# VODOU EN VOGUE: FASHION, RITUAL AND SPIRITUAL INNOVATION IN HAITIAN VODOU

Eziaku Atuama Nwokocha

A DISSERTATION

in

Africana Studies

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2019

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Anthea Butler

Associate Professor of Religious Studies
and Africana Studies

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Heather A. Williams

Presidential Professor and
Professor of Africana Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____

Heather A. Williams, Presidential Professor
and Professor of Africana Studies

Dissertation Committee

| | |
|---|---|
| Judith Weisenfeld | Professor of Religious Studies at Princeton University |
| Elizabeth Pérez | Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at UCSB |

VODOU EN VOGUE: FASHION, RITUAL AND SPIRITUAL INNOVATION IN HAITIAN VODOU

*Dedication*

To my Anyim and Nwokocha family.

To my older brother Chimeremeze Azuonye Nwokocha.

To Bashir, Brianna and Laura

To Black people everywhere.

You are my sanctuary.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As a child, I was always speaking greatness into myself. When I was eight years old, I told myself I wanted to get my Ph.D. In the sixth and ninth grade, I was signing people's yearbooks and the back of their photos with the moniker 'Dr. Chocolate.' I told my peers in the sixth grade that I was going to go to Harvard. The beauty of dreaming big is the joy of reaching your own expectations. I held on to my dreams so tight and I always prayed, like my mom told me to, and put positive people in my life to help me achieve these dreams. This completed dissertation is proof that my prayers have been answered.

I would like to thank my Nwokocha and Anyim ancestors for guiding the beautiful people who helped me achieve this momentous accomplishment. I am grateful for the generosity and openness of Marie Maude Evans, or Manbo Maude, and her Vodou temple, Sosyete Nago, which merits deep admiration, respect, and love. Manbo Maude and her community welcomed me with open arms and I was constantly challenged mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally. Some of the names of my informants have been changed, however our candid conversations about Vodou have pushed me to think critically about the Vodou tradition. I have gained friends and colleagues in this space and they will never go unnoticed. I give special thanks to Taleah Pierre-Louis, Eddie Bernard and Christina Désert for helping me with my Haitian and for translating a number of complex conversations. To my Haitian Vodou Family, Claudine Michel and Kyrah Daniels, thank you for opening up your home in both Santa Barbara and Port au Prince, Haiti for me to learn and grow. I am forever grateful for your generosity and guidance. Thank you Patrick Bellegarde- Smith for your wisdom, and Manbo Jaqueline for your *konesans* in Vodou.

My committee members were nothing short of amazing. I surrounded myself with fierce women of color that guided me through the tribulations of graduate school and dissertation writing. Heather Williams, Anthea Butler, Elizabeth Pérez, and Judith Weisenfeld, I thank you for your unwavering support. You are all models of what mentorship should look like. Your analytical rigor and patience always had me in awe. I am so happy to finally transition from your student to

your colleague. The support from the administration at the University of Pennsylvania is second to none. Thank you to Ms. Carol Davis (*Manman*), Ms. Teya Campbell, Ms. Gale Garrison, Tracey Turner, Patricia Rea, Shantala Thompson, Sean Fields, Monica Bradford, Melissa Moore and Luz Marin for your organizational leadership and support. Ms. Carol and Ms. Teya, thank you so much for checking in on me and making sure I was well fed. I admired and sought to emulate your sense of style and grace. I appreciated that you were continuously looking out for me. You are all so loved.

The institutional support from my undergraduate, masters and doctorate programs are immeasurable. I am thankful for the faculty, staff and institutions that helped and supported me along the way. I would like to thank the Black Studies Department and the Center for Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, especially Claudine Michel, Clyde Woods, Jeffrey Stewart, George Lipsitz, Gaye Johnson, Jude Akudinobi, Roberto Stongman, Nadege Clitandre, Earl Stewart, Wenonah Valentine and Masheed Ayoub. From the Feminist Studies Department, I thank Grace Chang, Mireille Miller-Young, and Jacqueline Bobo. I am also grateful for dedicated mentors of the Ronald E. McNair Program: Beth Schneider, Monique Limon, Ellen Broidy, Nathaniel Burke; the Educational Opportunity Program, staffed by Stephen Jones, Aaron Jones, and Marcus, Mathis; Counseling and Psychological Services, specifically Jeanne Stanford and Rose Mainhardt. I am incredibly proud of the time I spent at the Harvard Divinity School under the tutelage of Jacob Olupona, Cheryl Giles, Janet Gyatso, Maritza Hernandez, Judith Casselberry, Kristin Bloomer and Jamie Johnson-Riley. Finally, I need to express my gratitude for the scholars at the University of Pennsylvania, Africana Studies: David Amponsah, Grace Sanders Johnson, Herman Beavers, Michael Hanchard, Camille Charles, John Jackson, Deborah Thomas, Eve Trout Powell, Barbara Savage, Timothy Rommen, Dorothy Roberts, Dominick Rolle, Oliver Rollins, Chijioke Azuawusiefe, Jasmine Blanks, Ezgi Cakmak, SaraEllen Strongman, Augusta Atinuke Irele, Brian Jackson, Gillian Maris Jones, Destiny Crockett, Daniel Morales-Armstrong, Tatiana Nelson and Ivy Williams. Moreover, I offer thanks to the Department of Sociology and Audra Rodgers; Counseling and Psychological Services and Batsirai Bvunzawabaya; the Gender

Sexuality and Women's Studies Program; and the Department of Religion: Justin McDaniel and Ruth Toulson. I am also indebted to the Ford Foundation and their wonderful network of support. Lastly, I am so appreciative of Princeton University's Religion Department, subfield Religion in the Americas. They opened up their department to me and welcomed me with open arms. I am so appreciative that I was able to take classes and attend workshops. My time with you all has been incredible and I am grateful that you were there to provide feedback on my chapters. Thank you to Ahmad Greene, Kijan Bloomfield, Wallace Best, Jessica Delgado, Andrew Walker-Cornetta, Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesus, Leslie B. Ribovich, Kelsey Moss, Beth Stroud, and William M. Stell.

My Dad constantly told me, 'show me your friends and I will show you who you are.' My friends are such badasses! I am so appreciative of my friends. Thank you for reading my work. Thank for the laughs and listening to me cry. Thank you for being so present in my life. You have been with me on a beautiful journey and I hope it continues. Thank you to Kellie Carter Jackson, Natalie Léger, Venise Adjibodou, Omaris Zamora, Jasmine Omorogbe and Alexandra Nixon. You are all truly special people and I so grateful for your friendship. Thank you to Cortney Veney at Naturally Crowned Hair Studio for making my locs look flawless. Thank you to Nikki Buchanan for making sure I was fed mentally and physically and coming into my life and filling it with Afro-beat, Reggae, curry chicken, and love. Debra Williams, I am truly grateful for you helping me stay in physical shape and allowing me to work as a personal trainer at your studio: Smart Fitness Studio. Teaching both the cycling and weight training class helped me mentally and physically. To my "Fox and Friends" work out crew: Amy Neukrug, Mark Randall, Janet Kwiatkowski, and Elizabeth Garver, thank you for kicking my butt Monday to Sunday. Our workouts were critical in helping me organize my time and setting my pace for writing. I am most grateful to my dearest friends, Bashir Hassan, Brianna Eaton, and Laura Tinker, or as my Mom would call them, my Secretary of State, my Editor in Chief, and my Spiritual Guru. You have made my life functional. I have walked with you for over twelve years, and I hope to walk with you some more. I give special thanks to my dear friend Brianna Eaton. Even writing this makes me tear up… nope, you will not edit this out. Take. The. Compliment. Bri, thank you for sticking by me. No words can

describe how much I truly care for you. This dissertation would not be as rigorous if it was not for your attention to detail and wonderful (sometimes ruthless) questions that strengthened my project. Through Indian food, smoothies, wine coolers, and a lot of laughter… we made it.

To my family: you are the reason why I fight. Thank you High Chief Syringa and Lola Florence Nwokocha. You instilled in your daughter a dream for an education and a love for learning. The stories of our ancestors and the divine have always inspired me to search for African Religious Traditions and where they magically landed within the Diaspora. None of the sacrifices you made to come to from Nigeria to the U.S. were easy. You made the impossible, possible. You survived (and are still surviving) the Biafra war, immigration issues, racism, discrimination, and show us not only how to survive, but to thrive. Wealth comes to this family in more ways than finances and that is what makes our family shine. Thank you for naming my brothers and sisters Nigerian- Igbo names, so that we will not forget who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. To my wonderful Aunts: Aunty Rosaline Jonah and Aunty Veronita Nwaoha. To my brothers and sisters Chimeremeze (Chimex), Chidozie (Chido), Oluchi, Chibuzo and Chidinma: you fill my heart with joy.

Thank you all Black people. We are truly amazing. I love you. I live for you. *Ayibobo.*

# ABSTRACT

VODOU EN VOGUE: FASHION, RITUAL AND SPIRITUAL INNOVATION IN HAITIAN VODOU

Eziaku Nwokocha

Anthea Butler and Heather Williams

*This ethnographic project explores the embodied sartorial practices of Haitian Vodou that are produced and transformed within transnational communities in the African Diaspora. I study how fashion in the religious and social life of Vodou accentuates the importance of aesthetic trends to communal identity formation in the African Diaspora. My primary sites of research are the temples of a Haitian Vodou practitioner named Manbo Maude in Mattapan, Massachusetts and in Jacmel, Haiti. Manbo Maude creates ritual garments and sells them to her practitioners for adornment during religious ceremonies. The production of these ritual garments offers a critical lens through which to discern the adornment practices that are key to serving the spiritual worlds in Haiti and the Diaspora and that reveal a larger economy of fashion and spiritual exchange. I propose the term spiritual vogue as a multisensorial ritual practice to address the performative use of fashion in Manbo Maude's temples to unify practitioners and connect with the spirits. Through the presence of the spirits, dress, touch, movement, and the process of being seen, spiritual vogue is an interactive, multisensorial practice for the practitioners, the spirits, and the audience alike. This project builds on theorists like Sally Promey, Elizabeth Pérez, and Linda B. Arthur, who engage with the performativity of gender, race, the multisensorial experience of religion, and religious and material exchanges between Africa and the African Diaspora. I demonstrate how religious fashion addresses the transnational relationships created through faith labor, spirit possession, tattoos, and other embodied manifestations of Vodou. Mambo Maude's temples are investigated as sites of religious innovation that reflect the dynamic relationship between religious ritual, material aesthetics, and spiritual embodiment within African Diasporic religions.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

After walking up the concrete stairs to the Vodou temple, I was greeted by the smell of alcohol, tobacco and sweat. The crowded room was awash in blue and red. I pushed past the overheated bodies. Over seventy Haitian men and women were staring at the inner circle where Manbo Maude[1] and her practitioners surrounded the decorated *potomitan*, or center pillar, feverishly and rhythmically moving their feet on the red, clay earth to the beat of the *yanvalou* drums.[2] It wasn't solely the dance that fascinated the onlookers. In Jacmel, Haiti, ceremonies happened frequently in the summertime and this wasn't the only event on offer. What drew the audience closer and pulled their phones from their pockets to record was the lavish dresses, the coral blues and scarlet reds sashayed through the room by the dancers in the swirling fabric of their clothes. People sucked their teeth in appreciation and shouted in joy.[3] Bright head wraps elaborately covered their hair. Many women wore makeup and lavish gold jewelry, with rings on every finger. The men, with freshly shaved faces, had pressed their crisp shirts and pants only moments before the start of the ceremony. It was Ezili Danto's day, the warrior goddess, protectress of children, and keeper of lesbians.[4] An altar that took several hours to prepare offered her fruit, pork, rice, beans, and Barbancourt rum on a table draped in vivid sashes and lace. A silk, sapphire sheet was pinned to the wall behind the altar, decorated with scarves in varying shades of red and blue. Manbo Maude and the other ceremonial leaders stood out among the inner circle of primary colors, allowing the ruffles, excess layers of cloth, and embroidery to display their status to the room and to the gods. The fabric in their dresses was so extensive that the skirts extended outwards from the waist in a grand bell shape, echoing the

[1] Manbo is a Haitian Kreyol term for a Vodou priestess.
[2] Yanvalou drumming is a type of Vodou drumming with origins in what is now the country of Benin.
[3] In Haiti, there are nuanced reasons for people to suck their teeth: in frustration, in approval, or to get someone's attention.
[4] Ezili Danto's Catholic counterpart is usually Mother Mary.

aristocratic silhouette of bygone colonizers in a ceremony indebted to West and Central African ancestors in fashion, music, ritual, and spirit.[5]

In Haitian Vodou, the gods care about how they look.[6] The gods shape the lives of practitioners like Manbo Maude, a Haitian woman who practices in both Jacmel, Haiti, and Mattapan, Massachusetts, through numerous avenues, such as card readings, possession, visions, and dreams. The spirits also provide inspiration for religious dress and intervene in everyday situations in practitioners' lives. In this dissertation, I argue that the fashion on display in Vodou ceremonies allows practitioners such as Manbo Maude to connect with the spirits, and provides an opportunity for her to assert her religious efficacy. She produces clothing to convey her authenticity and power as a religious figure. In other words, Manbo Maude fashions dresses inspired by Vodou spirits to satisfy the material demands of the deities while simultaneously creating her own unique spiritual practices that shape the parameters of other practitioners and observers experiences in her temples.

Manbo Maude owns the Vodou temple where this ceremony took place in Jacmel, Haiti. Her rural home stands only a few feet away. She also owns a home in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts (Mattapan) where she resides for the majority of the year and continues to practice her religion in the temple in her basement. Throughout the year in Mattapan, she works as a social worker Monday through Friday and on the weekends she does spiritual work. In Mattapan, she holds ceremonies during the months of November, March and May all of which align with a particular spirit: November is for Gede, the spirit of life, death, and sexuality; March is for Danbala, the serpent spirit of wisdom; and May is for Kouzen Azaka, the spirit of agriculture and the market. Her ceremonies in Jacmel take place during the month of July where she conducts initiations, the feeding of the spirits and spiritual marriages. She also pays Haitian ritual workers, both initiated and non-initiated, to aid in initiation rites and religious services in extravagant ceremonies that honor her house gods, which are the deities she has a special

[5] Fieldnotes, August 3, 2016
[6] I am indebted to Elizabeth Pérez's book *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions*, which was an inspiration in studying African Diasporic religions through the senses.

obligation and connection to. Manbo Maude saves up her sick days and vacation days from her job in order to take the time off to travel to Haiti. Because of her residence in the United States, she is afforded the opportunity to take a wide selection of textiles to Haiti for her ceremonies.

I am most concerned here with how spiritual practices influence the ways in which practitioners, like Manbo Maude and her adherents, navigate their religious, social and cultural decisions in their everyday lives. I assess religion and fashion through the sense, specifically, through visual and material culture. What is seen, felt, and heard within the production and wearing of religious clothing and adornments is significant to how people engage their faith through a sensorial practice that I call *spiritual vogue.* I propose the term *spiritual vogue* as a multisensorial ritual practice to address the performative use of fashion in Manbo Maude's temples to unify practitioners and connect with the spirits. *Spiritual vogue* is a framework through which materiality, such as dress, can be investigated as key examples of the aesthetic ritual practices that animate African Diasporic religions. It is an interactive experience that speaks to the practitioners, the spirits, and the audience alike through the presence of the spirits, dress, touch, movement, and the process of being seen. I understand Mambo Maude's temples as sites of religious innovation that reflect the dynamic relationship between race, gender and sexuality in relation to religious ritual, material aesthetics, and spiritual embodiment. Through Vodou ceremonies, Manbo Maude's body, and those of her practitioners, function as ritualistically stylized individuals while simultaneously interacting with one another and the audience, which impacts their actions and the meanings of their performativity in service of the spirits. I argue that *spiritual vogue* is a stylistic apparatus that depends on the interactive process of looking between the participants, the spirits, and the audience. Exploring *spiritual vogue* requires understanding that the presence of the spirts in Vodou ceremonies is not figurative for many participants and devotees, and the legitimacy of these spirits has substantive effects on their actions and ritual practice. I therefore explore Vodou through ritual practice, ceremonial preparation, production of ritual garments, and spiritual marriages.

I use the word *vogue* because it has multiple meanings. Firstly, its meaning is derived from a French word for fashion.[7] The term *vogue* has come to embody high fashion in part due to the fashion magazine *Vogue*, which has approximately 1.3 million subscribers across the world and has editions in over twenty-three countries.[8] *Vogue* is a popular term to describe fashion in general and is a part of our everyday lexicon in the United States and beyond when it comes to describing modern style. Moreover, the concept of *vogue* as performance was created by queer people in the transgressive, gender bending spaces of Ballroom culture, dating back to at least the 1920s. I use the term *vogue* because it connotes not only style, but the body, performance, personality, the audience and community. The term is also racialized because of its origins in Black and Brown queer communities, which makes it especially useful in investigating African Diasporic religious spaces. I chose to combine *vogue* with the word *spiritual* as a way to describe a similar type of performance in religious spaces, incorporating the presence of the divine into the role of the performance and the audience. It is my hope that the concept of *spiritual vogue* will be useful is the study of religious ritual and fashion in African Diasporic religions.

Haitian Vodou is a system of beliefs and rituals where the experiences of everyday people can be explored for reflection, healing, and inspiration. Vodou, derived largely from West and Central African Indigenous religions and Catholicism, opens up a space where the past can be revisited and reimagined with an emphasis on the lives of its adherents. Vodou's value as a religion lies in its ability to be malleable to the needs of its believers: it informs and shapes their histories, and is directly responsive to their tribulations. Vodou provides valuable healing components for a people that have struggled and endured physical oppression and repression.[9] Vodou is intertwined with everyday life to provide basic knowledge on how to operate in the world. The sacred and the secular are not mutually exclusive, but rather interwoven with each other, and the divine can be called upon for aid and support in moments of crisis and healing. Manbo Maude's home exemplifies this as it transforms into a site of sartorial innovation, where

[7] Collins-Robert French-English, English-French dictionary. 1978. London: Collins.
[8] "Consumer Magazines". Alliance for Audited Media. Archived from the original on January 23, 2017. Retrieved July 5, 2017.
[9] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 209.

initiates and people in the house prepare their clothes and adorn themselves during breaks in the ceremony. The religious dress of the rituals becomes more elaborate as the ceremony continues through the night, creating distinctive, spiritually inspired ensembles that conjure historical and contemporary insights into African Diasporic religions. I have observed other Vodou sites and communities through my research in Montreal, Canada; Miami, Florida; Queens and Brooklyn, New York; and Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I center Manbo Maude and her homes in this dissertation because she and her practitioners are particularly innovative in their use of ritual aesthetics. She is not fundamentally different from other people who feel a connection to the divine, yet I was compelled by the fact that the Gods spoke to her through the avenue of fashion and shaped her relationship to her faith and her community. I rely on participant observation in her homes in Mattapan and in Jacmel, as well as ethnographic and historical research on Haitian Vodou. I have known Manbo Maude since 2012 during my time at Harvard Divinity School and I started conducting research with her in 2015. During the time I spent at her temples, I conducted formal and informal interviews with over forty Vodou practitioners and attendees at her ceremonies. As a participant observer, I was able to interact with members of her communities and aid in ritual and non-ritual services. I wrapped headscarves, braided and washed hair, washed clothes, applied makeup, and helped people dress all while engaging in conversations in both English and Haitian.

I use the term 'Haitian' to refer to the language spoken by Haitians, which is often called Haitian Kreyol. My time at the University of Massachusetts, Boston's summer language initiative greatly impacted not only my ability to speak Haitian, but my insistence on calling the language 'Haitian.' My professors in the summer initiative explained that all languages are mixed, or Kreyol, and draw from many different languages to establish their vocabulary and syntax. Defining Haitian as Kreyol is a remnant of colonial attitudes, which made European languages the standard, and labeled other linguistic traditions as derivative of those standards. Within this dissertation, I contribute to the effort to redefine Haitian as a distinctive language that stands as firmly in its history and nationality as any other language. I center the experiences and worldviews

of Black people in Manbo Maude's temples, which includes Haitians, Haitian Americans, Black Americans, and Black people with roots in other Caribbean nations. I use the terms practitioner, audience, and initiate to refer to the people in Manbo Maude's temples. 'Practitioner' refers to any person who practices the religion. 'Initiate' is used to refer to practitioners who have undergone the formal initiation rituals required to carry out specific religious responsibilities that non-initiated practitioners are not privy to. To be clear, a practitioner does not have to be initiate, but an initiate is always a practitioner. When I discuss the 'audience,' I am referring to people who are a part of the ceremonies taking place, but who are not necessarily initiates or practitioners, and who are not associated with Manbo Maude's temples. The audience members can be practitioners, however I will not refer to them with this term because they are not a part of Manbo Maude's home. I am distinguishing the audience as witnesses who actively participate in the overall ceremonies through the act of watching, commenting, dancing, and interacting with possessed practitioners.

