and health merge for immigrant groups who come from cultures in which religion is an integral aspect of their culture. The narratives of respondents in Halouba concerning the ritual life of Halouba Hounfo demonstrate that within the same religious space where a sense of Haitian cultural identity is created, health is produced. Hence, there is a need to explore ongoing cultural projects of immigrant groups in the light of this finding. The concern of Haitian immigrants for a space within which they can perform their specific Caribbean identity also bolsters Meyer and Geschiere's observation that global flows trigger closures of cultural identities, rather than lead to homogenization. In this connection, one of the contributions of this study lies in the light it sheds on religious praxis in diasporic contexts as suitable contexts for the erecting of symbolic walls by immigrant groups to distinguish themselves from others. The Americanization of Vodou, as well as the gendered nature of Vodou ritual specialists in diaspora, which the study uncovered, offer intriguing experience that promise to be profitable to research inquiry, enhancing our understandings of changes that African–originated religions of the Caribbean are going through as their agents embark on secondary migrations from their adopted Caribbean homes. It should also be very interesting to explore ways in which Vodou discourse and practices are influencing American practices in relation to spirituality and health for as Vodou is becoming Americanized, while some Americans are also initiating into the tradition.

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