Dress is a tool through which practitioners create a reciprocal exchange between spirits and practitioners of African Diasporic religions. I use the terms dress, fashion and adornment interchangeably because they are aspects of appearance that symbolically represent identity in relation to social, ethnic, and cultural markers.[10] Scholar of religion Lynne Hume describes 'dress' as the process of exposing, masking, or adorning the body for the purpose of religious rituals and beliefs. Examination of dress includes not only clothing, but also all decorations worn on the body, any modifications to the body such as tattooing and scarring, the cultural context of dress, and how being dressed makes participants feel.[11] When dress becomes a part of religion, it is transformed into a "sacred item," connoting beliefs, engaging with power dynamics, acting as a conduit to the spiritual world, and more.[12] Understanding dress in religion requires the investigation of the multisensory experience of religious clothing and adornments, as scholar of

[10] Some scholars who study fashion, such as Malcolm Barnard in *Fashion Theory,* have noted that while fashion is often understood as a part of global and largely western capitalism, it is also a creative and social experience that contributes to the creation of identities. Therefore, fashion is complimentary to ideas of dress and adornment. Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007), xi.
[11] Lynne Hume, *The Religious Life of Dress: Global Fashion and Faith* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1.
[12] Hume, *The Religious Life of Dress*, 2.

religion Sally Promey says, not only the "smell, feel, touch, and even sounds," but the "emotional element of memories and impression evoked by dress; the textures, materials, and kinetic element" as well. [1314] Up until now, the study of dress in Haitian Vodou has often been limited to description and the linking of particular colors and objects to the spirits they signify. The analysis of sartorial choices is commonly couched in the history of French colonization and African religious continuities without considering the additional complexities of modern Vodou communities. The study of dress in Haitian Vodou is often limited to description and the linking of certain colors and objects to the spirits they signify, as well as social interaction and cultural symbolism.[15] I seek to further these explorations by considering the elements of dress in Vodou that have been overlooked and understudied. The dynamic adornment rituals of Manbo Maude's home offer insight into the role dress plays in the formation of belief and the creation of religious communities. I investigate the contemporary temples and rituals of Manbo Maude and her religious communities to explore the nexus between dress and religious labor, spiritual authority and efficacy, and the power of adornment to distinguish houses of worship from one another.

With this study of Haitian sartorial fashion in Vodou, I show how the fashioning of dress is dependent on the senses. Touching, seeing, and listening to fabrics during production are requirements for the completion of a religious garment in Manbo Maude's home. In the past twenty years, scholars of religion have turned to the concept of sensory religions to account for the multisensory experience of ritual practices. In sensational religion, the senses are worthy sites of critical analysis and religion can be investigated through the experience of the body. When the body of a religious practitioner is the focus of study, material and social connections illuminate the behaviors, feelings, and beliefs of people who practice a religion.[16] Just as the body is mutable,

---

[13] Sally Promey, *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 3.
[14] Hume, *The Religious Life of Dress*, 5.
[15] For work on the connection between French colonization and the dress worn in Haitian Vodou ceremonies, see Charlotte Hammond, "Decoding Dress: Vodou, Cloth and Colonial Resistance in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Haiti," in *Vodou In the Haitian Experience: A Black Atlantic Perspective*, ed. Joseph L. Celucien and Nixon S. Cleophat (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016), 85-90; Susan Tselos, "Dressing the Divine Horsemen: Clothing as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda B. Arthur (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000), 46-49.
[16] Promey, *Sensational Religion,* 3.

growing and aging with time, so too are the materials involved in ritual culture. Sally Promey defines sensation in religion as the multisensory experiences of material objects, the practice of religion in personal experiences, and the circumstances of practitioners' lives. She argues that sensation in religion is concerned with "embodiment, the senses, and cognition."[17] Sense and cognition are symbiotic, rather than mutually exclusive. In order for religious practitioners to comprehend their experiential processes, they must make sense of their senses. Therefore, there is no separation between sense and cognition. This concept is significant to the study of Haitian Vodou because it is invested in the lived realities of people understanding the connection between their lives and how they imagine the divine. Like sense and cognition, the sacred and the secular are in a reciprocal relationship that informs perspectives on what is sensational in religious practices. The study of African and African Diasporic religions are always engaging with these kinds of multisensory experiences.[18] African Diasporic religions continuously demonstrate the significance of multisensory and material objects and their impacts within the natural and supernatural, profane and mundane, and the living and the dead.

The history of sensation in religion is fraught with the complications inherent to colonization, race, and concepts of modernity. Promey's assertion that there is no space between the sacred and the secular or sense and cognition was not a widely accepted idea in the study of Western religion, particularly in the age of Enlightenment. Instead, there was a dichotomy between Western religions and other religions that were deemed primitive. Sensation was seen as anathema to the intellectual. Therefore, religions that engaged with sensation and material culture were viewed by many Western scholars as undeserving of rigorous intellectual inquiry.[19] To be modern was to separate the quotidian from the sacred, and to subvert or refuse this division was to be backwards. In Western Europe, this dichotomy was also entangled with the

---

[17] Promey, *Sensational Religion,* 1.
[18] See, for instance, Jacob Olupona, ed., *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions Volume 3 of the World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of Religious Quests* (New York: Crossroads Press, 2000), xx.
[19] Jacon Olupona, ed., *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions Volume 3 of the World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of Religious Quests* (New York: Crossroads Press, 2000), 3.; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 72-77.

social, political, and economic context of colonialism, which inevitably racialized that divide.[20] Many scholars have interrogated the connection between religion and race, and how one informs understanding of the other.[21] Instead of being understood as different from, but equivalent to, the religions of Western Europe, the people, cultures, and religions of these non-White regions were reduced to artefacts in museums and items of curiosity and derision.[22]

The study of African religion, as a result, has been defined by perceptions developed by the ideals of the Enlightenment, which labeled African religious contributions as primitive and unintellectual. Both African religions and the scholarship surrounding these religions were dismissed as superstitious folklore. Western religious traditions and practices were the standard-bearer for what was or was not considered as reputable religion. This manufactured cultural divide in Western religions, where the divine is not a lived experience in the everyday existences of practitioners, but a metaphorical presence, is deconstructed by many scholars in the field of religion.[23] Through the study of Catholicism, Robert Orsi contributes the concept of *real presence* which suggests that there is a living presence, or supernatural presence, in not only objects but in everyday surroundings. The gods are not metaphors.[24] The presence of God is not an abstract concept, but a lived and embodied experience. Although Orsi makes an intervention in the study of Catholicism and critically challenges the division between Western and non-Western religions, this concept of *real presence* is not new to the study of African and African Diasporic religions. We can better understand the function of fashion in Vodou by considering scholar of religion Aisha Beliso De-Jesus' concept of *co-presence.* Beliso De-Jesus describes co-presence as

---

[20] Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 2016), 2.
[21] Scholars of African and African Diasporic studies have explored the connection between religion and race. Please see Charles H Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images In the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880-1920* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2003); Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 2016); Judith Wisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*, (New York: New York University Press, 2016);
[22] Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Museums, Tourism, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 7.
[23] Many scholars have done work on this topic, including Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images In the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) and Jacob Olupona, ed., *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions: Volume 3 of the World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of Religious Quests* (New York: Crossroads Press, 2000),
[24] Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 3.

"active spiritual and religious subjectivities intimately tied to practitioners' forms of movement, travel, and sensual bodily registers." This is not unlike some people's interpretation of Christianity, where the divine and the human are intimately connected. In her work studying Cuban Santeria, Beliso-De Jesus' theory of *copresence* emphasizes the tactile experience of practitioners relationship with "material-immaterial beings" (ancestors, spirits, orisha).[25] *Copresence* and *real presence* are invested in the spiritual life of religion and the practical manifestation of divinities in everyday life. The sacred and the secular are inseparable. These theories are imperative to understanding African Diasporic religions and I build on these concepts to explore Manbo Maude's religious innovations. In Vodou, the spirits are not symbols, but thinking, feeling, drinking, and talking entities in the lives and rituals of devotees. Through dreams, offerings, fashion, spiritual marriage, and possession, deities are a *real presence* in Manbo Maude's spiritual homes and communities. My ethnographic work extends this idea by considering how clothing, in dreams and ritual practice, is another way in which ritual and spiritual transmission are woven into the everyday lives of practitioners. Just as *co-presence* is the connection between spirit and practitioner, *spiritual vogue* in Vodou is a mode through which the living and felt triangulation uniting practitioners, spirits, and an audience can be examined.

*Spiritual vogue* is the lens through which materiality, such as clothing, adornment, and spiritual marriages are investigated as key examples of the aesthetic ritual practices that signify African Diasporic religions. *Spiritual vogue* is an analytical construct I arrived at as a result of my participant observation in Manbo Maude's *lakou,* or yard, in both Mattapan and Jacmel. E. Patrick Johnson's work on performance theory is useful in interrogating how the body must be understood as a site with the capacity for subjectivity, agency, and transformation; indeed, his work helps show how the performativity exercised through the body is always defined by a broader historical context.[26] In Vodou ceremonies, the body is a site of religious performance that

[25] Aisha Beliso-De Jesus, *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (New York: Columbia Press, 2015), 2.
[26] E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 136.

contests, conforms to, or negotiates with "dominant meaning systems."[27] In these ceremonies, it is not only important to consider how the bodies are adorned, but also what is happening around them. Manbo Maude's body, and those of her practitioners, function as individuals while simultaneously interacting with one another and the audience, which impacts their actions and the meanings of their performativity in service of the spirits. The "performative reflexivity" of *spiritual vogue*, the fact that the participants are expecting the eyes of the audience and the spirits, is at the heart of what shapes the concept, allowing the devotees to reflect on what Victor Turner describes as the "relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public [and religious] selves." [28] *Spiritual vogue* is a dynamic, multisensorial experience that incorporates the presence of the spirits, movement, fashion, touch, and being seen in a religious context. The act of looking and being looked at in Manbo Maude's temples and in Haitian Vodou in general involves the triangulation of multiple subjects: the practitioners, the spirits, and the audience. These religious practices illustrate the vibrancy of Haitian Vodou and the beautification rituals involved in ceremonies. *Spiritual vogue* affirms the confidence and attractiveness of its participants in an environment that is both religious and highly social. *Spiritual vogue* illuminates how the appreciation and exaltation of the spirits fosters the co-construction of both spirit identity and practitioner identity. Ultimately, *spiritual vogue* describes practitioners' communal relationship with each other and the spirits, witnessed on a cosmic level and human level, which draws from adornment practices to show the preservation of communality across time, place, and space.

*Spiritual vogue* hinges on the concept of being seen, an action expounded upon by religious scholar David Morgan. According to Morgan, the act of looking is a site of knowledge production that effects the senses and draws from sets of assumptions that are part of tradition, have historical context, and are socially and culturally specific.[29] Because sight is central to his theories, Morgan's work may appear to privilege vision, however, his work analyzes the act of

[27] Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies,* 138.
[28] Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1986), 24.
[29] David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

looking and seeing as a multisensory experience. The religious images in Vodou ceremonies and fashion do practical ritual work, informing "vision as a cultural act."[30] The images created through fashion are dynamic and malleable and create a relationship between the image and the viewer, who bestow upon the image meaning. Morgan introduces the concept of the "sacred gaze," which he defines as "the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance." [31] The sacred gaze is an embodied activity, where people explore their rituals through looking at images and each other. The process of looking ties together social, historical, and religious context. Therefore, vision as a medium produces an understanding of an image that is a part of the "social construction of reality."[32] The sacred gaze is pivotal to the function of *spiritual vogue*, where the act of seeing becomes a religious act integrated into Vodou ceremonies, building on cultural and historical context through fashion. Vision, integrated into the religious practice of *spiritual vogue*, reinforces beliefs in divinity. The sacred gaze, like *spiritual vogue*, is not isolated, but interacts with other senses through its social uses in religious spaces. *Spiritual vogue,* then, is a stylistic apparatus that depends on the interactive process of looking between the participants, the spirits, and the audience.

As concepts, sensational religion and material culture are incredibly useful for the study of African Diasporic religion and material practice because they establish a framework that effectively imagines how human senses can be engaged in religious spaces and in religious dress. Because dress is my focus, I am interested in the sensorial and material dynamics of embodied Vodou practice. Materiality, as defined by Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders is the "the human experience of material -things, objects, and their contexts- in ritual domains," and is critical to the study of religion.[33] Colleen McDannell also expounds upon this idea by asserting that scholars who study material culture "derive meanings from objects themselves by paying attention to the form, distribution, function, and changing character of the objects and their

[30] Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze,* 3.
[31] Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze,* 3.
[32] Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze,* 30.
[33] Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Sanders, *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), ix.

environments."[34] Significantly, these definitions show that objects have meaning, and this meaning is given to them through the context of not only religion but by the circumstances of devotees lived experiences. These objects are not passive, but dynamic, because of the messages they communicate and the spiritual powers imbued to them by individuals. These objects cannot be analyzed solely for their symbolic attributes and must be understood in a "system of exchange" which is given purpose by believers.[35] This system of exchange requires communication that is given meaning by an individual's social and historical environment, from which they create and interpret purpose for a ritual object. What is illuminated by this process is the active and interactive creation of meaning in material culture, which includes religious dress. What is placed on the body as adornment is imperative in critically analyzing how individuals' self-articulate as practitioners and as members of a religious collectivity. Centering practitioners, especially Manbo Maude, exemplifies the active production of fashion created in dialogue with spirits. The meaning making surrounding religious objects is the lens through which I explore Manbo Maude's ingenuity in the production of ritual adornment and ceremonial practice.

This ingenuity is directly tied to the transnational nature of African diasporic religions. In scholarship concerning African Diasporic religions, the movement of people, objects, and ideas across the Atlantic Ocean has been an important and unavoidable frame for understanding the religious and cultural continuities and adaptations in African Diasporic communities. The Black Atlantic is accordingly a transnational apparatus that can be used to think about religion, migration, commerce, and material exchanges.[36] Anthropologist J. Lorand Matory uses historical ethnography to demonstrate that people of the African Diaspora created transnational "imagined communities," and through their individual and collective ingenuity, created redefined homelands. Afro Brazilian religion, or Candomble, is the nexus through which Matory illuminates the continuities, or "dialogues," of West and Central African linguistic and ritual transformations.

---

[34] Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2.
[35] McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 3.
[36] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy* (New York City: Random House, 1983), xvii.
Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

Diasporic "dialogues" are an active and ongoing religious cultural exchange where Africa and the African Diaspora inform one another and create eclectic ritual practices that are in constant conversation. Africa "has never been stagnant," so the very idea of its people having "retentions" of their African cultural past devalues the creative agency and strategic choices that have shaped their transnational lives in their Atlantic realities.[37] Africa has always been a cosmopolitan place through commerce and migration and is at the forefront of transnational cultural formations. The concept of Diasporic dialogues is important to my analysis of Manbo Maude, her temples, and her fashion. Manbo Maude is a transnational religious practitioner, taking her goods, services, and culture with her when she travels between the United States and Haiti, exchanging ideas and religious traditions with her communities. She works with practitioners from multiple countries and is inspired by gods with origins in West and Central Africa and Haiti, all of which shapes her sartorial creativity and design. These cultural, social, and material exchanges inform the way she creates and understands religious fashion. *Spiritual vogue* is a product of these religious and cultural exchanges, wherein people and fashion from varying African Diasporic communities contribute to the religious rituals performed in Manbo Maude's homes in Mattapan and Jacmel. The ongoing conversations between the practitioners, the audience, and the spirits is facilitated through the use of fashion and adornment, and these materials articulate devotional practices within the transnational religious communities Manbo Maude leads.

The transnational nature of Manbo Maude's spiritual practice is directly tied to the way in which African and African Diasporic religions rely on a vast body of knowledge culled from various religious practices that have shaped the worldviews of many, migrating throughout the world. The transatlantic slave trade sustained African religious traditions while also creating new ways of thinking about and practicing these faiths.[38] The brutal legacy of slavery could not destroy

[37] Lorand J. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.
[38] For more work on the transatlantic slave trade, Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making In Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden : Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

African religious practices and cosmologies.[39] One of the most salient examples of the resiliency of these traditions is the formation of Haitian Vodou, which incorporates a multitude of African and American Indian cultures.[40] The essence of Haitian Vodou is the amalgamation of varying African cultures to form a meta-language to communicate with diverse African traditions and ritual practices. The transatlantic slave trade forced many African peoples and cultures into the same geographical space in Haiti, and what emerged from this contact is a complex system of beliefs that entwined West and Central African religious worldviews, American Indian traditions, and eventually Catholicism. The presence of Catholicism in Vodou is due to the impact of French colonial authority, which forced Haitians to hide their deities within the images of saints that evoked the same meanings as their spirits, for fear of deadly consequences. For enslaved Haitians, naming African spirits, owning ritual material, or gathering to practice their religions could result in death. The necessity of this secrecy depended on which region of Haiti practitioners lived in and the level of influence Catholicism had on the particular individual or religious community.[41] The vast expanse of the plantations in Haiti and other Caribbean colonies prevented the French from exerting rigid control over the religious beliefs of large numbers of enslaved Africans. The constant influx of Africans to the colonies also added to the sustainability of African religious traditions.[42] In the twenty-first century, Catholicism is still a force carrying degrees of power: some communities embrace its symbols and practices, while others focus on the African or American Indian elements of Vodou. The secrecy involved in the practice of Vodou and the worship of its deities illuminates how enslaved Africans had to find creative and

[39] See Melville Herskovits, *Myth of Negro Past* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958) and Albert J Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[40] Manbo Maude does not focus on the American Indian aspects of Vodou. However, there are scholars who have mentioned the American Indian influences in Vodou, such as Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953) and Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
[41] Ennis Barrington Edmonds, and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 53.
[42] Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, eds. *Vodou in Haitian Life & Culture: Invisible Powers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xix.
Ennis Barrington Edmonds, and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 59.

discursive ways to practice their religious traditions. Haitians had to create new significations for their spirits as they adapted their religions to new environments in order to survive.[43]

The religious rites and ceremonial practices of Vodou are a constant reminder of not only the complexity of the spirits, but how diverse African Diasporic communities have always been. These traditions pay homage to various West and Central African religious communities. Enslaved Africans in Haiti had to engage in dialogues with people from many religions and nations, creating an eclectic African Diasporic religious system. For instance, the term "vodou" means "spirit" in Fon, a language from Benin. Moreover, the nations or *nacions* in Haitian are as follows: the *Rada* nation from Dahomean, which is now Benin; the *Nago* nation from Yoruba which is in Western Nigeria; the *Petwo* nation from the Congo- Angola; and the *Igbo* nation from Eastern Nigeria. Haitian religion embodies what scholar of history and African American studies Paul Christophe Johnson describes as a "memory bridge" that ties not only African nations to each other, but religious beliefs about the divine, the universe, morality, and community.[44] The colors associated with the respective Vodou nations and the deities who represent them have roots in Fon and Yoruba traditions and the temperaments that define these pantheons are derived from these color designations.[45] For example, the serpent spirit Danbala,[46] who is tied to the *Rada*, is known for wisdom and benevolence and is associated with the colors white and sometimes green. These colors connote a cool, calm nature. Ezili Danto, the *Petwo* warrior goddess, on the other hand, wears red and blue to signify her fierce and fiery attitude. As an analytical framework, Diaspora entails an understanding of the "claims and practices [of people] rather than [a simple understanding of] biological determination or territory[al]" reach. [47] The pairing of the term religious with the term Diaspora (i.e. religious diaspora) signals a notion of

---

[43] Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 4.
[44] Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 2.
[45] See Susan Tselos, "Dressing the Divine Horseman: Dress as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda B. Arthur (Oxford: Berg, 2000),48. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy* (New York City: Random House, 1983).; Suzanne Blier, "Vodun: West African Roots of Vodun," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou,* ed. Donald J. Constentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History), 61-87.
[46] Danbala's Catholic counterpart is Saint Patrick.
[47] Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 5.

Diaspora that emphasizes communal and ritual practices, and beliefs that exist through the transmission of sacred traditions. The rich entanglements between materiality, specifically fashioning, and spiritual practice necessitate a critical engagement with Diaspora. As a result, religious Diasporas create multiple understandings of Blackness grounded in materiality.

The chapters of this dissertation are as follows. Chapter 1 introduces Manbo Maude and her spiritual homes in both Mattapan, Massachusetts and Jacmel, Haiti. I accompany her to a fabric store to gain insight on how she receives inspiration for her religious fashion from the spirits, the material on display and her broader religious community. Manbo Maude uses these fabrics as a tool to distinguish herself and her Vodou home. These sartorial choices imply her relative wealth and showcase the spirits during ceremonies. I argue that the aesthetics of religious fashion allow practitioners to create communal religious experiences while pleasing and communicating with the spirits.

Chapter 2 explores the bedroom in Manbo Maude's home in Mattapan in order to emphasize the informal, social interaction between Black women. The bedroom becomes a site of religious innovation that reflects the relationship between gender, sexuality and race in religious ritual, material aesthetics, and spiritual embodiment within African Diasporic religions. Through head wraps and ritual clothing, I examine how intra-racial spaces can reinforce ideas of black sisterhood and how African Diasporic identity is negotiated through interactions with White practitioners within Manbo Maude's temple. I inspect how fashion connects practitioners and initiates within Manbo Maude's home, yet race, gender and sexuality complicate the unity that she tries to create with her religious garments.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the labor of faith work in Manbo Maude's temples in Jacmel and Mattapan through *emotional*, *intimate* and *aesthetic* labor, categories established by historian of religion Judith Casselberry. These categories are useful in exploring the religious and economic work that are mandatory to maintaining her temples and her spiritual community. By considering the negotiatory labor required by the deities and by practitioners in her temple, I argue that

Manbo Maude's spiritual efficacy is demonstrated through her ability to delegate responsibilities and resources.

Chapter 4 centers the role of spiritual marriages in allowing for easier communication between spirits and practitioners. I interview several initiates about their journey to their ritual commitment to the spirits and how fashion creates opportunities for multisensorial interactions with the divine. These interactions can take place through possession during marriage ceremonies, as well as within dreams where the ongoing communication can facilitate possible sexual encounters between spirits and practitioners. I also explore the often unspoken realities of same gender desire between spirits and practitioners and how this sometimes challenges the ritual traditions of spiritual marriage within Manbo Maude's temples. The religious fashion and gender presentation involved in spiritual marriage extends beyond ceremonies into the everyday lives of practitioners, as social and cultural influences impact how the human body is perceived during possession in spiritual marriages.

# CHAPTER 1

*Fashioning the Spirit: Materiality and Spiritual Exchange in Haitian Vodou*

Figure 1. Manbo Maude at "Sewfisticated" shopping for fabric in Cambridge, MA.

## Fashioning Faith

When I arranged to see Manbo Maude in Mattapan, I did not know Massachusetts would be experiencing an unusual cold spell. Two days before I arrived, eighteen inches of snow had fallen and it was questionable if my plane would ever make it off the ground. Manbo Maude and I discussed the precarious travel conditions over Facebook, and she assured me that she would be willing to go fabric shopping with me another time if this trip was not possible. Ultimately, the flight was delayed for over two hours, but I could make the outing we had planned. The first steps out of Logan Airport were bitterly cold, and I remembered why I had not come to visit the area in the wintertime after earning my Master's degree in Boston. My jacket, warm enough for Pennsylvania winters, was no defense against the Boston wind chill.

The taxi dropped me in front of Manbo Maude's house which I had visited numerous times before, though the face of the structure was nearly unfamiliar through the snow piled high in

her front yard. It was a two-story house built sometime before World War II, with an attic that had been converted into a bedroom, and a basement she used as her ceremonial space. The railing that bracketed the stairs leading to her patio was wobbly from use and rust, and wind chimes rang out along the front entrance. The paint was peeling from the paneled, wooden exterior of the home, revealing the ruddy brown color underneath. For a number of people in North America, Europe, and the Caribbean, this place was their Vodou home. I rang the doorbell, and even before the door opened I could smell the food being prepared in her kitchen. I thought it was *diri ak pwa*, a Haitian food dish that consisted of rice and beans. When the door opened, my suspicions were confirmed, and Manbo Maude ushered me out of the cold. She was smiling and had a broom in her hand, which she used to clear her floor of the detritus brought in on the bottom of people's shoes. Manbo Maude was about five feet and six inches tall, with brown skin, and shoulder length, pressed hair she had pinned up and covered with a head wrap. She was thin, but not skinny. Although she was in her fifties, her face did not carry all those years, and she appeared a decade younger. When she was not performing a ceremony, her glasses were perpetually perched on the brim of her nose, and she peered at people over the top of the frames.

"Welcome, Eziaku," she said, "Are you hungry?"

Hearing that question was common when entering Caribbean and African households and it warmed me to hear it, not only because I was hungry, but because of its familiarity. I dropped my belongings in her daughter's room and returned downstairs to eat and talk with Manbo Maude. We started planning our next day, when I would accompany her as she shopped for fabric for the religious dress she was producing for an upcoming Vodou ceremony in honor of the serpent spirit Danbala. The ceremony was two months away and would fall on St. Patrick's Day, the holiday celebrating the Catholic saint that was a counterpart to Danbala. The fabric store opened at ten the next morning.

"I'm not trying to get there that early," Manbo Maude said.

"We can leave by noon," I suggested.

Manbo Maude seemed uncommitted to the timeline and looked away rather than agree with me. It would happen when it happened. We ended up leaving her home to go to the store at 2:30 in the afternoon after a Black American neighbor helped us dig her car out of the snow. All of her neighbors were Black: American, Jamaican, Haitian, or Afro-Latinx. Her block reflected Mattapan in general, which had a large population of immigrants and was predominantly Black.[48] The demographics of the neighborhood were a part of what made Manbo Maude comfortable performing ceremonies. With friendly neighbors and a relatively significant number of Haitians in the area, she believed her religious activities were not viewed as strange or dangerous.

We drove twenty minutes to "Sewfisticated: Discount Designer Fabrics" in Cambridge. The owners of the store traveled the country searching for the fabrics they sold, which could come from not only anywhere in the United States, but the world. Manbo Maude said the store in Cambridge had better options than other locations and she had a good relationship with the staff. "I feel like a queen," she said, and when we entered the store I could understand what she meant. She was greeted by the staff by name in a chorus of friendly hellos and warm smiles. One of the staff members immediately went to the back of the store and returned with sixteen reams of fabric, which included pink and blue denim with white lace and stitched flowers. Manbo Maude had already given a down payment on this fabric to serve the spirit Azaka[49] in the summertime and was going to ship it to Haiti soon. She periodically shipped fabric and other materials to Haiti throughout the year in preparation for her ceremonies. Manbo Maude frequented the store with enough regularity that she was able to pay for her materials in installments, and the owners had full confidence that she would honor the arrangement. One of the owners had been attending to another client and came to greet her as soon as she was finished. She asked after Manbo Maude's mother, and Manbo Maude explained that her mother was doing better after having suffered a stroke. The woman seemed interested in the answer and they appeared to have developed a friendly rapport over Manbo Maude's countless visits to her store for the past fifteen

[48] Census 2010; https://www.boston.gov/neighborhood/mattapan
[49] Azaka is a Haitian spirit of Agriculture

years. Because of this long-term business relationship, the owner of the store often kept Manbo Maude's preferences in mind when she traveled to search for new materials to sell in her store.

Manbo Maude spent the rest of our time at "Sewfisticated" browsing through their selection of fabrics, not only for the Danbala ceremony she was anticipating, but for anything that struck her as suitable for the many spirits she served and for the ceremonies she would be performing throughout the year. The store was neatly organized by color and texture, with sections dedicated to trims and to styles, such as African cotton prints, lace, and sequins. The spirits often ask for lace, cotton, and denim, which symbolize aspects of Haitian agriculture, luxury, West and Central African ancestry, and colonial history. Manbo Maude's choices are about functionality and glamour. Cotton is breathable and affordable, lace is glamorous, and denim represents peasant culture and agriculture.[50] The walls were lined with shelves packed with fabrics of every color and pattern, ranging from light shades to dark hues. Manbo Maude wanted green and white fabrics for Danbala, as well as yellow for the spirit Papa Loko, the spirit of the first Vodou priest, because she sometimes celebrated them simultaneously.[51] White is a color that pleases all the spirits in the Vodou pantheon. The colors Manbo Maude used to identify the spirits are widely understood designations in Vodou, which stem from traditions in Yoruba, Dahomean, and Kongo cultures. In Yoruba tradition, there are three color-coded groupings: *funfun*, which groups white, silver, and gray, signifies coolness, age, peace, reconciliation, and wisdom; the *pupa* group, which includes numerous warm or hot colors such as red, orange, deep yellow, and pink, is understood to connote heat, passion, and aggression; and the *dudu* group, which connects the cool and hot and includes darker colors like black, blue, purple, and green.[52]

---

[50] For more on Haitian peasantry see, Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Public and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (New York: Viking, 1985).
Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 37.

[51] Papa Loko is a Haitian spirit of initiation who gives ritual powers to priests.

[52] Susan Tselos, "Dressing the Divine Horesmen: Clothing as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda B. Arthur, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 46-49; Robert Farris Thompson*, Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy* (New York City: Random House, 1983), 206.

When I asked Manbo Maude how she decided on the fabrics for the spirits, she said, “I’m open. I’m listening to them.”

She stopped by an island of cloth labeled ‘designer fabrics’ and ran her hand over a red, lace textile. She pressed her forehead against it and stood there pensively. It seemed that she might be praying, but perhaps she was only carefully thinking about the prospect of buying it. Eventually, she moved on from the fabric. She was not satisfied. We went to the section of the store that had many green and yellow materials. I asked her if she found anything of interest for the ceremony dedicated to Danbala and Loko, and how she would know what was appropriate when she saw it. “If I come and I see fabric just for Loko I’m like, okay, you’re talking to me,” she answered. “Or, if I’m really seeing all white that I like I’m like, okay, let’s do it.” Manbo Maude did not find the fabric she wanted for Danbala and Loko, but she found material that might suffice for the spirit Ezili Freda and paid for the fabric she had selected for Azaka. The owner also assured her that she would be leaving soon to find more fabric for the store, and that she would remember Manbo Maude’s particular preferences.

My experience shopping with Manbo Maude helped me understand that her access to a plentiful fabric store, where she can peruse materials from around the country and even the world, contributes to her ability to innovate in her production of religious dress. At the start of her tenure as a Vodou priestess decades ago, fashion was an integral part of her ritual practices, but over time, she discovered that the production of fashion presented a unique opportunity to elevate her religious ceremonies. Now, she uses these fabrics as a tool to distinguish herself and her Vodou homes, suggest her relative wealth, and showcase the spirits. Manbo Maude does not make a significant profit from her creation of religious dress. She uses fashion to create a signature style for her Vodou ceremonies. Because of her residence in the United States, she is afforded the opportunity to take a wide selection of textiles to Haiti for her ceremonies. She gains inspiration not only from the spirits, her communities, and her own creative thinking as a fashion designer, but also from the resources available to her. Manbo Maude’s work with the store owner and the seamstresses she hires in Haiti and Mattapan creates an informal, small scale production

network that intersects culture, transnationalism, and religion. Manbo Maude works with practitioners from multiple countries and is inspired by gods with origins in West and Central Africa and Haiti, all of which shapes her sartorial creativity and design. These cultural, social, and material exchanges inform the way she creates and understands religious fashion.

While Manbo Maude's religious and sartorial innovations bear distinctions born of her personal influence, this capacity for change and adaptation is not unique to her temples and ceremonies. Manbo Maude is a point on a spectrum of evolution that runs through Vodou stylistics, another in the long line of contributors to what Dana Rush has called the "unfinished aesthetics" of Black Atlantic religions and Haitian Vodou in particular.[53] Aesthetics in Vodou are constantly being re-worked and re-made, drawing from an endless array of cultural and religious inspirations, and dynamically shifting to suit the needs of diverse communities throughout the African Diaspora. Manbo Maude's creative, religious perspective is constantly growing through her interaction with the spirts and her religious communities. In Vodou, the spirits are not symbols, but thinking, feeling, drinking, and talking entities in the lives and rituals of devotees. The spirits are also vain. They are invested in the physical presentation of their presence in Vodou ceremonies. Manbo Maude's connection to the divine is an integral part of her everyday life. As I will show in this chapter, deities are a *real presence* in Manbo Maude's homes and communities who make their presence known through dreams, fashion, ritual and possession. The aesthetics of religious fashion provide a way for practitioners to co-construct religious experiences while responding to and interacting with spirits. Clothing is collectively imagined, with the spirits asking for specific colors and materials that practitioners then fashion for themselves. Dress, like the body, becomes a canvas for spirits to adorn, and then perform with, even as devotees use these rituals to communicate with the spirits.

The ritual purposes of the clothing used in Manbo Maude's ceremonies and in Vodou in general, as well as the complex, communal process of creating and giving meaning to this

[53] Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). Pérez draws this description from Dana Rush's concept of the "Vodou Vortex," which explores the dynamic aesthetic and material elements that organize Vodou.

fashion, is articulated through what I am calling *spiritual vogue*. In *spiritual vogue,* the gods inspire the religious fashion aesthetics. *Spiritual vogue* is the lens through which materiality, such as dress, can be investigated as key examples of the aesthetic ritual practices that signify African Diasporic religions. I explore *spiritual vogue* in Manbo Maude's temples as a dynamic, multisensorial experience that incorporates the presence of the spirits, movement, fashion, and touch in a religious context. Through Vodou ceremonies, Manbo Maude and her practitioners function as ritualistically stylized individuals while simultaneously interacting with one another and the audience, which impacts their actions and the meanings of their performativity in service of the spirits. I argue *spiritual vogue* is a stylistic apparatus that depends on the interactive process of looking between the participants, the spirits, and the audience. Exploring *spiritual vogue* requires understanding that the presence of the spirts in Vodou ceremonies is not figurative for many participants and devotees, and the legitimacy of these spirits has substantive effects on their actions and ritual practice.

**Visit from the Goddess and Spirit Negotiations**

In the early 1990s in Mattapan, Manbo Maude was not yet a Vodou initiate. She was referred to as a *Manbo Makoute*, a person who visits temples, communicates with the spirits and performs some religious ceremonies without being officially initiated. At the time, she did not have a temple of her own and attended ceremonies in the local Haitian community she was familiar with through her friends and family. During a phone conversation in the Fall of 2017, she described her formative years as a *Manbo Makoute*. She used to wear outfits she defined as "simple": plain clothes in basic white that she purchased from stores anyone might frequent, lacking any personal touch or flare. Often, she wore pleated, white skirts with a collared, buttoned-down shirt, which lacked the amount of fabric she incorporated into later, flowy designs. "You could dress a little kid with it," she described. The initial inspiration for wearing white in her ceremonies came from her spiritual mother and what she witnessed in Haitian ceremonies in Jacmel. She explained:

> After I did my initiation, my spiritual mother, I saw her at her *peristil*,[54] I saw people wearing white. You know, when I do *kanzo*[55] in Haiti, people are wearing white. So my spiritual mother, [and] her people were wearing white. I thought it was the most beautiful thing in the world. So when I was doing my thing, not thinking that I kept that in my mind, I was thinking, you know, people should be coming to *fetes*[56] in white.

Her spiritual mother required the practitioners who participated in her ceremonies to wear white, which Manbo Maude emulated. The connection between white and spiritual rituals emphasized by Manbo Maude and her mentor stretches back to Yoruba and Fon cultural traditions in Nigeria and Benin, transported through the Atlantic slave trade, where the color connoted wisdom and purity.[57] This tradition and her experiences with her spiritual mother guided Manbo Maude's early forays into religious fashion, but eventually the spirits demanded more from her.

On one occasion, a spirit appeared to Manbo Maude in a dream the day before she was to attend a friend's ceremony where she intended to wear her typical white outfit. Receiving a visit from a deity in her dreams was not an unusual occurrence for Manbo Maude. In Vodou, dreams are realms through which the gods can relay direct or indirect messages to devotees, sometimes through visceral, tactile visions.[58] Dreams represent an in-between state: in between the conscious and the unconscious, and in between the physical world and the spiritual one. This is why communication between spirits and humans is so common in this space; dreams are a conduit to the spiritual plane.[59] However, dreams do not remain segregated in the unconscious, but have consequences in the waking world, where practitioners interpret their messages for practical use in their everyday lives.[60] For Manbo Maude, dreams have impacted not only how she negotiates problems in her life and in her communities, but how she designs religious dress.

---

[54] A Vodou temple.
[55] A type of Vodou initiation ritual.
[56] Haitian word for feasts.
[57] Karen Tranberg Hansen, "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 369-92.; Susan Tselos, "Dressing the Divine Horesmen: Clothing as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda B. Arthur, (Oxford: Berg, 2000 Lynne Hume, *The Religious Life of Dress: Global Fashion and Faith* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953).
[58] Regarding the nature and importance of religious dreams, see Angie Heo, "The Divine Touchability of Dreams," in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 436.
[59] Karen E. Richman, *Migration and Vodou* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 119.
[60] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 296.

Her dreams are sites of reflection, where the spirits inspire her and where she can envision her own potential as a Manbo and as a religious fashion designer.

The message she received in this particular dream concerned her sartorial choices. A dark skinned, middle aged woman with "salt and pepper hair" appeared, singing a Vodou song somewhere in the distance. Based on the woman's age, Manbo Maude recognized her as Ezili Je Wouj who is part of the Ezili family of spirits, and is understood to be a manifestation of Ezili Danto.[61] Manbo Maude makes a distinction between the Ezili deities based on age instead of personality:

> Ezili Danto is very young. She is mature and has a child. She's not that old. She's around her twenties and thirties. Je Wouj is a powerful woman with a lot of maturity and she is in her late forties, going on fifties. For Gran Ezili, she is the wise older woman. She is a very old woman who could be around her mid-sixties to early eighties.

Often, Ezili Je Wouj is contrasted with the rest of the Ezili pantheon as the evil or vengeful manifestation of the spirit. Ezili Freda is generally described as a light-skinned woman who embodies love, luxury, and desire; Gran Ezili is an old, stooped woman; and Ezili Danto is a dark-skinned, independent single mother who raises children. Ezili Je Wouj is commonly a footnote or merely one more name in a list of deities in the scholarship surrounding the Ezili family.[62] Ezili Freda and Ezili Danto are frequently the focus, with special attention paid to their contrasting skin tones and the complicated issues involving colorism that contrast evokes. The Ezili constitute a "map," offering paths of reflection that value femininity, while also acknowledging some of the pitfalls of gender as a constructed idea: vanity, the elevation of light skin over dark, jealousy, the

[61] Ezili Danto is commonly interpreted as a manifestation of the Catholic figures Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the Polish black Virgin, Our Lady of Czestochowa. *Ezili Dantò,* who belongs to the *Petwò* nation, is a renowned Lwa in Haitian Vodou. She is held in such high regard that people sometimes explain that the blue on the Haitian flag is dedicated to her spiritual greatness. She is known as the spiritual Mother of Haiti. The *Petwò* nation in Vodou cosmology is largely of Kongo origin and according to Robert Farris Thompson, this "hot side" of the Vodou pantheon has been associated with spiritual charms for healing but also used as attacking forces. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy* (New York City: Random House, 1983), 206.

[62] For more work on Ezili je Wouj see Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Karen E. Richmond, *Migration and Vodou* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), and Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

vying for male attention, and female competition.[63] The Ezili are not Lwa that can be easily quantified or simplified, and this is where their value lies. Centering Je Wouj offers an opportunity to expand the narrative about the Ezili pantheon of spirits by exploring her impact on practitioners' lives and her investment in the sartorial decisions of Manbo Maude's ceremonies.

Ezili Je Wouj was not an unfamiliar figure in Manbo Maude's life. The deity has been appearing to her since she was six years old, frequently encouraging her to become a Vodou initiate, but her parents and extended family insisted that she was too young. Decades later, Je Wouj returned to make the same demands. In the dream, Manbo Maude asked the deity who taught her how to sing because it sounded so beautiful. Ezili Je Wouj responded, "You can sing just like me. You can sing like this as well." Singing is a typical feature of Vodou ceremonies, and Je Wouj's insistence that Manbo Maude possessed a voice worthy of this ritual may have been a suggestion that she take on more responsibility as a practitioner. In the dream, Manbo Maude was carrying a bell in her hand, which was used by practitioners who were non-initiates during ceremonies. She described the encounter:

> She was like, [she] looked at me and sized me up and down and she's like 'you know what, it's about time you put the bell on the side. I want the *ason*.[64] I want to show off, I want to show off! I want people to know who I am. I want you to put the bell away.' And then she said, 'you know what they are saying about you… they are calling you '*Manbo TiKolet*' because of the way you dress.

Over the phone, I asked her what the phrase meant, knowing the term *kolet* could be translated as "no money." Manbo Maude called on her daughter, Nadia, to help with the translation.[65] She regularly asked her daughter for translation and clarification, often speaking in Haitian and having her directly translate.[66] In the background I heard Nadia's voice answer, "It means little Manbo with no means, or Manbo with little means." Manbo Maude agreed with the interpretation.

---

[63] Brown, *Mama Lola*, 228-229.
[64] An *ason* is a sacred rattle used by initiates
[65] Nadia is a pseudonym
[66] Often, the Haitian language, a French based Creole language, is described as "Haitian Creole." Michel Rolph Trouillot calls it "Haitian," and I follow his lead. I argue that the use of the term "Creole" is racially coded, and is often used only to describe languages spoken by Black people throughout the African Diaspora. I believe using the term "Haitian" centers it as a distinct linguistic system. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995), xxii.

Later, standing in her kitchen, she shared Je Wouj's demands in more detail. She demonstrated the way Je Wouj spoke to her in the dream. "I want to show off," Manbo Zamni said proudly, sticking her chest out and swaying her hips, "I want to show off! I want people to know who I am…I want big dresses, I want beautiful dresses to show off." Though she respects the spirits and their wishes, Manbo Maude's immediate response was not easy acquiescence. At first, she explained, "I smiled. I'm like *hmm*, this spirit has some nerve to talk to me like that." She contacted her cousin and told her about the encounter. The cousin confided that what she had been told was true. People in their community had been calling her *Manbo TiKolet* and said her style was not in fashion. Ultimately, the discussion surrounding her clothing was not only about the specific style, but about class and social status, which were conveyed through her sartorial choices. Manbo Maude cared about the opinion of her community and showing proper respect for the spirits, and needed to answer to both forces. She could not merely meet the bare minimum for ceremonial fashion, she was required by her community and the spirits to show her status through her clothing and emphasize her religious potency as a Manbo. Vodou spirits are not only concerned with morality and holistic world views, but with their own vanity. What a Manbo wears during a ceremony reflects upon the deities they serve. Showing off is an aspect of *spiritual vogue,* illustrating the urgent need of the spirits, in this case Je Wouj, to be seen by an audience and represented by practitioners through fashion and material culture. For Je Wouj, it was essential that Manbo Maude understood the importance of presentation and that she capture a mode of display that emphasized the ritual potency of sartorial expression. Moreover, Manbo Maude could not expect to inspire fellow practitioners or new initiates to follow her to her own temple if her fashion did not connote her ability to provide for herself and for others. A Manbo who represents wealth conveys the message that her religious community will also prosper and that her ceremonies will be materially plentiful enough to please the spirts, feed the community, and properly complete ritual work. Wearing white was a perfectly acceptable and traditional way to honor the spirits, yet for Manbo Maude it did not communicate her own vision of religious fashion. By incorporating bigger, more colorful ensembles into her ceremonies, she crafted a religious

fashion that was inspired by her personal connection to the spirits. The need to 'show off' as Ezili Je Wouj demanded was not only a way for the spirit to be represented through Manbo Maude's material display, but a way for Manbo Maude to stand out as a prominent religious figure in her community.

In Mattapan, Manbo Maude attended the ceremony in her plain clothes because she did not have the time to create a new outfit. "I felt embarrassed," she explained, referring to the opinions of her community and the spirits, "I felt like I wasn't representing the culture and I was putting the culture down." Still uncomfortable but obligated to fulfill her duties as a *Manbo Makout*, she explained that she took her bell to the ceremony. She forgot it at the end of the night. A week later, the person who had overseen that ceremony called Manbo Maude and told her she found the bell in her home. I asked her how she could have forgotten her sacred bell. She responded, "Exactly. It's not like me to forget a bell. But I think that Je Wouj made me forget the bell because she didn't want me to have the bell. She wanted an *ason*." Manbo Maude understood this seemingly out of character forgetfulness as a spiritual intervention and confirmation that she was no longer supposed to use the bell, but should use an *ason* instead. Having the *ason* meant she would have more responsibility and become a full Manbo, a distinguished leader in her community. Manbo Maude described the dream and the messages conveyed by Ezili Je Wouj as greatly impactful on how she practiced Vodou. She explained, "Since then, I have been thinking about how to improve my clothes. I would ask the spirits, 'how do you want me to dress?' And they will tell me. I will get inspired by style, and it will come to me by design."

**Serving Spiritual Face**

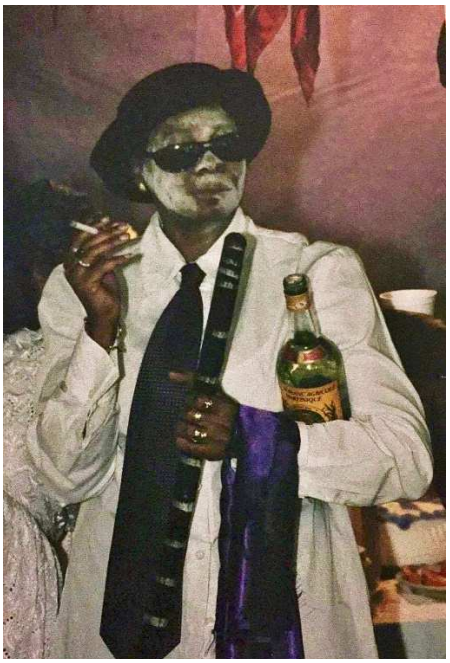

Figure 2. Manbo Maude possessed by Gede in Mattapan, MA.

When Manbo Maude began hosting her own ceremonies in the early 1990s, branching out from her spiritual mother's guidance and creating her own Vodou temple, she decided to honor Gede.[67] She was no longer a *Manbo Makoute* and was establishing herself as a Manbo with her own home and her own traditions. She would hold the ceremony in the basement of her home in Mattapan. The basement is often a neglected space in the house, relegated to storage, but for practitioners of this often-stigmatized religion, the basement is often appropriated into a sacred space. [6869] Gede was one of the spirits Manbo Maude had a special affinity for, and who provided guidance in her life. The Gede nation is possibly one of the most studied spirits in the

[67] The Catholic counterpart to Gede is Saint Gerard, who represents family.
[68] Novelists writing about the Harlem Renaissance such as Carl Van Vechten (see his controversial book, *Nigger Heaven*, 1926), Richard Wright (*The Man Who Lived Underground*, 1942) and Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*, 1952) all use the basement as the principal scene to discuss experiences of Black communities and Black music especially.
[69] Scholars of Vodou such as Karen McCarthy Brown (1993), Karen Richman (2005), and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (2006) have noted that many Haitians in the diaspora hold ceremonies in the basements of their New York, Miami, and Montreal homes. I further assert that we ought to consider the basement as a liminal space and an important sacred site for Vodou communities. Interestingly, in African American literature, novelists writing about the Harlem Renaissance such as Carl Van Vechten (see his controversial book, *Nigger Heaven*, 1926), Richard Wright (*The Man Who Lived Underground*, 1942) and Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*, 1952) all use the basement as the principal scene to discuss experiences of Black communities and Black music especially.

Vodou pantheon. This is perhaps because Gede reigns over the cemetery, life, death, and sensuality, universally important issues that affect people's everyday lives. Gede also occupies the border between life and death, which makes him especially important in healing rituals.[70] Moreover, the ceremonies that celebrate Gede can be some of the most elaborate and expressive, from the religious dress, the vibrant ritual dances, the pale chalk smeared across the practitioners' faces, to the sexually suggestive performances of the devotees and the audience.[71] The uncommon decision of some female practitioners, like Manbo Maude, to wear pants during a ceremony bends the norms of gender in Vodou, but in honoring Gede, flouting these kinds of norms is allowed. The Gede nation was "born in Haiti."[72] Gede perfectly illustrates spiritual innovation in the African Diaspora, because Gede is conjured from various spirits (including American Indian) that speak to the unique lived realities of the New World.[73] In particular, this nation expresses the history of colonialization. The Gede deities emerged in response to the harsh, unforgiving labor required on Haitian sugar plantations, the astounding number of enslaved Africans that joined the land of the dead as a result, and the ancestors that were lost in the Middle Passage.[74] Members of the Vodou tradition who embody Gede fashion themselves with religious and ritual materials that often include a black top hat, sunglasses, pipes and cigars, and a black suit and tie.[75] [76] Additionally, they may cover their faces with white chalk to signify that they are not from the land of the living, but rather the dead. The stylistic signifiers used to invoke the image of Gede draw from Haiti's colonial past: wearing a suit and tie, while at the same time mocking the type of aristocratic respectability associated with French colonial powers

---

[70] Brown, *Mama Lola*, 329.
[71] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York City: Harper & Row Publishers, 1938),105. Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 58; Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York and London: McPhereson, 1983), 73; Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 269; Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 173.
[72] Scholars such as Joan Dayan (1995), Karen McCarthy Brown (1991), Patrick Bellegarde Smith (2006) have explored Gede and the spirits roots in Haiti.
[73] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 95; Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 104.
[74] For more work on the Gede nation, see Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 263-266.
[75] Brown, *Mama Lola,* 96.
[76] Some scholars have found potential links between the uses of tobacco in Haitian Vodou to Amer-Indian influences. For more, please see Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953) and Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola* (1991).

as they dance sexually and use profanity.[77] Gede's appearance is not simply mimicry, but an interpretation of the fraught images connected to colonization and all they have meant in Haitian history and society, reinventing the style into the form of a deity that negotiates the roles of life, death, and sex in practitioners' lived realities, with all the complexities, contradictions, and ambivalences inherent to such broad and complicated experiences.[78]

A few weeks before the first ceremony in Mattapan began, Gede appeared to Manbo Maude in a dream. He looked sharp, wearing a tailored black suit with a white, button down shirt and a wide, purple tie. He told her, "This is me, Gede. This is how I want to be dressed." Gede modeled for her. Stretching out his arms into a T-shape, he slowly rotated clockwise so that Manbo Maude could capture every detail of his garments. His visit was corrective. Manbo Maude had not intended to dress lavishly for his ceremony. By this time, in response to her earlier encounters with Je Wouj and the spirit's insistence that wearing all white was too simplistic, she usually wore African fabrics that featured shades of purple and black that would not have been considered improper for many Vodou ceremonies in Haiti or the Haitian Diaspora. But in this case, Gede did not approve.

A few days later, with her reverie still in mind, she went to the Men's Warehouse in East Cambridge, Massachusetts and told the tailor she wanted to be sized for a suit. In confusion, he told her he made suits for men. They went back and forth on the subject, playfully arguing, until finally she said, "Today, I am a man, size me up." Still a bit incredulous, he asked her if she wanted to rent, and she again said she wanted to buy it. He told her it was expensive, but she did not care. Gede demanded a suit, so she was going to buy him a suit. Luckily, she could afford it. As they discussed the fitting of the clothes, the tailor was intrigued that Manbo Maude wanted to wear a tailored suit. Content to keep her mysteries, she smiled and laughed mischievously, saying, "You don't know. You really don't want to know."

---

[77] Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995),104.
[78] Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), 15.

Gede's appearance in her dream, modeling his outfit for her, was essentially a dynamic invitation for Manbo Maude to use her skills and capacity for innovation to interpret the vision in the real world. In this dream, the gods spoke to her in a way that was legible in the context of her experiences and her talents. Manbo Maude had been educated in fashion design, and so this was the avenue through which Gede spoke to her about devotion and worship. Gede pushed her religious fashion even further than Je Wouj by demanding a specific suit, an outfit designed to please him through every detail. Like Je Wouj, Gede's *real presence* had real consequences for Manbo Maude's life and altered the way she glorified the spirits in her ceremonies, enabling her to begin distinguishing herself among other practitioners through her use of religious dress and adornment.

After the instructive dream and after the costly visit to the tailor, Manbo Maude was ready to honor Gede. During the ceremony, she initially wore a white dress to honor all the spirits. Then, it was time to summon Gede. During a lull in the service while the drummers, singers, and dancers rested, she disappeared into her bedroom to change and put on her ritual outfit. She buttoned up her tailored black jacket and slipped on her pleated black pants. A male friend helped tie her purple tie and she stuck a pipe in her mouth. She emerged from her room transformed. As she recalls it, when she walked down the stairs into the basement, her carefully, professionally crafted suit won her audible appreciation among the other participants in exclamatory *oh ooh*'s and *eh eh*'s. The suit featured the colors and symbols that signified Gede, such as the colors purple and black, and the accessories of the pipe and the sunglasses. The ceremony began anew and Manbo Maude was mounted by Gede. An initiate's body / head is a vessel which specific Lwa can "mount" or "ride." During this possession, the body becomes a space where the divine and human can join as one and in this liminal state, the spirit's voice and behavior take over the initiate, delivering messages (good or bad) to people within the community and/or the world at large.[79] Manbo Maude gave messages, danced, and blew smoke from her pipe and cigarettes, which was documented by several practitioners and observers present at the

[79] For more on Spirit possession see Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola* (1991) and Mimerose Beaubrun's *Nan Domi* (2013).

ceremony who later showed her pictures of the event. There are different stages in possession with varying degrees of recall. In this instance, Manbo Maude was fully possessed and had no recollection of what she said or did while mounted by Gede. She was dependent on the stories others told her for knowledge of her actions during this length of time. Moreover, the fact that she had not suffered any injuries informed her that Gede had been happy or satisfied by her and the ceremony.[80] Often, people who have experienced possession rely on others to inform them of their actions at the ceremonies or spiritual readings. Because of this, possession is an intra and interpersonal process, wherein the sometimes intensely personal experience of possession becomes a community experience. The witnesses at the ceremony are the only people who can explain to the previously possessed what the spirits did in the time they spent mounted. The re-telling of the ceremonial possession is a visual and oral experience made possible by stories and pictures. The recollections of her community were what confirmed for Manbo Maude that Gede was pleased by her outfit. "He would go around and talk," she explained, "Like, he would go to [practitioners and observers] and say, 'look at my outfit.'" She pulled on her shirt and extended her arms, "Look at how I am handsome. Look at my outfit. I am not just anyone, I am a general. I am Gede. Look at me!"

Gede's satisfaction with Manbo Maude's sartorial choices was gratifying because of the effort she expended in producing the outfit, and more than that, it was confirmation that she had prepared properly for his arrival at the ceremony. In Vodou ceremonies, fashion becomes another invitation for the spirits along with altars, songs, drumming, and food. "If they can be comfortable, they can be happy," Manbo Maude said when I asked her about Gede's manifestation at her ceremony. She continued:

> You have to have the outfit for the spirit. The color associated with that spirit and then a style that they are comfortable with. And you have other items like the liquor, or if they take like a machete or a knife, or whatever they want on the altar. If you have all that ready for them you are serving the spirits. So they know, 'Oh I have my clothes right there and this is my dollar, this is my perfume, I have everything, I feel comfortable. I am needed there.'

[80] Scholars who have studied possession, like Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) and Katherine Dunham (1969), have documented the process of possession and how it can be a conscious or unconscious state.

Manbo Maude wore Gede's ritual outfit to please her audience and to invite the presence of the deity. Clothing in Vodou ceremonies is not exclusively about fashion, but a functional aspect of religious ritual meant to attract the presence of the gods by pleasing them. Her body was prepared not only spiritually, but sartorially for the experience of possession. The material culture of Gede's ceremony welcomed the spirits into a space where they knew they were appreciated and needed, and this preserved the relationship between the spirits and practitioners. In Vodou, the use of symbolic material items signifies the ongoing exchange between religious communities and the spirts they honor.

As the ceremony continued in her basement in Mattapan, Gede also possessed several other practitioners. When these Gedes caught sight of the possessed Manbo Maude in her new suit, they were overjoyed. They pulled on her clothes admiringly, brushing away imaginary dust to show how clean and classy she looked. Her sartorial choices had been validated by the gods. Encouraged by the twin approvals of Gede and her community, Manbo Maude continued to create new clothing for different rituals. Manbo Maude was developing the format for the ceremonies she would perform well into the future, changing into specific outfits during the event in a flair of deliberate pageantry. Practitioners who were initiated under her tutelage and remained a part of her temple joined in her fashionable innovations. Her reputation as a Manbo grew. I asked her how she felt after establishing a model for the use of clothing in her ceremonies. She said, "I'm happy…comfortable. I feel confident going into the ceremony. I am not worried about what people are going to say about me." *Manbo TiKolet* was well and truly gone.

Understood through the context of Manbo Maude's dream and subsequent sartorial display in honor of Gede, *spiritual vogue* is revealed as a way for the spiritual to become tactile during religious rituals. Manbo Maude's purposeful stride was intended to serve herself, the audience, and the spirits. As she walked into her basement in Mattapan in the outfit inspired by Gede's message, the stairs became a site with added spiritual validity. It was a runway where she modeled spiritually blessed religious dress. Moreover, her presence signaled an end to the break in the ceremony. In most Vodou ceremonies, the drumming and singing of the worshippers

dictates the starts and stops in the event. By leaving the room to change her clothes and then descending her staircase in religious dress, Manbo Maude changed this rhythm and centered the role of fashion. Her sartorial presentation recommenced the ceremony. Manbo Maude's movement represented a multilayered experience, wherein she was blessed by the gods and invited the audience to take part in the event, to witness this spectacular display. Manbo Maude's religious exhibition situated her as distinct from many of her peers, distinguishing her from the other practitioners in the basement through style and procedure: her suit was created through her personal collaboration with Gede, and the break in ceremony, followed by the walk down the stairs, highlighted her role as a religious leader. The display illuminated her devotion to the spirits in a way that captured the historical and social context of the Gede nation. The gods, Gede in particular, inspired her fashion as a practitioner, which then affected not only how she spoke to the spirits in her ceremonies, but also the involvement and response of the audience at these religious events. The fact that her use of religious dress encouraged the increase in her practitioners and her audience was, for Manbo Maude, proof that the gods were pleased with how she honored them. The connection between the spirits, the practitioners, and the audience dictates the ways in which *spiritual vogue* is articulated in a religious space.

Manbo Maude's use of fashion in her religious and social life in both Haiti and Mattapan is indicative of practices that have permeated the African Diaspora for centuries. This combination of fashion and exhibition in the creation and expression of identity and community has been explored by many scholars in relation to fashion shows, parades, drag balls, and strolling in the context of Black America.[81] Strolling, for example, has been described by historians as a prominent tradition in the early twentieth century, especially in Harlem, New York, and Chicago, Illinois. Many Black residents of Harlem and Chicago left their homes in their best clothes and walked the streets of their neighborhoods, interacting with their neighbors, friends,

[81] For more work on these topics, see Monica Miller's *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009). Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of a Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

and complete strangers as they went. The point of this stroll was to be seen. Strolling celebrated Black style and identity in public, allowing Black people to announce their status, their fashion sense, and their creativity to their communities.[82]

The necessity of being seen, and the use of fashion to connote social and cultural identity to a larger community, is exemplified within the history of this tradition, and demonstrates how collective exhibition is not unique to Haitian religion or any singular community in the African Diaspora. Monica Miller investigated another point in African Diasporic identity creation still earlier in the mid-eighteenth century in the United States. Throughout southern and northern regions of the country, Africans and American-born Black people threw extravagant parades showcasing their eclectic fashion, originating from African and European influences, where they formulated community and identity in the context of a society ruled by slavery.[83] Through this flamboyant public event, they forged new community ties in the U.S. and wore the transnational nature of their identities on their bodies by mixing sartorial influences and designs. These parades announced the presence of Black American communities and asserted their dynamic, evolving sense of shared identity to a broader society that denied everything about their humanity. Like strolling and the church fashion shows in Chicago and New York, these parades indicate the enduring link between fashion, identity, and community in the Black Diaspora, as well as the persistent role of seeing and being seen. When Manbo Maude sauntered down the steps of her basement in Mattapan wearing the tailor-made suit she had purchased for the occasion, she and the other attendees at the ceremony conjured elements of a tradition that has a long history in African Diasporic communities. Her ceremonies present another avenue through which to explore the performance of Black style and identity.

Manbo Maude's use of fashion in religious spaces echoes these Diasporic cultural formations because her elaborate displays showcase her relative wealth and distinguish her from other Vodou practitioners as a result, stressing her religious potency. As is true in Manbo Maude's ceremonies, the sartorial presentations discussed were concerned with more than

[82] Miller, *Slaves to Fashion,* 198-199.
[83] Miller, *Slaves to Fashion,* 87.

distinguishing social and economic difference, but, instead, bound together practitioners, onlookers, and the spirits as partners in identity creation and community formation.[84] This comparative emphasis on the traditions of Black Americans is deliberate because of Manbo Maude's location in Mattapan. Though she travels back and forth between Haiti and the U.S., the use of fashion in the ceremonies she performs resonates with the histories of both places. The ceremonies Manbo Maude and her fellow practitioners perform are a continuation of these African Diasporic traditions, re-imagining and reinforcing community by drawing on the past and diverse cultural influences to craft religious identities that express their contemporary realities.

**Vodou Aesthetics**

Figure 3. Manbo Maude welcoming guests at Ezili Danto ceremony in Jacmel, Haiti.

Manbo Maude's commitment to religious fashion is not a preoccupation she can satisfy alone. She used to make her own dresses, but because she became so busy with her spiritual

[84] White and White. *Stylin'*, 210-213.

work and her full-time job as a social worker, she decided to employ a Salvadorian seamstress, her “secret weapon,” to help her produce the clothing. This seamstress lives close by in Mattapan, only a ten-minute drive away from Manbo Maude’s home, and they have been working together for over fifteen years. Manbo Maude texts the seamstress images of her sketches of dresses through her cell phone or travels to meet her in person and describe the dress style she wants created. Manbo Maude has never explained to this woman that she was making the dresses for Vodou ceremonies. I asked her why, after working with the same person for over fifteen years, she would keep the purpose of the clothes a secret. Why would she keep a secret from her own secret weapon? She answered, “Not everyone has to be in my business. I give her a job to make my clothes. She tells me she can do it, and that’s it. I keep it separate.” Manbo Maude is careful about who she allows into her religious space, wary of those who do not fully understand Vodou. She is selective about sharing information with people outside of her community, and shares only what is necessary for the work to be achieved. Manbo Maude’s inclination towards secrecy is a consistent pattern in her production of religious fashion. Part of this tendency is protective: she believes many people are frightened by the idea of Vodou, and keeping her religion relatively private is a strategy to avoid their potential ignorance and the resulting impact on her religious work.

Manbo Maude’s proclivity towards religious privacy in regard to her religious practices does not extend to Haiti. She has two seamstresses in Haiti who make her clothes and they are fully aware of the intended use of the garments. Moreover, her seamstresses openly display Vodou dresses in their homes to showcase their work and to point to as examples for other clients. In Haiti I prepared to participate in a ceremony Manbo Maude invited me to months earlier when I visited her in Mattapan. She advised me that, as a scholar interested in the Ezilis, it would be beneficial for me to see a ceremony honoring Ezili Danto that was performed in Haiti. She told me I could have a dress made so that I could be a part of the ceremony. Because I was a student, she said, the cost of the dress would be fifty dollars, though I was unsure how the seemingly lower price compared to the price demanded in other circumstances. At the time, I was

too nervous to ask her for the specifics of her pricing, so I do not know if the cost accounted for her own profit, or if the reduced cost meant she was sacrificing money from her own ritual funds. I wondered how many ritual goods my fifty dollars would compensate for once it was converted into Haitian *gourde*.[85] I was grateful the amount was one I could manage and I would be afforded the opportunity to participate in a ceremony.

In July of 2015, I was in Jacmel, Haiti being fitted for my dress. In what normally served as the dining room of Manbo Maude's house in Jacmel, two Haitian women, along with Nadia who played the role of translator, sized me up for my dress. Even though I wanted to wear a sleeveless dress to combat the sweltering heat of the Haitian summer, I knew from simply observing other women and attending other ceremonies that it was not appropriate for the event. I had seen many women with lacey, voluminous sleeves, but I could not imagine tolerating the extra fabric in hot weather. I compromised, and asked for short sleeves with elastic at the bottom, so that it would stay in place and end well before my elbow. I chose a V-neckline because I judged it to be more flattering for my full figure. Because I was not an initiate, I was not obligated to display the more elaborate decorations and designs in my dress, and so opted for a simplistic style that prioritized comfort. For this ceremony, the designated colors designated by Manbo Maude were crimson red, emerald green, and royal blue. I decided to use all three colors in my dress. I asked what the appropriate length would be, hopeful that I could have it stop at my knees:

> EZIAKU: How long does my dress have to be?
> NADIA: It has to go past your knees.
> EZIAKU: So…Can I have it at my knees?
> NADIA: [frustrated] No. The minimum it can be is a couple of inches above your ankle.

Nadia was translating my words, but the negotiation was not only with her. I was in conversation with the women who were taking my measurements for the dress and they, too, emphasized the necessary length of the hem. This was not the first or the last time I would be engaged in

[85] The Haitian currency.

negotiation with community members, and with women in particular. It was a reoccurring and unavoidable aspect of the time I spent in Haiti and in Manbo Maude's religious spaces, which were predominantly Black and predominantly female. The amount of control I had in any given negotiation varied from experience to experience. My Haitian was still a work in progress, but I understood enough to describe what I wanted for my dress and to correct some of the women when they misrepresented my desires. I was grateful for Nadia's presence and her translations, and she was not the only Haitian-American or *Dyaspora* woman moving in and out of the room in preparation for the ceremony.[86] If I needed any additional linguistic clarification, they were readily available.

Later that day, I hopped on the back of a motorcycle and rode to another section of Jacmel to undergo a second fitting, this time by the seamstress. The seamstress, Liza, lived in a concrete house with light blue walls and a peach colored door. A gutter ran along the street in front of the home with free-flowing sewage. A slab of wood lay over a small section that lead to her door. There was no sign designating her home as a business, but there were clear signals as clothing was piled outside of her door, decorated her walls, and was nailed into the concrete or dangling from hangers. The interior of the house was small; it would only take a few steps to walk the length of the room. It was crowded with fabric; her sewing machine was the first thing to greet me as I walked through the door. She sized me again for my dress to confirm the correct measurements. I was cautious about speaking. I was worried that the sound of my American accent would inspire her to raise the price of my dress. My wariness was a consequence of the time I had spent with my extended family in Nigeria, where my cousins warned me not to speak while we were shopping in the markets because my obvious foreignness would incentivize the sellers to give me a higher price, one different from what they demanded from native Nigerians. But the woman telling Liza about the color specifications for my dress was making mistakes, and my Haitian was decent enough for me to correct her. When I spoke, Liza gave me a look I interpreted as knowing. It might have been obvious from the moment I stepped into her home that

[86] *Dyaspora* is Haitian slang used to describe Haitian-Americans born in America or Haitians that have immigrated to the United States.

I was not a Haitian. My body size and my demeanor were probably telling, and even if she assumed I was a part of the Haitian *Dyaspora*, it was clear I was not a native of the country. I received my measurements and took the motorcycle ride back to Manbo Maude's home.

The next day, Manbo Maude came to me and informed me that I needed to pay Liza twenty more dollars for the dress than originally agreed to because she needed to use more fabric for the size of the dress. I was suspicious and irritated. I felt that Liza raised the price because she knew I was a foreigner and could bilk more money out of me. I shared my frustrations with Manbo Maude. We had already agreed on the price and more money was not a part of my planned budget. To some, twenty dollars might have seemed insignificant, but as a student the funds were crucial. I had assumed the fact that I requested a simple dress would compensate for my relatively larger size. I was not asking for the complicated designs and embellishments that other women were demanding, which I thought required more labor and therefore justified a higher price. Manbo Maude was sympathetic. "You know, I think you're right," she said, "I see why you're frustrated. I'm going to talk to her and see what I can do. Don't worry, I will use my own money to pay for it. You know this. Some people feel money grows on trees for Americans." Her response made me feel guilty because I did not want Manbo Maude to pay for my dress. We negotiated and I gave Manbo Maude ten dollars extra for Liza instead of the full twenty. "She should take it," I said, "And not ask for anything more. That's not fair." I had seen and participated in enough haggling in Haiti and Nigeria to understand that I did not have to pay the full price she demanded. The deal was accepted, and I gladly received the dress before the start of the ceremony.

The following day, hundreds of people had gathered at Manbo Maude's temple, which was built adjacent to her house, for the ceremony in honor of Ezili Danto. For the first four hours, the participants celebrated Rada spirits such as Legba, Danbala, and Ezili Freda by drumming and singing Vodou songs dedicated to them. It is traditional in Vodou ceremonies to honor the Rada spirits, the 'cool' spirits whose origins reach back to Benin, first before transitioning into serving the Petwo spirits, such as Ezili Danto and Ogou, predominantly derived from the Kongo

region.[87] During the planned lull in the ceremony, while observers drank alcohol and socialized, I went with Manbo Maude and a group of practitioners to change into our ritual outfits in her home. This break had become a standard feature in her ceremonies ever since she established the practice two decades prior serving Gede in her basement in Mattapan. It had become her signature. The living room had been transformed into a changing room. It smelled like perfume and hair grease and devotees took pictures of themselves while helping each other put the final touches on their outfits. They looked good and they were proud of it. After every dress was zipped up, every scarf tied, and every shirt buttoned, we marched down the stairs into Manbo Zamni's yard, singing songs and holding candles in our hands, careful of the melting wax sliding towards our unprotected fingers. Manbo Maude led the procession. It was dark outside. Most of the light was from the candles we held and from a lone, bright street lamp that towered over the event. People poured out of the nearby temple to take pictures and gawk at those who dressed up for the ritual. Some of them shouted *bel rad* as we walked by.[88] The procession was wearing the elaborate, carefully constructed blue, red and green clothes that were prepared for the ceremony to honor Ezili Danto. The fabric of the women's cotton skirts swished around audibly as we moved, some women kicked the hems of their skirts away from their feet and others waved the material back and forth to cool themselves. The men joined the procession as soon as we entered the yard. Though not dressed as elaborately, they were adorned for the occasion. They wore blue collared shirts with red trim down the middle and blue pants, all made from the same fabrics as the women's dresses.

Manbo Maude and other Manbos in her inner circle wore lace, which was considered more elegant and luxurious. The distinctions in fabric differentiated participants based on status, not only because of their religious positions, but also their social proximity to Manbo Maude.

---

[87] The term 'Vodou' is derived from the Fa language of Benin. In Fa, the word "Vodoun" means spirit. Scholars who have studied Haitian religion have accounted for the Rada spirits being celebrated first in ceremonies, as many of the spirits such as Legba, Danbala, and Ezili Freda are part of the commencement of Vodou rituals. Although some scholars have made distinctions between ceremonies in the north of Haiti and the south of Haiti, it is still evident that the spirits derived from Benin are honored first.
Robert Ferris Thompson. The Petwo spirits are often associated with the "spiritual fire of charms for healing and attacking evil forces," 164.

[88] *Bel rad* is Haitian for beautiful garments.

Three other Manbos who were her confidants in either Mattapan, Jacmel, or both locations, wore lace, as well as her daughter. Typically, she separated herself from others in the ceremony through fashion in order to stress her role as a Manbo and a leader in her religious community. Manbo Maude's blouse was blue silk with red lace sewn over it to provide a vivid contrast of color. Her sleeves featured trims of green and red lace, accentuating her sleeves with a flare of volume. She is especially fond of using trims to add detail to her outfits, layering the colors to heighten the extravagance of the dress. In "Sewfisticated," Manbo Maude emphasized the use of trims as a technique for incorporating movement into her garments, and considered it a finishing touch to distinguish her designs. Her skirt was the reverse of her blouse: red silk with blue lace on top. When she reached down to grab her skirt and pulled it outwards, the fabric was plentiful enough to stretch the full length of her arm span. The large amount of fabric was a literal signifier of wealth: Manbo Maude had the funds to pay for more fabric, which she incorporated into her dresses. She tied a green, lace sash around her waist and used the same fabric as a head wrap. She adorned herself with a gold necklace and gold rings, some of which represented her commitment to Vodou spirits. An embellished red bra strap peeked out from under her collar and curved around to her back to reveal a lace pattern. Her daughter had encouraged her to add this particular detail, a potentially American inspired innovation in her layered, lace aesthetic. When I asked her what about her ritual outfits made her feel the most satisfied, she explained, "When I put this dress on, and I look in the mirror and I see myself as being beautiful, and this dress, I can't see it anywhere, it's just my creation, and you know this dress suits me. That's when I say 'you know what, I nailed it.'" Glorifying the spirits through fashion was important, but so was her own comfort and gratification.

Some people in the procession made the walk through the yard barefoot over the rocks and dirt; some held onto each other for balance. After watching other practitioners start the trek without shoes, I had imagined braving the rocks on my bare feet for the sake of my own perceptions of holiness and nature. I abandoned the idea. I could not bear the pain of the rocks, so I kept my sandals on. We cupped our hands around the small flames of the candles to protect

them from the air, keeping them lit. The wind carried the scent of burning candle wax, dirt, and the manure from nearby farms. Roosters crowed and the attentive silence of the march was periodically punctured by the participants' quiet chatter. The procession passed the temple and walked past a large field to a massive sacred Mapou tree,[89] covered in vines with exposed, timeworn roots that plunged deep into the earth.[90] The remnants of past spiritual work littered the ground at the tree's trunk for the sake of reuse and the memory of previous rituals: melted wax, gourds, small clay pots and herbs. The tree trunk had been wrapped in red and blue cloth. The long line of practitioners looped around the tree and passed the temple again, making our way along the field. We paused to give a prayer at the crossroads between the cluster of buildings on Manbo Maude's property, paying respect to Legba.[91] Finally, marching through the crowd of onlookers who parted at our approach, we entered the temple, still singing. Inside the temple, we circled the *potomitan,* or sacred pole*,* and set the candles down at the base of the pole, ready for the ceremony to begin again.

The path I walked with Manbo Maude and her practitioners in Jacmel was long, ritualistically rich, and visually compelling. In Manbo Maude's ceremonies, and through *spiritual vogue* specifically, the spirits and the people who serve them co-create a religious space through fashion and adornment, engaging in a spectacular display of African Diasporic religious traditions. By drawing from symbolic resources, like extra fabric to accentuate the arms and length of the dress, pleated pants, elaborate head-wraps, makeup, and sashes that are tied across the neck or diagonally across the chest, the practitioners in Manbo Maude's temple use cultural practices and traditions from Haiti and the United States, all of which have material symbolisms.[92] Manbo Maude's ceremony in Jacmel illustrated the multisensorial experience of religious ritual and is instructive in exploring the act of looking and being seen in relationship to Vodou ceremonies and the *spiritual vogue*. The ritualistic walk Manbo Maude and her practitioners took embodied the

[89] The Mapou tree is a sacred tree with symbolic importance in many Vodou ceremonies.
[90] I am focusing on the triangulation of the participants, spirits, and the audience, but further research can be done on the importance of nature to the ritual practices of Haitian Vodou.
[91] Legba is the deity of the crossroads. His Catholic counterpart is Saint Anthony or Saint Peter.
[92] This discussion is greatly impacted by the insights of Marcia Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformista, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Venezuela Femininity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

senses: the touch of other participants, the smell of the land and the candles, the sound of the singing, and the sight of the religious garments. Throughout this walk, onlookers witnessed the devotees' demonstration of faith. Their presence as spectators was not incidental to the ritual, but an integral part of it. The audience members reinforced their own beliefs and sense of community through their physical proximity and the act of witnessing the event, and in turn their presence affected the actions and sartorial displays of the participants in the procession. The visual event of the *spiritual vogue,* that long procession of worshippers with candles and elaborate outfits, shaped the way in which Vodou was experienced and viewed by the audience, and the practitioners were aware of this fact. The participants were engaged in a reciprocal relationship with their audience of seeing and being seen. Therefore, the ceremony in Jacmel, as well as those in Mattapan, were a multisensorial experience that affected the practitioners, the audience, and the spirits. The devotees knew they were being watched by the onlookers and the gods, and collectively understood their purpose was to create a religious moment that relied on fashion for the expression of reverence and belief. The anticipation of being watched by a crowd of onlookers inspired the tedious, careful preparation in Manbo Maude's home before the start of the ritual.

Wearing makeup, grooming facial hair, pressing the wrinkles out of garments, and donning lavish outfits was a critical element in the creation of this religious production. By joining the procession, the practitioners created the sense of a larger religious community and a larger religious commitment and purpose. The walk was made sacred because the gods were present and the participants engaged in ritual for the purpose of serving them. This trifecta of influences, the participants, the audience, and the spirits, depend on one another; without one element, the other two would be rendered incomplete. Manbo Maude was not initially aware of this confluence of influences, but once she realized the impact her fashion had on the audience and her fellow practitioners, she capitalized on this element of her ceremonies. Perhaps this was the reason the spirits had been persistently and consistently pushing her towards ritual fashion, not only to satisfy their own vanity, but to aid Manbo Maude in producing a religious community.

# CHAPTER 2

## *"Make Me Look African": Diaspora, Identity, and Race*

Figure 4. Manbo Zanmi praying during Danbala ceremony in Mattapan, Massachusetts.

Manbo Maude sat at the edge of her four-poster, oak bed in her home in Mattapan, Massachusetts. Her room smelled of shea butter lotion, jojoba oil, and Chanel perfume. The wooden floors were creaky, and the walls were matte violet. Two pictures, both prints of painted flowers, hung on opposite walls in wooden frames. There was an inactive silver radiator next to the window that Haitian women were resting their clothes on before changing. Four green plastic bins stood tall next to the radiator, overflowing with clothes Manbo Maude had created for other ceremonies. There was not enough space in her closet for all of her ritual outfits in addition to her everyday work clothes and they bled outside of her room, stashed in containers in the hallway.

It was ten o'clock at night and she was already dressed in her ritual outfit, adjusting her green and white clothes. She faced the large mirror attached to the mahogany dresser and stared at her reflection. Perfume and photographs of her friends and family rested on top of the dresser,

along with ritual beads and necklaces, as well as hair products and combs. Sometimes this dresser served as an altar when she wanted to pray or perform small rituals somewhere more comfortable than her basement, but in that moment it served as a haphazard resting place for her belongings and a way to visually affirm that her makeup and clothing were in place.

Manbo Maude yelled across the hall for one of her *ti fey,* Shori, to help tie her head wrap before the start of the ceremony honoring Danbala.[93][94] Shori was Haitian *Dyaspora* and a graduate student at the time.[95] She had learned how to wrap her hair during graduate school with the help of one of her closest friends who was a Black American Ifa priestess. We had made the forty-minute drive from Somerville to the ceremony together and were changing into our ritual outfits in Manbo Maude's daughter's room. We attended the same university and had made the trip many times before. When Manbo Maude called Shori, I followed her into the bedroom across the hall. I could tell by the way Shori started to wrap the fabric around Manbo Maude's head, with a repetitive wringing motion, that it would not be stable. The twist was too loose. I had never helped Manbo Maude with her head wraps, but I had spent years watching and assisting my aunt as she created head wraps for women in the Igbo community I was raised in outside of Sacramento, California. Aunt Rose was well known in my community for her elaborate head wraps. Community members came to her requesting particular head wrappings, and they also deferred to her opinions on what suited them before different occasions. I remembered my aunt explaining her process: why she folded the cloth one way or the other, or why she stuck a pin in a particular place in the wrap. I had always seen it as a collaborative process, as it was in Manbo Maude's bedroom.

"I don't think it's gonna last," I said, eyeing the head wrap warily.

"What do you think about this?" Shori asked, shifting the wrap closer to the center of her head.

[93] The literal translation of *ti fey* is little leaf, a Haitian phrase that describes a Vodou initiate or a "child of the house," which connotes a person who belongs to a particular Vodou home and is under the tutelage of a Manbo or Houngan.
[94] I have changed all names in Manbo Maude's community except Manbo Maude herself.
[95] This is a pseudonym.

I did not think her new suggestion was an improvement. I requested that she hand me the two ends of the fabric that was already tied around Manbo Maude's head so that I could show her what I thought would be more effective. I tied the base of the wrap tighter and coiled the fabric securely. Shori made suggestions and so did I, and in the end, we found a design that suited Manbo Maude who had been patient with the process, especially considering the fact that Shori and I had not asked her for her opinion. She seemed pleased with the result. In Manbo Maude's temple, every female initiate was expected to wrap her hair for the ceremony to fully conceal their hair and cover their head. Some members of the audience also wanted to respect this tradition and wrap their hair as well, though it was not a requirement. The whims of the specific woman and her knowledge of wrapping techniques determined the elaborateness of the head wraps. Eventually, helping Manbo Maude and other Black women wrap their hair became a common task for me in preparation for ceremonies.

The experiences we shared in Manbo Maude's room, adorning ourselves by wrapping our hair and collectively configuring the aesthetics and techniques necessary to properly dress for the night's activities, were intimately connected to the ritual work ahead of us. Even in her room during this informal, social interaction among women, Manbo Maude's home was a site of religious innovation that reflected the dynamic relationship between gender, sexuality and race in relation to religious ritual, material aesthetics, and spiritual embodiment within African Diasporic religions. To begin this chapter, I explore the intricacies of head wrapping and the politics of Black sisterhood. In Manbo Maude's temple, head wrapping is a part of African Diasporic identity creation and evokes a vision of Africa that participants draw on for their own sense of community. These head wraps claim Africa and, in turn, a Black religious subjectivity grounded in the ideological space of Africa and Black Haiti.

In chapter one, I introduced *spiritual vogue* as a framework for analyzing the multi-sensorial experience of fashion in Vodou. In this chapter, I explore how *spiritual vogue*, and the triangulation between the audience, the practitioners, and the spirits, is complicated by race, gender, and sexuality. Ritualized head wrapping and ceremonial fashion helps create new

reciprocal exchanges between spirits and practitioners that solidify communal bonds in deliberately pro-African and Haitian ways. These sartorial displays signify a mode of religious ritual that is deliberately embedded in African and Haitian identity. Through interviews with African Diasporic participants and initiates in Manbo Maude's temple, I investigate how ritual clothing and head wraps inform their perceptions of their own African Diasporic identities and how their use of ritual fashion is in part informed by their negotiations with Whiteness. I deliberately center the opinions and experiences of members of the African Diaspora to explore the complexities, contradictions, and creativity of Black identity and community. I examine how African Diasporic participants envision and made use of Vodou, how they imagine the religion's relationship to their own heritage, and how fashion helps them orient themselves in an African Diasporic religious space. Although fashion is often a unifying force in Manbo Maude's religious communities, ritual dress and adornments cannot overcome all the differences and tensions among the participants. While White women were present in the house, only Black women participated in the head wrapping experience. Race, gender, and sexuality are factors that could not be fully ameliorated through the use of fashion and communal identity creation.

**The Social and Religious Life of Head Wrapping**

A year after Shori and I designed Manbo Maude's head wrap, I was once again in her bedroom in Mattapan with other participants getting dressed for another ceremony honoring Danbala. Manbo Maude, Shori, and I were accompanied by her daughter Nadia, two Haitian immigrants, and a Black American. We were changing and getting themselves ready for the ceremony, as well as watching Manbo Maude's preparations for the event. Once again, only Black women populated this space. They chatted about their outfits and people in their community using English and Haitian interchangeably. Manbo Maude sat on her bed in front of her dresser as she had the previous year. When she saw me, she stretched out her arm in my direction, presenting me with an emerald green, lace scarf. It had sequins and subtle yellow embroidery and was around two yards long. The length would give me enough fabric to play with,

creating twists, knots, movement, and height. "Okay, Eziaku," she said expectantly, "Make me look African."

I grinned and took the scarf. For Manbo Maude, asking me to tie the head wrap added a sense of cultural authenticity, which was one of the reasons I was allowed to wrap her hair for the ceremony even though I was not an initiate. My African heritage, which was validated by the fact that my parents are Nigerian immigrants to the United States, bestowed the head wrap with a connection to the continent. "Maybe there is a type of understanding that you know how to do hair because you come from the motherland," Manbo Maude explained during a conversation over the phone at a later date, "And I see you as an expert…It's not just because you know how to wrap hair. The style comes from Africa." For centuries, head wrapping was a cultural practice in West Africa in countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire, evolving from practical use as protection from the climate into a style connected to religion and social status.[96] The meaningful use of head wrapping traveled with West Africans through the Middle Passage, shifting to accommodate the social and cultural contexts of slave societies. In the Caribbean and the United States, the head wrap was often a "mark of slavery," while at the same time an accessory used by enslaved women to express their individuality and style.[97] Manbo Maude intentionally invokes the historical and cultural links between West Africa and the Americas by calling upon me to help her wrap her hair as a reaffirmation of these connections.

When I asked Shori about Manbo Maude's willingness to allow me to participate in wrapping her hair, she said, "I think that you represent as a Nigerian woman in the house another base of knowledge that she considers sacred in its own right." She contrasted my relationship to head wrapping in Manbo Maude's home with her own experience, continuing, "And then for me, I think it's more from the fact that she's seen me wear head wraps that she's liked." Shori's observations reveal that her role in head wrapping was determined by Manbo Maude witnessing her expertise and deciding that she had proven to be skillful in the craft, whereas my abilities

[96] Georgia Scott, *Headwraps: A Global Journey* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 21.
[97] Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 84.

were interpreted as being inherited from my African heritage. Manbo Maude had not known of my experience watching my aunt wrap women's hair in Sacramento. Ostensibly, there were no clear indications that my abilities in head wrapping were especially unique or any more African than the styles Shori donned for the ceremonies. But my direct connection to Nigeria created a sense of cultural credibility that afforded me the opportunity to work with Manbo Maude during her stylistic preparations for the ceremony.

I was mindful of the honor of being permitted to touch Manbo Maude's head. In Vodou, the head is where the spirit lies and where mounting takes place during ceremonies. In initiation, a person's *met tet* is determined through the head.[98] Moreover, the head is where the spirit resides and where practitioners dedicate themselves to particular spirits.[99] The spiritual importance of the head in Vodou has cultural forbearers in West Africa. As Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan has noted, for the Edo people of Benin and Nigeria, "the head is the locus of reason…and enables a person to realize his or her destiny and potential in his life."[100] This focus on the head as central to spirituality is also present in Brazilian Candomble and Cuban Lucumi/Santeria.[101] Again, my Nigerian heritage granted me access, and Manbo Maude gave me permission to be in her personal space and to touch her hair, which I was in no way entitled to do as a non-initiate. "Ostensibly, there is no reason that somebody who is not initiated should be touching her head, her crown, the site of her spiritual power," Shori explained when I asked her to elaborate on the collaborative process of head wrapping in Mabo Maude's bedroom. Shori continued, "I think it speaks to the trust that she's developed with you. I think that it speaks to the fact that you are African and that she regards your knowledge base as being somehow 'authentic' and beautiful."

I started wrapping Manbo Maude's head by draping the lace from the front of her head and tying it in the back. The experience of watching women at ceremonies taught me that putting the knot in the front often contributed to the wrap falling off more quickly during the ceremony.

---

[98] A *met tet* is Haitian for master of head; it's a phrase used to describe the principal spirit of protection for an initiate.
[99] Brown, *Mama Lola*, 76.
[100] Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, "Some Thoughts on Ideology, Beliefs, and Sacred Kingship among the Edo (Benin) People of Nigeria," in *African Spirituality*: *Forms, Meanings, and Expressions,* ed. Jacob Olupona (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 118.
[101] Elizabeth Pérez "Portable Portals: Transnational Rituals for the Head across Globalizing Orisha Traditions." *Nova Religio* 16, no. 4 (2013): 35-62.

Because Manbo Maude's hair was chemically relaxed, so I had to cover her hair with a white satin fabric first so that the lace head wrap would not slip off her head. White was a color used to honor Danbala, so if it peeked through the green lace on top it would complement the green and white color scheme of the ceremony. I learned from my aunt that understanding how to work with the texture of a woman's hair was important and affected which materials should be used for the head wrap. Ultimately, though, there was no guarantee that the head wrap would survive any given ceremony. Sometimes, Manbo Maude's dancing and movement while mounted was so energetic that no head wrap I could create would stay in place. During those nights, I lowered my expectations, and hoped that whatever material I fashioned for her would at least endure the first half of the ceremony when she welcomed guests into her home in her completed outfit. The impression she made on the people entering her home was important, and I did not want participants to be distracted during prayer or the start of the ceremony by an unkempt appearance. After five years of attending her ceremonies, I understood the image Manbo Maude wanted to maintain.

After tying a knot in the fabric at the back of her head, I used the remaining material to create height by twisting and folding it. The other women in the room nodded and hummed in agreement. Completing the head wrap required more hands than just my own. Shori held the scarf down against Manbo Maude's head and added hairpins to secure the lace. Trial and error was involved. I twisted the fabric in one direction and was told by one of the women that the design did not flatter Manbo Maude's face, or Manbo Maude told me the wrap was too high and she did not appreciate the way it looked. We started over both times. In general, Manbo Maude was satisfied by the designs I and others created, especially if there was a consensus within the group that the design was beautiful. Often, her daughter's approval was all the confirmation she needed. We twisted the green lace and wrapped it around her head. "Danbala is really showing," Nadia commented.

The hands involved in creating Manbo Maude's head wrap were Black: Nigerian American, Haitian, Haitian *Dyaspora*, and Black American. The head wraps created in Manbo

Maude's room represent, to paraphrase Paul C. Tayor, an "assembled" aesthetics, not born in a void, but assembled from the cultures and histories of the women in the room, bringing their complicated and varied heritage together in one space in service of their shared religious practices.[102] Later, I asked Manbo Maude why she consistently asks Black women, like Shori and me, instead of the white women in the house, to help her with her head wrapping. She responded:

> Because I think its common sense. They're used to wrapping their own hair. They will have a sense of how to do it. It's not in White people's tradition. I wouldn't be comfortable asking them to do my hair unless I will see them perform that and I will see 'oh, they have some talent, let me ask, yeah.' It's just like a sisterhood thing. You know, I am sorry, it's not racism. It's just that we click better. Its sisters! [laughs out loud] We click better.

The women in Manbo Maude's bedroom created and reinforced bonds of sisterhood and solidarity, not only through the conversations where they shared personal information, but through the affirmation of the changing room. They offered compliments and constructive advice, sought validation and assistance, or playfully corrected wardrobe malfunctions. For instance, when the zipper broke on someone's dress, other women helped pin the garment together, or wrapped scarves around her waist to keep the dress closed, adding an unexpected accessory to the outfit. The bedroom is a site where sisterhood is fostered, where collective knowledge and collective memories are disseminated and expressed in a gendered space. The changing room becomes what Robin D.G. Kelley calls an "alternative" cultural space, defined by the shared religious and cultural knowledge of Vodou and by the potential for refuge from the racism and sexism of the world beyond Manbo Maude's home.[103] Gathering in Manbo Maude's room to prepare for ceremonies is not a "clear act of resistance"; Manbo Maude and the other Black women in the room were not discussing explicitly political ideas that stood in direct opposition to the larger, predominantly White society around them, but constitute a more subtle act of

[102] Paul C. Taylor, *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 2-3.
[103] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 47.

resistance that emphasizes survival and community building across the African Diaspora.[104] The connections built in the changing room also contribute to the care shown later during the ceremony because that sense of caring is maintained throughout the process of possession and religious ritual.

An affective sense of camaraderie is cultivated in the room, which moves into the ceremony where these same women surrender their bodies to the vulnerabilities of possession, the physically exhausting dances, and the stresses of organizing and managing the ceremony. The changing room, just as surely as the ceremony itself, is a space "spiritual empowerment," where women find strength and community through collectively engaging with ritual fashion and religious practice. Preparing their aesthetic appearance is a crucial element in summoning the spirits later in the night, which they perceive to have real, material effects on their everyday lives. The process of preparing ritual outfits is a part of how Manbo Maude creates a sense of solidarity in her religious community, though more selectively than the role of her elaborate dresses. She was with her "sisters," and this helps construct an idea of African Diasporic connection and creativity.[105]

During the preparation for Manbo Maude's ceremonies, Black women are principally responsible for head wrapping and aid each other in the practice. They also assist White women initiates when asked. I have never observed a White woman assist a Black woman in wrapping her hair, though I have witnessed White women initiates wrapping their own hair. This dynamic shifts in the midst of ceremonies when Black women are possessed; if a White, female initiate is nearby and the possessed Black woman needs assistance fixing a head wrap that has been disturbed by the exertions of the ritual, they will adjust or re-wrap the fabric. Moreover, White women initiates might also tie *moushwa*, ritual silk headscarves that are used to signify which spirit is present during a ceremony, around the head of Black women initiates for ritual purposes when calling on the spirits. These are rare occurrences because Black women outnumber White

[104] Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 47; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), xii.
[105] Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 42-43.

women in Manbo Maude's ceremonies. I have never seen a man contribute to this ritual process although this may be the case in other temples. For Shori, the racial makeup of the women involved in head wrapping is unrelated to numerical difference and is more practical than a sense of sisterhood. It is about style and technique:

> One could argue that it's not actually such a fundamental difference in the way that Haitian women wrap their hair. But it's done less expertly… the way that the Haitian women do it is so expertly done. It's tight! You know it's not gonna slip, it's not gonna fall. It's like *byen marle.* The word is *byen marle*, like well woven, well tied, well wrapped. You know, whereas a lot of white women, they will do the same style, but it's all loose. But part of the reason it's all loose is because they don't know how to tie it…To be quite frank, seeing people wrap their hair who are White in a fashion that to me doesn't at all resemble the way that women of color wrap their hair was kind of like, yeah, this is yet one more way that you all don't quite fit in.

Shori described a disparity between the technical skills of Black women, who she perceived as having more experience, and White women, whose efforts were more amateur. She was concerned with the practical matter of whether or not a head wrap was tight enough to endure the energy of a ceremony. The gulf between the skills of White women and Black women contributed to Shori's sense of who belonged where with respect to aspects of ceremonial preparation and participation. Her observations of the varying levels of skills in head wrapping reinforced her ideas of who did or did not belong in the room during those social moments before ritual. If White women could not tie a head wrap tight enough to last through a significant amount of a ceremony, then essentially, they did not "fit in" during the preparations in Manbo Maude's room. They could not contribute properly to those preparations and could not ensure that the ritual fashion would be constructed well, whereas their Black peers could. Because of the necessity of the fashion involved in Manbo Maude's Vodou ceremonies, the variation in skills was especially noticeable.

The differentiation between White women and Black women extends beyond perceptions of technical skills in head wrapping into the physical space of ceremonial preparation in Manbo Maude's room. As previously discussed, this was a room occupied by Black women. I have never heard anyone explicitly request this racial stratification, but White women initiates in Manbo Maude's community did not change in her bedroom. They changed their clothes in the attic of her

home or went into another room across the hall from Manbo Maude's bedroom. Usually, if I saw White women in the room at all, it was to ask for help with tying their head wraps or zipping up their dresses. The visits were brief, and after they received help they left the room. I was not sure if the racial homogeneity of the room was purposeful. When I asked about the racial organization of the changing rooms and the people involved in head wrapping, Manbo Maude struggled to find an explanation and did not seem to have considered the matter before:

> Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. Maybe they don't want to. I don't know, they are just not interested. Because, you know, I am guessing, the reason is because they are White and the head wrapping is part of the African tradition. But they may feel uncomfortable. But they have not said anything to me. But it's just like, now that you are saying it… I think that you are right. They have never asked. Because I think there is a barrier.

Manbo Maude also noted that often the male initiates, White, Black and Latinx, involved in ceremonies arrived in their ritual outfits: white pants and a white, button up shirt. Or, they changed into their outfit hours before the start of the ceremony. Non-initiates invited to the ceremony were encouraged to wear white, or whatever color was associated with the spirit who was being honored. There were also Black, White, and Latinx women, initiates and non-initiates, who arrived in their ceremonial clothes and did not make use of any of Manbo Maude's rooms for preparation. I asked another participant present at the Danbala ceremony, Natasha, about her observations of the racial dynamics of Manbo Maude's home. Natasha is a first generation Caribbean American woman who had never attended a ceremony with Manbo Maude before. She had spent a year communicating with Manbo Maude online through Facebook and receiving spiritual readings from her over the phone. She also noticed the racial separation and offered her observations: [through a conversation using Skype:

> There was this sort of separation. Because it felt like Manbo Maude put me on the second floor like 'you go here.' It's funny, I wasn't hyper aware of it initially until I saw people start coming down the stairs. And then I was like, 'oh…I'm in! I'm in!'

Because Natasha was from the Midwest and had grown up in a predominantly White environment, the fact that she was included in the preparations taking place on the second floor

was important for her identity as a Black woman. She told me that where she was raised, she was often "coded as White." But in Manbo Maude's home, she was invited to join the other Black women participating in and observing the ceremony, which made her feel a sense of inclusion. For Natasha the racial separation was about what Robin Kelley defined as "congregation," gathering with other Black women and reinforcing her sense of identity by allowing her to "construct and enact a sense of solidarity."[106] She understood the idea of "sisterhood" that Manbo Maude expressed, which was encouraged by the process of preparing their clothing for the ceremony, and was pleased that she was considered a part of that group of women.

Earlier in the evening, Natasha's feeling of belonging had been less secure, largely in relation to the religious fashion expected at Manbo Maude's ceremonies. After Shori and I finished changing in Manbo Maude's room, we hovered near the stairs as other people were setting up for the ceremony: cooking, setting up the altar in the basement, and folding the *moushwa*. Natasha walked up the stairs and we greeted each other. She immediately asked me if the length of her skirt was appropriate for the occasion. I looked down to where the hem of her simple white, cotton skirt stopped just above her ankles and told her it was suitable.[107] She seemed relieved. Later, when I asked her about dressing for the ceremony, she explained, "I was a little self-conscious because I noticed that my attire was not the same as everyone else. So it's a little bit like 'hmmm, am I *in* enough?' I was in a room with people like, 'is this ok? Is this alright? It's not too tight?' Because I felt like what I was wearing was a lot tighter than what a lot of other people were wearing. They had a lot more fabric." Again, Natasha emphasized the importance of fitting in with the rest of the religious community and was relying on her clothing as a major factor as to whether or not she had accomplished this. She was anxious about her ritual outfit seeming abnormal according to the norms set by Manbo Maude and the other members of her temple. Natasha pinpointed the effectiveness of how Manbo Maude used fashion in her home and the pressure prospective practitioners might feel to conform to that standard of ritual adornment.

---

[106] Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 51.

[107] As I explained in chapter one, my extended conversations with Haitian women regarding the length of ritual skirts provided me with knowledge as to what would be regarded as appropriate for the ceremony.

The emphasis placed on the clothing and adornments in Manbo Maude's room and among the Black women in her "sisterhood" illuminated the women's understanding that the preparations taking place were inextricably connected to the practice of Vodou in her temple. Head wraps, dresses, *moushwa,* and the various rituals performed throughout the night constitute what Taylor described as "expressive objects and practices," constantly at work in Manbo Maude's room and in her ceremonies, responsible for "creating and maintaining black life-worlds."[108] These Black life-worlds can be imagined in a number of ways: Vodou itself as a life-world, or African Diasporic religious and cultural formations, or the rituals taking place in Manbo Maude's temples. The head wraps we fashioned, the dresses we wore, and the makeup we put on our faces are the "expressive" means through which we formed the Black life-worlds of Manbo Maude's Vodou home and community. The relationships fostered in Manbo Maude's bedroom are practices needed to create community and encourage the considerate behaviors necessary in producing Vodou ceremonies.

**Threading Individuality in Community**

Figure 5. Shania in her "spirit clothes" in Jacmel, Haiti

[108] Taylor, *Black is Beautiful*, 12.

The importance of ritual clothing in Manbo Maude's temple is undeniable, but the sentiments of the people in her home about religious fashion vary. The initiates and participants I interviewed imagine the role of ritual outfits as a connection to the spirits, the African Diaspora, and Haiti. Different aspects of clothing, such as the process of getting dressed, the colors of the outfits, or the use of the clothing during ceremony, affects the way practitioners engage with fashion in Manbo Maude's temple. These varying interpretations provide a mechanism to examine the role of Haitian Vodou and material culture in the lives of practitioners and participants, which emphasizes how community, identity, and the spirits are imagined in an African Diasporic religious space. The lived experiences of the practitioners in Manbo Maude's home are points of inflection that create a diverse array of opinions on ritual fashion, often reflecting the geographic and cultural histories of their lives.

I spoke to Shania, a middle aged, female Haitian immigrant who is an initiate and a Manbo in Manbo Maude's temple, over the phone on her day off from her job as a nurse in Boston. She described wearing ritual clothing as a form of transformation, a visceral, sensorial connection to the spirits. For Shania, donning religious clothing created "electricity":

> The moment you put those spirit clothes on, you don't feel yourself anymore. You feel like you are on top of the world because you feel the vibration on you, you feel so good. You don't feel the same. Especially when you dance, we all line up, holding the candle going downstairs. There's a vibration there. You feel the spirit with you. There's a big, big difference you feel when you dress with the spirit clothes. You feel something like electricity. Some kind of electricity from the bottom of your feet. You feel like a chill. I don't know about everybody, I am telling you how I feel. It goes from your toes all the way up to the top of your head. You feel like you are transforming. The spirit is with you. You know you are not yourself. You feel like something on you. That means that you are surrounded.

In Shania's description, clothing is a connection with the spirits. She experienced what Aisha Beliso-De Jesus calls "copresence," the manifestation of the divine which Shania physically felt through the use of ritual outfits. In her work examining Cuban Santeria, Beliso-De Jesus wrote

that *copresences* are “felt in, on, and around the body” as “electrifying spiritual currents.”[109] This concept is relevant to the exploration of fashion in Haitian Vodou as well, as Shania’s words demonstrate. The sensations she described, the “electricity” she felt moving through her body, reinforced her beliefs in the presence of spirits and her religious commitment. Wearing ritual outfits had an immediate impact on Shania’s body and transformed her into a vessel for the spirits, proving the link between her clothing and the divine. Her religious clothing became a medium for spiritual connections during ceremonies. In conjunction with her movements throughout the ceremony, including dancing, the ritual clothes transformed her into a different person, one that was intertwined with the spirits. For Shania, ritual outfits are inseparable from the presence of the spirits and are critical to the experience of Vodou ceremonies. “Spirit clothes” represent a key aspect of *spiritual vogue* by connecting the practitioner to the spirits and creating a sense of religious community for the audience. Therefore, *spiritual vogue* is in conversation with *copresence* as multisensorial religious experiences that tether the presence of the spirits to the practitioners. *Spiritual vogue* expands upon the idea of *copresence* by drawing on the impact of an audience and emphasizing the use of fashion as a material conduit to the spirits.

The idea that ritual garments hold special power is not unique to Shania. JS, a male, Haitian immigrant who is an initiate and a Houngan and who came to Boston to attend school, offered another perspective on the role fashion played in Manbo Maude’s temple and in his personal experiences as a practitioner. JS’s clothes were not as elaborate as the clothing worn by Shania and the other women during Vodou ceremonies. For the ceremony honoring Danbala, he wore a plain, white t-shirt and pleated white pants. In the past, there have been spray (aerosol) painted words on the men’s shirts, proclaiming the name of Manbo Maude’s house: *Sosyete Nago*, which is Haitian for ‘Nago Society.’ The ceremonies have also featured collared, buttoned up shirts. The relative simplicity of JS’s outfit is indicative of the fashion in Manbo Maude’s temple, which is distinctly gendered: the clothing men wear is not as detailed or elaborate as the clothing women wear. Generally, the gendered use of clothing in her home is decided by the

[109] Aisha Beliso-De Jesus, *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (New York, Columbia Press, 2015), 2.

person's gender presentation or their personal gender identity, and a person's sexuality is irrelevant. As mentioned in chapter one, fashion can be used to connote differences in status between women within the religious community, but with men this is not the case. The ceremonies have also featured collared, buttoned up shirts. Men usually wear the same ritual outfits as one another and cannot be distinguished as high ranking Houngans or newly initiated *ti fey.* For Manbo Maude, the central focus is the elaborate dresses worn by women. Despite the gendered stylistic differences, the men in her temples are expected to participate and their clothing still holds spiritual and ritual importance.

As previously stated, the significance of the fashion in Manbo Maude's temple varies among the participants, and for JS the use of ritual outfits was intimately connected to immigration and his sense of belonging. He distinguished between the colors he wore to ceremonies based on his proximity to his home in Haiti. He did not feel a strong connection to Boston, so he wore white to signal not only his respect for the spirits and the ritual of the ceremony, but as a representation of his existence in a liminal space. "My family is not here, I didn't want to be here. I am just being honest," he explained, "I just don't feel at home. So like I said, white is what I feel. It is what I usually wear, it is my preparation of not being home." JS used color as a way to connect with people in a shared religious community and to symbolically represent his own dislocation, a reminder of where his true home was. White connected him to the spirits, but it also represented a transitional space. When he wore reds, blues, greens, and other colors beyond white, he was anchored to Haiti and the sensational experience of ceremonies there. Because of this sensorial and spiritual connection to his homeland, he chose to reserve the use of such colors for the ceremonies he attended in Haiti.

JS's thoughtful engagement with religious fashion extended beyond the duration of ceremonies and he placed great value on clothes as sacred items. Like Shania, he imagined the spirits were present and the clothing acted in part as a vessel for spiritual energy. Because of this presence, he could not casually or carelessly disregard the clothing, even after the ceremony ended. "I wash it, I fold it, I put it here, and I am wearing this again next year," JS explained. He

continued, “Or, I am getting dressed again next year. So it’s like an understanding. It’s like a promise that I am not throwing it away. Or if anything happens to it, I am gonna protect it, I am gonna fix it, I’m gonna make it better.” For JS, how a practitioner maintains clothing is just as important to the ritual process as putting it on. His treatment of his ritual outfits represents a “promise” between himself and the spirits, a commitment to continued reverence and devotion. He considers the longevity of the clothes and engages in an active process of improving and repairing them. The care he shows the clothing is important to his reverence for the spirts and for Vodou itself. “I hope you respect it,” he said, expounding upon the process of preserving ritual outfits, offering his wishes for other practitioners and participants, “I hope you carry it in a certain way. I hope you don’t disrespect it, you know, I hope when you get home you don’t just take it off throw it somewhere and step on it.” Because the clothing is doing spiritual work, aiding in calling spirits into a ceremony, the fashion transforms into a sacred item and needs to be afforded respect. This is a habit that Manbo Maude demonstrates as well. Though she produces a large amount of clothing, she is meticulous about cleaning her pieces after using them, either through dry-cleaning or by washing her clothes by hand. She also stores her clothing in various containers, keeping them for future use or for her own collection and inspiration, protecting the history of her previous ceremonies and the ritual work the dresses enable her to pursue.

The elaborate fashion in Manbo Maude’s temple can positively shape a practitioner’s experiences with the spirits, but that is not always the result. The economic realities of purchasing the dresses impacted Shori’s opinions on their necessity and functionality:

> I wouldn’t say it’s necessarily my favorite part. I really like doing head wraps, you know. And some of the dresses I like, some of the dresses I don’t like. I like preparing, you know, I like doing my little make up and doing that with the other ladies. But I feel less enthralled by the dress itself because there are times when I don’t have a dress, right? So there are times in Boston for instance where I just don’t have the money to do the dress that year. And because I don’t have the money I am going to be the only one who stands out, and who looks different, and who isn’t a part of that inner circle. And I think it creates some differentials. And to be very honest I think it’s extravagant to do a new dress every single ceremony for every single year.

Shori enjoyed the preparation for the ceremony, helping other women get dressed and wrap their hair or put on makeup, but did not feel enthusiasm for the dresses themselves. She felt they

could be “frou frou,” or over-the-top and flamboyant. She expressed much less excitement over the dresses than Shania had, who seemed to relish the role of spiritual dress in her ceremonial experiences. Moreover, whatever spiritual meaning she may have experienced through the dresses was tempered by the economic costs of attaining the ritual garments, or by a feeling of embarrassment when she was unable to afford the same clothes as the rest of her religious community.

Manbo Maude’s intention to create a sense of religious unity in her home seems to have been successful, but Shori’s words reveal a detriment to this attempt at solidarity. The failure to don the same dress as the other members of Manbo Maude’s home made her feel distant from her peers and negated a part of the purpose of the ritual outfits. Shori’s opinions shed light on the financial resources needed to maintain the solidarity that Manbo Maude has cultivated in her communities through the use of fashion. For most ceremonies Manbo Maude performs in Mattapan, she has a new dress made for herself and her initiates. The frequency of the ceremonies that required these dresses became daunting for Shori and were financially burdensome. The sentiments Shori shared are not an anomaly. The expenses of becoming a part of Manbo Maude’s Vodou communities is an issue that Manbo Maude has to negotiate as a religious leader interested in increasing the number of practitioners and maintaining her temples. Chapter three will explore the economic nuances of Manbo Maude’s use of ritual fashion in greater detail.

**“Trop Blan”: Racial Stitches and Spiritual Materiality**

Manbo Maude’s ceremony for Danbala was about to begin. I went down the stairs to the basement, moving past the crowd of people standing in the room. Arriving to the ceremony early was beneficial because I had found someone to save me a seat. Samuel, who I met hours earlier, waved me over to him and patted the empty, metal folding chair next to him.[110] Samuel was a

[110] Samuel is a pseudonym.

Black, gay American man who was a Vodou initiate. Most of the people in the house, some of whom were unaffiliated with Manbo Maude's Vodou home and some who belonged to her temple, had gathered in the basement, waiting for Manbo Maude to appear and commence the ceremony. I overheard audience members speculating on what she was going to wear. We sat and talked among ourselves for thirty minutes, until finally Manbo Maude, her daughter, and another female, Haitian initiate walked down the stairs into the basement.

Manbo Maude was wearing the green, lace head wrap that Shori and I had helped her fashion and an embroidered, white cotton dress that went down to her ankles. Her sleeves featured six tiers of white, embroidered ruffles that stopped at her elbows. The fabric of the top half of the dress was sheer, so she wore a white tank top underneath. She had on pearl earrings and a simple, gold necklace with a cross pendant, along with two gold bangle bracelets. One of the bracelets was shaped like a snake coiling around her wrist, a symbol for Danbala. Her fingers were adorned with several rings. She layered a green lace skirt that tied around her waist over her white dress. The extra layer had a gap in the front where the white of her dress showed through, framed by the flowing, ruffled trim of the green material. She wore white sandals with silver buckles on top. Unlike many of her other ceremonies, this event would not feature Manbo Maude and her initiates changing their ritual outfits. She was more flexible in her requirements for ritual outfits when honoring Danbala. Primarily, this was because Danbala was one of the first spirits to be called in the line of ritual in the Vodou ceremony. During Vodou ceremonies, the spirits are called upon in a particular order, and each spirit is honored with three to four songs during this procession. One song welcomes them, the second celebrates their presence, and the third is to usher them out to move on to the next spirit. Any one of these songs can be sung repeatedly. With at least thirteen spirits to call on, Manbo Maude's ceremonies in Mattapan were long events, and required a significant time commitment. The commitments of the participants also determined the duration of the ceremony: people had jobs and could not attend an event that lasted well into the next day. Usually, her ceremonies in Mattapan ended by seven o'clock in the morning, and some of the participants had work at seven thirty. In Jacmel, the list of spirits in her

ceremonies doubled. She had more time in Jacmel and could start her ceremonies earlier in the day, allowing her to honor additional spirits. Moreover, there were more people in Haiti who were able to sing the songs for the spirits. She could pass the microphone along to another person and rest her voice while the line of ritual continued.

Before the procession of spirits could begin, Manbo Maude needed to complete her ritual of Catholic and ancestral prayers and songs.[111] Catholic prayers were often featured in Vodou ceremonies, and in Manbo Maude's rituals they were brief interludes before longer prayers dedicated to *Ginen*, which could last as long as two hours, and called the spirits into the ceremony. *Ginen* prayers are a universal feature in Vodou ceremonies, because they call on the *lwa* to be present and ask for protection and healing for the participants, though they differ in length. Catholic prayers are not standard for all Vodou homes. I had witnessed ceremonies in Montreal, Canada and Boston where the Catholic prayers lasted ten to twenty minutes, and others where they were not featured at all. The inclusion of these prayers largely depended on the practitioners' personal relationship to Catholicism, how they had been taught to begin a ceremony by their spiritual mothers or fathers, and their opinions on the addition of Catholicism into traditions that are historically African or Haitian. For some devotees, Catholicism represented White religious practices, and could function as a reminder of French colonization, forced conversion, and the generations of Vodou practitioners who had to hide their religious practices for fear of punishment. However, for some the blending of Catholic traditions with Vodou rituals illuminated the hybridity of Vodou as a religion, which included different traditions from a multitude of African cultures –including those of the Kongolese, who had already been Catholic prior to their enslavement –as well. Moreover, the inclusion of Catholic rituals represented an aspect of the religious diversity of Haiti as a nation throughout its history. There were no drums accompanying her at this point in the ceremony, only the sound of her rattle. Samuel and I were facing the altar where Manbo Maude sat in a chair in the center of the room and prayed with her back to us.

Danbala's *veve* was drawn on the floor in yellow chalk in front of her. Male and female initiates sat on her left side, listening to her prayers. Behind me, a Black Haitian man whispered to the Black woman sitting beside him, "*Trop Blan*," Haitian for "A lot of White people." If he meant his comment to go unnoticed, he failed. I spoke Haitian well enough to understand his words. I glanced at him. He gave me a head nod in response.

At a later date, Natasha shared with me that she perceived a certain level of discomfort among Black participants and members of the audience at the number of White people present, and the gay, White males in particular. She described some of the Black, male drummers rolling their eyes at them in the audience when they fanned themselves because of the warmth generated in the crowded basement. She was seated next to the drummers, and said she watched them whisper to one another and "pass weird glances" throughout the opening prayer. It was difficult to interpret the exact cause of their discomfort, whether it was the Whiteness of the men, their sexuality, or both, but Natasha and I were distinctly aware of the uneasiness among some of the Haitian men regarding the White people in the room.

During Manbo Maude's prayers to *Ginen*, some people in the audience bowed their heads, others sang along, or covertly texted, or took furtive swigs from their mostly alcoholic drinks. [112] People clapped when they were supposed to clap and responded when the songs demanded call backs. As Manbo Maude continued praying and singing, Samuel leaned over, glancing around the room, and whispered to me, "There's a lot of fucking White people here." I snickered, surprised that he was comfortable enough to share the sentiment when we had only met that afternoon. I scanned the room and tried to count the number of White people in attendance, curious as to what constituted "a lot" in his estimation. I counted about twelve White people. There were around fifty Black people in the room, Haitian and American, and two or three Latinx people. There were more White people in the room than I had remembered seeing at any previous ceremony in Manbo Maude's home. It was not uncommon to see White people practicing Haitian Vodou. In fact, many of the scholars who have made significant contributions to

[112] *Gine* is considered to be Africa. It also can describe *Ginen anba dlo*, which translates to 'Africa beneath the waters'. Madison Smart Bell preface to Nan Domi: An Initiate's Journey into Haitian Vodou, pg 15

the study of Vodou have been White Vodou initiates.[113] For some, Whiteness, admittedly, acted as a barrier, preventing them from gaining insight into the opinions and rituals of Black Vodou practitioners. Becoming an initiate helped them bridge the distance and contributed to their ability to produce work about Vodou. For others, becoming initiated was a personal journey into their own spirituality. A number of White people who were initiated in Manbo Maude's home were either scholars or felt a personal connection to Vodou, and they often openly discussed their reasons for practicing the religion before or after the ceremonies.

The procession of spirits continued. A group of three White men danced two feet in front of where Samuel and I sat, shuffling from side to side as the drummers played. One of the men, an initiate, was especially off beat. He was an average sized man in his early to mid-twenties. He was barefoot and dressed in white, linen pants and a white, cotton shirt. Samuel watched them. He folded his arms across his chest and huffed in annoyance, sliding down in his seat. "Look at him. He doesn't know how to move," he said. "He doesn't know what to do. I don't know why they're all initiated, and they don't know what to do. If I were them, I would sit the fuck down." The White initiate heard Samuel's words, glancing over his shoulder at us. I was embarrassed that Samuel was speaking so loudly. The man moved further away from us, closer to the other two White men who were dancing nearby. He kept dancing.

The Vodou initiates called Ezili Freda, the goddess of love and wealth, singing her song of welcome and praise. A Haitian Houngan called forth a Haitian woman initiate and tied a light pink *moushwa* on her head, handing her an *ason*. Pink was the color that signified Ezili Freda. Another Black female initiate stood to her right with a white cup of water, used to pour libations in the four corners of the room. Water was used to conjure the spirits. The initiates poured the water three times in each corner signifying the trilogy of the beginning, middle, and end of a human life cycle. A White male initiate held a candle and followed the two Black women as they walked to each corner of the room. Members of Manbo Maude's temple continued to dance and

[113] Maya Deren (1953), Elizabeth McAlister (2002), Karen McCarthy Brown (1991), Karen Richman (2005), Terry Rey (2013), and Timothy Landry (2018) are White scholars of Haitian Vodou and Vodou initiates who have made contributions to the study of Haitian Vodou.

sing to Ezili Freda to welcome her to the ceremony. As the Black woman was finishing the last corner of the room, she began dancing backwards, swaying her head from side to side and rolling her shoulders. Her eyes rolled back into her head. She started to undulate to the rhythm of the Vodou drums. Her hands flailed upwards over her head. She screeched a series of “he he he” noises, a sound associated with Ezili Freda when she possesses a devotee. The deity had arrived. Instantly, three heterosexual, Haitian male initiates ran to the altar to get the lightly scented perfume, white rum, and white laced hand fan to welcome and adorn her. One man splashed her hands and feet with the perfume while another gave her the fan, so she could cool herself. The third man sprayed her feet with rum, by taking a few sips of the alcohol and spitting it out from between his teeth.

Male initiates and non-initiates came forth to greet Ezili Freda. Some linked both of their pinky fingers with both of hers, raised their joined hands upwards, and then touched their foreheads to their fists. This was one of the many standard greetings that signified a connection between the participant and the *lwa*. Others gave Ezili Freda a hug and asked for favors of money or romantic love. She returned the greetings by either kissing them on the forehead, smearing perfume on their face and neck, or splashing Florida Water Cologne on their face or chest. Male initiates usually tend to Ezili Freda. This was primarily because Ezili Freda viewed other women as competition and wanted to be the center of attention. Sometimes she even shied away from greetings offered by female participants who may not be aware of her preference for male adulation.

Soon after the first initiate was possessed, Manbo Maude was also mounted by Ezili Freda. Two other Haitian women were possessed as well. Initiates tied additional pink *moushwa* on these women’s heads and arms to signify Ezili Freda’s presence. Soon, all the men, both initiates and audience members, Black and White, went to one of the four Black women to receive their blessings. A two White male initiates were also mounted. At the same time, in the section of the room where Samuel and I sat and watched the proceedings, a White gay male

initiate named Tyler was taken over by Ezili Freda as well.[114] We both watched as he shook and fluttered his hands at his sides, whimpering. He was smiling. Two other White gay initiates tied pink *moushwa* around his head and arm. They both greeted Ezili Freda by linking pinky fingers and pressing their fists to their foreheads. Tyler walked throughout the ceremony. Black Haitian men who saw him smiled slightly but did not greet him as they did the possessed Black women. They let him pass by. Tyler's possession did not last for very long. He fell out of possession, falling backwards towards the floor at Ezili Freda's departure. The two White initiates who had helped him before caught him and assisted him to a nearby chair for rest. They fanned him and gave him water. Aiding people in the aftermath of possession is a standard task for initiates in Vodou ceremonies. The Black men still attending to the possessed Black women only a few feet away from Tyler were prepared to assist in the women's recovery.

The divide I observed in this moment does not occur in all ceremonies, but what is important is that it illustrates the racial, sexual and gender dynamics of adornment and ritual. This moment captures the reality of a division in Manbo Maude's religious community that cannot be bridged by the fellowship encouraged by her use of fashion and aesthetics in her ceremonies. What is compelling about this moment is how race and sexuality interceded in the traditional, ritual use of fashion and adornment. There seemed to be a discomfort not only with the presence of White people, but also with White people participating in possession. When I asked Shori about this ceremony over the phone, she elaborated on what she thought about the racial dynamics of Manbo Maude's ceremony:

> I think there was a divide because I think Haitians are always suspicious as to whether *blan* can really be mounted by spirit. I am too. Frankly, I am too. And to be honest, last year was the first year that I ever seen so many *blan* being mounted by spirit. It may have been the first time I have ever saw *blan* who were mounted period. So the fact that it was like raining cats and dogs of *blan* being mounted seemed a little ridiculous. And I don't think that they were completely faking it. But, it was a little suspect, a little suspect…
>
> The other thing is that in Haiti, and in Haitian Vodou women can be mounted by both male spirits and female spirits. But it's pretty unusual to see men mounted

[114] Tyler is a pseudonym.

> by female spirits. That's just unusual… There are a few exceptions that I can think of are men who are mounted by Freda who are gay. And that still happens rarely, but if you are going to see something like that, that's typically what you are going to see. That's been my experience. So with that in mind, I think there was a double layer of suspicion. And I think the cautious part was '*Ki blan sa a k'ap pran lwa konsa?'*[115] You know like on the surface level on the conscious level, I think there is a certain degree of 'who is this white person who thinks that they have spirit?

As a Haitian *Dyaspora* woman who has spent a great deal of time visiting Haiti, Shori felt comfortable making a claim about the Haitian reaction to White people participating in Vodou. For her, race impacted the authenticity of possession and qualified the legitimacy of being connected to the spirits during religious ritual. As she stated, during the ceremony a number of White people were mounted besides Tyler, which caused her to feel suspicion as to the degree of possession taking place. Race was not the only factor that gave her pause, but gender as well. She had expectations as to which gendered bodies could be taken over by which gendered spirits based on the ceremonies she had witnessed in the past. Shori explained that typically, men were possessed by male spirits, and women could be possessed by both male and female spirits. I have attended ceremonies where there have been exceptions to this tradition, where men have been possessed by female spirits such as Ezili Danto and Gran Ezili. However, her generalization is typically accurate. Additionally, sexuality was another factor affecting the possession that took place. She noted that the gender expectations for possession can fluctuate in relation to sexuality, though this possibility did not make the practitioners in the room any more comfortable with Tyler's possession.

Beliso-De Jesus' work is once again instructive in investigating the dynamics at play during Tyler's possession in Mattapan. She examines how the presence of spirits is interpreted in "different historical moments" and contends with the "politics of race, gender, sexuality [and] imperialism" that are inevitably unearthed in the process of religious ritual.[116] Though she was analyzing the nuances of Cuban Santeria, the description of the complex elements involved in the

[115] 'Ki blan sa a k'ap pran lwa konsa?' is Haitian for 'who is this white person who thinks that they have spirit.'
[116] Beliso-De Jesus, *Electric Santeria*, XIV.

interaction between the spirits and practitioners holds true for Vodou and for Manbo Maude's ceremonies. The presence of the spirits cannot erase the unavoidable history in the room, where individuals with very different life experiences and cultures gather in an attempt to honor the same deities under the guidance of the same Manbo. For many of the initiates and participants in that basement, the spirits are a *real presence*. Their presence during possession is real, an actual manifestation of deities that are revered and respected. And yet, the physical bodies of the initiates being possessed impact the adornment practices of a typical Vodou ceremony. Shori questioned whether a White person had the ability to be possessed in the first place, placing great importance on the identity of the practitioner during the process of being mounted by a spirit. The "unusual" sight of a White, gay man being mounted by a spirit in general, and a female spirit specifically, was jarring enough that it prevented Black people in the room from fully believing in the *copresence* of the spirits.

Black initiates and participants focused their attention on the Black women who had been possessed and did not tie *moushwa* on Tyler despite it being a typical aspect of possession in Vodou ceremonies. Arguably, Tyler's race, gender, and sexuality partially ruptured the usual interaction between the Black participants and the spirits because these factors disturbed their ability to see the presence of the spirits as real when manifested in his body. The meaning derived from the framework of *spiritual vogue* shifts when applied to differing ceremonies depending on the practitioners, the audience, and the spirits. The interaction between these three factors fluctuate because of the complicated histories and identities of the people involved. Focusing on the triangulation of these influences emphasizes the malleability of *spiritual vogue* and illustrates how inseparable one aspect is from the other. The Whiteness and queerness of the practitioner, the gender of the spirit, and the expectations of the predominantly Black audience shaped the ceremony and affected the spiritual work being performed.

Similarly, Natasha felt as doubtful about the validity of the possession as Shori, saying,

> I remember thinking to myself 'is this thing real?' Like that was my first instinct when white boy went down. Was this even real? And I didn't feel like I could believe it because I didn't know who this kid was. You know, that didn't look like

> the other possession did. And I was trying to keep an open mind, but seeing all the Black people move away just like kind of (throws her hand in air and scoots chair back) like something is weird about this.

Natasha's reaction to this particular possession was impacted by numerous factors: her unfamiliarity with the person being possessed, his race, his movements and actions while possessed, and the reactions of the other Black people in the basement. She took cues from other Black people in the room on how to react to Tyler's possession, relying in part on their responses to navigate a situation that made her feel uncertain. It was her first time attending a Vodou ceremony and the behavior of Black participants and audience members reinforced her own perceptions of what a typical possession looked like. She adapted to the religious community around her by emulating the social norms she perceived during the ceremony. Her initial reticence to believe the veracity of the possession was reinforced by the reserved reactions of the Black people in the room. She was confident that her uneasiness with Tyler's possession was felt by others. "You could see the room did not know how to deal with that," Natasha recalled, "People were uncomfortable."

Natasha and Shori were relatively comfortable sharing their thoughts on the possessions that took place during Danbala's ceremony. Samuel, however, proved more difficult to pursue for an interview. I made numerous attempts to speak to him about the ceremony, eager to hear the perspective of someone I thought colorfully articulated the discomfort I could sense from many people in the room that night in Mattapan. Ultimately, we compromised on a written response. To my mind, he seemed reluctant to elaborate. When asked specifically about his reactions to the White people at the ceremony, his emailed response was simple: "I suppose I was just being catty."

The presence of White people in Manbo Maude's temple exemplifies how although Vodou is inclusive, race, gender, and sexuality represent complicating factors that can disrupt religious communities. These disruptions not only affect the ceremonies performed in Mattapan, but also the preparations before the ceremony, including head wrapping and the ritual use of clothing. The cattiness Samuel described is a manifestation of the fissures within Manbo Maude's

temple, the divides that cannot be fully bridged by her careful and purposeful use of fashion. These complications do not prevent Manbo Maude from completing all necessary ritual work and honoring the spirits, but concentrating on fashion brings the complex interplay between race, gender, and sexuality into focus. By centering members of the African Diaspora and their narratives, I explore the fostering of women's spaces and the connection between fashion, belonging, transformation, and identity. In chapter three, I will examine how the centrality of fashion in Manbo Maude's temples expands into the economic realities of ritual by exploring spiritual marriages.

CHAPTER 3

*Kouzen's Makout: Economic Negotiations within Spiritual Labor*

Figure 6. Nadia negotiating with an audience member while possessed by Kouzen.

Over time, Manbo Maude has learned how to negotiate the economics of her spiritual work with members of her community and the spirits. In Haiti, practitioners pay for dresses and services not only with money, but through manual labor and ritual labor in her home and temple in Jacmel. The creation of the religious dress and the services offered in Manbo Maude's temples are made possible by what Judith Casselberry calls "the labor of faith."[117] My analysis of the labor involved in Manbo Maude's ventures draws from Casselberry's investigations of the efforts of Black women in a rigidly hierarchical, Black Apostolic Pentecostal community. Manbo Maude

[117] Judith Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 6.

engages in work that connects her to Casselberry's descriptive analysis of Black women's labor of faith, though I explore both men and women in her temples. The work in Manbo Maude's temple is categorized by gender to an extent, but men and women bend those loose rules, and all genders are crucial for Manbo Maude to demonstrate and solidify her spiritual efficacy. These social roles, although evident, can be flexible. I examine what Manbo Maude does to "produce, navigate, claim, and sustain spiritual authority" through fashion and her negotiation of spiritual labor and payment.[118] Casselberry defines the labor of faith by distinguishing three categories: *emotional labor*, *intimate labor*, and *aesthetic labor*.[119] Her definitions are useful in the analysis of the religious and economic work occurring in Manbo Maude's temples, and more broadly, in investigating how labor and economic negotiations operate in African Diasporic religious communities. *Aesthetic labor* defines the importance of self-presentation and the connection between personal presentation and the values of the laborer's religious institution.[120] *Emotional labor* refers to interpersonal relationships, both public and private, that are defined by the face-to-face effort exerted in negotiating social and religious spaces.[121] *Intimate labor* describes the embodied, multisensorial, personal interactions defined by the act of caring that are simultaneously commodified.[122]

I use *aesthetic labor* to describe Manbo Maude's presentation of herself and the members of her temple through fashion, and how fashion articulates the religious values important to her community, reinforcing her religious efficacy. *Emotional labor* helps define how Manbo Maude speaks with initiates, spirits, observers, and other practitioners to mediate problems in the community and resolve tensions between members of her temples, herself, and the spirits. *Intimate labor* explains the labor done during religious services, when Manbo Maude and her practitioners perform work that is spiritual and physical, caring for other attendees, especially to meet the needs of possessed devotees. The practitioners who execute this work are

[118] Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith,* 6.
[119] Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith,* 6-8.
[120] Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith,* 8.
[121] Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith,* 6; 107-111.
[122] Casselberry, *The Labor of Faith,* 6; 127-130.

paid monetarily for their religious service and are important to the functions of the ceremony. Moreover, Manbo Maude provides religious services to clients and negotiates compensation for these rituals. Casselberry's categories of labor are useful in exploring the nuances of the religious work done in Manbo Maude's temples and they constantly overlap with one another. Understanding how *emotional labor*, *intimate labor*, and *aesthetic labor* operate in Manbo Maude's religious practices illuminates the economic realities in Haitian Vodou. The religious dress, ceremonies and ritual services in Manbo Maude's temples are ultimately a product of *emotional*, *intimate*, and *aesthetic labor* accomplished by Manbo Maude, the spirits, other practitioners, workers, and even the audience. By focusing on Manbo Maude's temples, I unearth another aspect of faith labor within Vodou that is defined by everyday practices of bartering and redistributing funds in order to maintain the religious community. I argue the work Manbo Maude does in service of her community and the spirits constitutes *negotiatory labor*. Considering *negotiatory labor* illuminates how the spirits facilitate economic exchanges and expands the types of labor performed in service of faith. For example, Kouzen Zaka aids Manbo Maude in managing her spiritual homes by acting as a mediator, helping her negotiate payments for services and redistributing money to her communities. *Negotiatory labor* is not exclusive to Manbo Maude's temples and is present in other African Diasporic religions such as Candomble and Lucumi/Santeria, as ritual and service work for the spirits has always required monetary and material resources. The foundation of *negotiatory labor* is the work practitioners engage in to acquire these resources, and the conversations practitioners have about how to use these resources effectively in service of the spirits and their religious communities.

The economics of Manbo Maude's temples and community extends beyond the fashion alone. As the leader of her temples, Manbo Maude is in control of the finances of her religious communities and as a result, is meticulous about understanding where her money is coming from and what she is spending it on. In July of 2015, I visited Manbo Maude in Jacmel for the first time. Before traveling there, I asked her how much money I needed to bring with me for the trip. She told me five hundred dollars would be sufficient for the week I intended to stay. I was going to pay

her around two hundred dollars for allowing me to stay in her home during my time in Jacmel. I took her advice and brought exactly five hundred dollars. After de-boarding my plane, I was dismayed at how quickly I was spending money. I had to pay to get into the country; I had to pay to eat; I had to pay the driver to drive me from Port au Prince to Jacmel; I had to pay for my ritual dress. Moreover, I had not accounted for the exchange rates. I had not put much thought into how dollars translated into *gourdes*. The receipt I received after exchanging my money had the exchange rate on it, but I did not even keep it. I threw it away at the airport. By the time I reached Manbo Maude's home, I did not have the money I promised her for room and board. I only had one hundred and fifty U.S. dollars in cash. Manbo Maude was frustrated. Privately, she expressed her dismay and explained to me that the money I had told her I would bring was supposed to pay for food and ritual items needed for the upcoming ceremony. Manbo Maude was constantly calculating how much money she had and how she would spend it; she had already budgeted my money into her plans. I was very apologetic, and I knew I had made a mistake. The following day, I hurriedly went to the nearest Western Union and asked a friend to send me money. When the money arrived, I was able to pay Manbo Maude what I owed her. It was the first of several lessons I learned about the economics of Manbo Maude's temples, and how carefully she budgeted for the religious services she provided to her community.

That same week, I was confronted by another unexpected financial obligation that revealed the broader economic realities for non-Haitian members of Manbo Maude's religious communities, and the *emotional labor* necessary for navigating the social life of these same communities in Jacmel. During time between ceremonies, my friend Shori, a graduate student, and I decided to go to the beach with other members of Manbo Maude's community, along with a few other Americans. Local Haitians set up tables on the beach for people to sit, eat and drink. We sat at a table that was set up by someone familiar to the people from Manbo Maude's temple, and people began ordering drinks. The same local Haitians that set up the tables were working with others who cooked food and provided beverages. The group I arrived with was growing. I saw people arriving on the backs of motorcycles and joining us. I had no idea who they were.

They ordered refreshments as well. We had fun and spent hours in the water. When the bill arrived, I thought most of the people present would contribute to paying it off. The only ones reaching for a wallet were the Americans. I thought the Haitian people who had spent the day with us drinking and eating would pay some portion of the bill – smaller than the amount the Americans paid, but at least a few *gourdes*. Most of the people on the beach trip were Black and because of that I assumed a solidarity that was now deteriorating along the lines of national identity. I thought our shared Blackness and the communal religious space we had been inhabiting would influence everything, including our leisure time. It became clear the Americans were expected to pay the full amount. I was immediately irritated.

It was another expense I had not accounted for when planning for the trip and I had not carried a great deal of cash with me to the beach. I had to rely on Shori to cover some of my part of the bill. She noticed my annoyance with the situation and told me it was only a small amount of money to feed a large amount of people. "It's appreciation," she explained, "For all the help they've given us: cooking our food, washing our clothes. If we need supplies, they run to the store and get it for us."

"But we pay them for that," I said. None of the tasks she mentioned were done for free.

"You know, Eziaku, this is what you do," she responded, a little exasperated. "We have it, they don't. This is where we can help."[123]

Ultimately, I did not mind paying for community members to enjoy a day at the beach, but the presence of so many strangers was aggravating, especially because I had not budgeted for their attendance. I did not appreciate owing Shori money, or the fact that I was surprised by the expenses. I felt annoyed for the rest of the day, but I stopped arguing about it. I remained uncomfortable with the arrangement for the remainder of my stay and made sure I was never the only American in any group heading for the beach. By 2018, it was an expenditure I incorporated into my budget and I set my selfishness aside. The day at the beach was another learning experience that taught me I needed to account for a host of unexpected costs when traveling to

[123] Personal communication. July 28, 2015.

Haiti. I corrected my assumption that as a Black person, I would not be held to the same generalizations about money and wealth as White Americans. The nuances of my life were irrelevant: it did not matter that I was a student without a full-time job, or that I was sending money to my younger siblings. I was American and in Haiti that meant I "have it." I learned to bring extra funds with me to Haiti. Negotiating the financial obligations of visiting the beach was part of the *emotional labor* that was necessary to my time at Manbo Maude's temple and in Jacmel. These social interactions not only had financial implications, but also impacted my engagement with the religious community. These negotiations would always be a part of traveling to Jacmel, so the next time I visited I calculated my expenses and then added three to four hundred dollars to the total. I had friends and family I knew I could call on if I needed money wired to me in an emergency. If I wanted to travel with Haitians in my leisure time, I had to account for the fact that I would be expected to pay for their food and transportation. This disparity in the resources available to Americans and those available to Haitians is a dynamic Manbo Maude factors into the ritual dress and services she offers in her temple. There is a practical difference between what she can charge Americans and what she can charge Haitians. Haitians alone do not have the money she needs to maintain her temples, but Americans and members of the Haitian Diaspora do.

For some *Manbos* and *Houngans*, the ritual work in Vodou is a full-time job.[124] Manbo Maude, however, is a full-time social worker in addition to her religious responsibilities. She does not want to rely solely on Vodou for her economic stability and safety, because the money she receives from these services can be inconsistent. The fees she collects from practitioners and others who request ritual work are used to pay for the lavish ritual services provided in her temples. However, the costs of paying for spiritual services, including initiation, ceremonies, and the workers needed in Jacmel and Mattapan, often require her to use her own income to cover the cost of labor and supplies. In both of her temples, a community of people contribute labor for

[124] In *Mama Lola*: *A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 160-163. Karen McCarthy Brown describes the practitioner Mama Lola's transition from working part-time jobs into working full-time as a Manbo, which ultimately jeopardized her ability to remain financially stable.

the continuing success of her religious practices. To organize and properly compensate this community of aides, Manbo Maude created a system of payments for the tasks required in rituals and services: sewing the dresses, cooking, retrieving purified water, constructing the altars, purchasing ritual objects and animals, attaining fuel for generators, cleaning, laundering ritual clothes, and assisting in initiation services. She is pulled in so many different directions by her commitments to her religious communities that she entrusts particular individuals, often family members, with buying her supplies in Jacmel in order for them to be completed on time. In Mattapan, she delegates tasks to initiates in addition to her family members. The cooking is done largely by Haitian women. All of her initiates participate in decorating the altars and the basement in Mattapan. The money that Manbo Maude saves throughout the year as a social worker in Mattapan is not only for ceremonial work, but also for stipends that she offers to members of her community in Haiti. These stipends support them as they maintain her temple throughout the year, as well as compensate them for performing the necessary ritual services during the month of July when Manbo Maude is present in Jacmel. The money Manbo Maude gives members of her temple helps them survive throughout the year, supplementing whatever wages they earn from other work. Manbo Maude provides money to send at least a dozen children to school. She ships clothing to Haiti, as well as school supplies, makeup, and non-prescription medicine, providing materials not only for ritual work, but for everyday life. When I visited Manbo Maude in June of 2016 in Mattapan in the weeks before she left for Haiti, her dining room was piled high with boxes and suitcases filled with supplies she was preparing to send back to Jacmel. Sometimes she was overwhelmed by the volume of material she accrued, and eventually learned to send supplies throughout the year instead of during only the few weeks before July.

In Jacmel, the laborers Manbo Maude can rely on for help in organizing and throwing Vodou ceremonies are many. For example, Manbo Maude has a cousin named Fabienne who operates as her assistant. Fabienne is in charge of the money Manbo Maude saves throughout the year for the ceremonies and assuring that all ritual items are purchased, and ritual needs

met.[125] She makes any necessary trips to Jacmel or Port au Prince for supplies. Manbo Maude is also able to trust many cooks to work during her ceremonies. They cook not only for the gods and the participants, but also for the many guests who frequent her ceremonies. In preparation for the event, Manbo Maude relies on Haitian laborers, mostly from Jacmel, Port au Prince, and even the Dominican Republic, for cooking, cleaning, laundering, butchering, driving, and construction. They have regular or sporadic jobs outside of Vodou and work with her seasonally during the month of July when she performs rituals in Jacmel. Some of these workers rely on the money Manbo Maude pays them before, during, and after her ceremonies for the entirety of the year. The number of people present and the fact that she has ample space on her property in Jacmel expands the types of ritual work she can engage in and the frequency with which she can perform these rituals. She holds ceremonies in the daytime, usually from eleven o'clock in the morning until two or three in the afternoon, and in the nighttime, when the ceremonies can last from nine o'clock at night until nine o'clock the next morning. The increase in available workers directly impacts her abilities as a Manbo: more laborers means more and longer ceremonies. Because Manbo Maude interacts with a large number of laborers, her time in Jacmel is defined by constant negotiation, where ritual work has to be adjusted to suit the needs of individual participants and workers. She mediates conflict between the people she employs and accommodates guests from multiple countries, which includes arbitrating cultural and linguistic clashes.

Recognizing how to balance her *emotional*, *intimate*, and *aesthetic labor*, along with her salaried work, encapsulates the *negotiatory labor* Manbo Maude engages in not only with her family and her communities, but with the spirits. Manbo Maude saved the money she made from spiritual work and full-time employment all year in order to fund the summers she spent in Haiti, often putting herself in a financial deficit. When she returned to Mattapan and to her job as a social worker, the cyclical process of earning to alleviate her debt and saving for the next summer in Haiti began anew. One spirit in particular aided in her quest to get what she was owed: Kouzen

[125] Fabienne is a pseudonym.

Zaka.[126] Kouzen, also referred to as Azaka, is often the spirit called upon to mediate financial disputes. He is the spirit of the market, labor, and agriculture and commonly appeared in ceremonies to speak on money and debt. The origins of the name Kouzen are somewhat mysterious, but according to what scholar of religion Leslie Desmangles, it may have been a derivation of the Taino Indian words *zada* or *maza*, which mean corn.[127] Throughout Haiti's history, its economy was largely based in agriculture. Kouzen was tied to Haiti's colonial past, where sugar and tobacco plantations defined the largest and most profitable portions of its economy.[128] His general persona in Vodou suggests ties to the Fon spirit of agriculture called *Yalode*.[129] Kouzen often appears to devotees as an illiterate peasant, wearing a straw hat and blue denim, and sometimes smoking a pipe. He also dons a straw bag, called a *makout*,[130] slung across his shoulders, where he keeps rum, sacred herbs, and his money. The presence of money in his bag is not a given, as Kouzen sometimes appears to his devotees penniless, reflecting the real economic conditions of many of the practitioners attending the ceremony, and warning others of an economic status that is fearfully possible. His appearance and demeanor connote the importance of, and, connection among family, ancestry, and the spirits.[131] The ancestry of many Haitians is intimately connected to the land, and the labor their ancestors spent farming that land for sustenance and profit – profit for themselves, or for the French slave masters who enslaved countless Black Haitians several generations ago. The name Kouzen, which translates to

[126] Kouzen's Catholic counterpart, the saint he is typically linked to, is Saint Isidore who is depicted as a peasant praying in the fields.
[127] Susan Tselos "Dressing the Divine Horseman: Dress as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda B. Arthur (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 50; Leslie Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods* (Chapel Hill & London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992).
[128] For more information on the history of plantation labor and colonialism in Haiti, see: Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); C.L.R James, *The Black Jacobins (*New York: Vintage Books, 1938); Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Sidney Mintz, "The Caribbean as a socio-cultural area," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale X* No. 4 (1966): 912-937; Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti State Against the Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990).
[129] Susan Tselos, "Dressing the Divine Horseman: Dress as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda B. Arthur (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 50.
[130] Susan Tselos (2016) and Robert Farris Thompson (1983) have written about the *makout's* derivation from early Spanish ownership of the island, when it was called Hispanola. It is derived from the Iberian *alforja*, a similar bag that features red trim and tassels at its bottom. It is also derived from the Ki-Kongo word *nkutu* that describes "a small cotton bag on the shoulder."
[131] For more detailed information on Kouzen, see Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 36-78.

"cousin," or another common moniker, Papa Zaka, is a reflection of his link to the idea of family. Manbo Maude, for instance, used these names interchangeably. Kouzen negotiated financial situations. He is a barterer, another indicator of his connection to Haiti's agrarian roots and extensive peasant culture. When he arrives at ceremonies, Kouzen is known to negotiate with guests about the prices of the sacred foods on display, celebrating the long history of bartering over goods in peasant culture.[132] Access to food was a symbol of wealth and prosperity, so his preoccupation with this task was directly allied with his role as the spirit of the market and his association with money. Serving Kouzen helps practitioners in the labors of life and faith and prepared them for the economic negotiations that inevitably defined the contours of their everyday experiences. *Negotiatory labor* is not only a necessity inside Manbo Maude's temples, and Kouzen's presence is a reminder that the economic realities of life may always require compromise.

When Manbo Maude was becoming a Manbo in the 1990s, Kouzen intervened in her life to aid her with the *negotiatory labor* required for being compensated for her spiritual work. In the earlier days of her career as a Manbo, Maude had to figure out through experience how to price these services and how to ensure she was paid what she was owed. It took her years and numerous misfortunes to figure out the correct procedures. She used to be flexible with her rates, but because she had been taken advantage of in the past, she was no longer as willing to negotiate with most potential clients. Manbo Maude instituted the use of contracts for initiations and ritual services to avoid getting cheated out of payment for her services. She realized that she was using a great deal of her own money in her spiritual services, often to offset the loss of profit from people who refused to pay despite previous promises to do so. These losses began to negatively impact the lives of her children, as she conceded their expenses to the requirements of religious services. While living in Mattapan, Manbo Maude had a cousin who became ill. She sought help through the gods, and the spirit Kouzen informed her of a grim prognosis: this cousin

[132] For more on Haitian peasantry see, Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Public and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power (*New York, NY: Viking, 1985).
Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37.

was being spiritually and physically drained by three zombies.[133] In *Invisible Powers: Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture*, Carrol F. Coates defines zombie as "a person whose soul has been captured by a sorcerer, leaving the individual without a will of their own." This can affect people emotionally, physically, and mentally. In this case, Manbo Maude's cousin became gravely physically ill. Thankfully, Kouzen informed her of how to cure this fearful affliction. Manbo Maude was required to make a small offering for her cousin and she gladly purchased the necessary items. The healing process took several grueling days. On the first day, Manbo Maude rid her cousin of two zombies. The final zombie was defeated on the third day. After the services were complete and her cousin was on the mend, Kouzen again came to Manbo Maude in a dream and told her to collect the money he was owed, even asking for a specific amount. Manbo Maude refused. This was her family. She would not request money for curing her cousin of her sickness. Kouzen was unmoved by her reasoning. "You have family," he said, "I don't. I need to be paid for the services I provided." Still, Manbo Maude was uncomfortable. Kouzen stubbornly maintained his position. They argued, until finally she told the spirit that if he was so determined to receive payment he would have to speak to her cousin himself. Kouzen agreed. A few days after the contentious dream, Manbo Maude's cousin called her and asked how much she owed for the services. Manbo Maude insisted she owed nothing. The cousin replied, "I don't owe you, I owe your spirit." Kouzen had demanded from her the exact amount he had told Manbo Maude. The cousin gave her the money, and Kouzen was finally satisfied that his needs had been met.[134] Within her dreams, Manbo Maude engaged in *negotiatory labor* with Kouzen, attempting to gain vital spiritual knowledge to help her cousin, while still maintaining a respectful relationship with the deity.

Manbo Maude's efforts to rid her cousin of the zombies that were negatively impacting her health exemplified *intimate labor*: she provided a religious service defined by her ability to

[133] Zombies and their role in Haitian Vodou have been discussed by numerous scholars, including Melville Herskovits and Frances S., *Dahomey: an Ancient West African Kingdom* (New York City: J.J. Augustin, 1938), 197;243; Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kaiama L. Glover, "Exploiting the Undead: the Usefulness of the Zombie in Haitian Literature," *Journal of Haitian Studies* (2005): 11.2.
[134] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Boston, 9 October 2017.

care for and heal her cousin, physically attending to her needs for several days. These services would normally be offered for a price, but because of the familial connection, Manbo Maude was initially willing to forgo payment. It was Kouzen that demanded payment be rendered for the services provided. Kouzen's involvement in this narrative was an example of the continuing importance of *real presence* or *copresence* in the analysis of Haitian Vodou and its practitioners. For Manbo Maude and her cousin, Kouzen was a real entity with as much right to negotiate for compensation as them, which is why Manbo Maude engaged in the *negotiatory labor* necessary to please him. Kouzen provided spiritual knowledge to Manbo Maude, negotiated face-to-face in the space of her dreams, and expected to be paid for that labor. By receiving compensation, Kouzen's worth and his contributions to Manbo Maude's ritual work could be rewarded, reinforcing the connections between the spirits and the people who serve them. Though Kouzen had a symbolic connection to the idea of family, it was a nuanced perspective that interacted with economic concerns. To have family, and to take care of family, also involved being compensated for the *emotional* and *intimate labor* that was offered. The fact that Manbo Maude was related to the woman she treated does not negate the economic demands of religious labor, and her cousin acknowledged this truth by paying for the services despite Manbo Maude's protests.

The *negotiatory labor* involved in this incident is twofold: Manbo Maude was engaging in an interpersonal interaction with her cousin, as well as with Kouzen for the purposes of compensation. She had to satisfy both parties in the negotiation of payment and resolve the issue without displeasing her family or the spirits. Kouzen provided a way for Manbo Maude to negotiate a potentially sensitive financial situation with a family member. Whether Kouzen truly asked the same price of Manbo Maude and her cousin in separate dreams was irrelevant; his presence facilitated *negotiatory labor* between the two women to discuss payment for the services rendered without compromising any social mores. Manbo Maude was able to obtain payment from a family member while maintaining the nicety of claiming it was unnecessary. The cousin was able to give her this supposedly unnecessary payment without traversing that same awkward boundary and without depriving her relative of her fee. Kouzen was a mediator between

them, smoothing the interaction. With Kouzen as a mediator, Manbo Maude was able to receive payment for the *emotional* and *intimate labor* she provided to her cousin. Manbo Maude could not continue her work without proper compensation, even when she helped her own family. Kouzen illuminated this fact and through him, she was able to articulate the economic value of her religious labor. His knowledge as a healer was crucial to Manbo Maude in aiding her cousin, and his insistence on negotiating for monetary compensation exemplifies the long-lasting importance of *negotiatory labor* to the economic feasibility of Manbo Maude's religious services.

Kouzen's connection to *negotiatory labor* is also apparent during ceremonies, where his image is largely defined by his interaction with money. On July 25th, 2018 Manbo Maude threw a *fete* at her temple in Jacmel, Haiti, for Kouzen. Earlier in the day, a cow, several goats, and chickens were slaughtered by Haitian practitioners and cooked to feed the spirits and the community. The ritual feeding of the spirits lasted for several hours in the afternoon. Then came a break that lasted a few hours. The ceremony for Kouzen started later than the typical eleven or twelve at night because the dresses were not ready. The ceremony started around 2 o'clock in the morning. One seamstress usually made the dresses for forty-five people. The dresses for Kouzen are some of the most complicated due to the elaborate patch work, sewing together pieces of many different fabrics to form the garment. In the temple, I overheard the seamstress speak to Shori about how she had been working all night to complete the dresses and as a result had not had the time to prepare her own dress for the ceremony. She still wanted to attend the ceremony to see what the finished results looked like. The seamstress was not the only cause for the tardy start of the ceremony. Manbo Maude and her initiates had taken longer than usual to prepare for the ceremony, and there had been a last-minute dash into town for some of the necessary items for the rituals. While practitioners waited for their dresses to be finished, audience members and other practitioners idled outside, buying snacks and drinks from the locals who showed up whenever the temple was organizing a ceremony, knowing there would be people willing to buy their products. They were also socializing, reconnecting with friends and making romantic connections.

New initiates are often showcased during ceremonies honoring Kouzen. The eight new initiates into Manbo Maude's Vodou home were already outside of the *jevo,* a sacred room, when I arrived. Because I am not an initiate, I was not privy to what happened in the *jevo* or to the intricacies of the initiation process. The *jevo* also contains a great deal of ritual materials used for ceremonial and ritual work that I am not allowed to see. The initiates were eight Black Haitian and Haitian *Dyaspora* women. In the three years I had been visiting Manbo Maude's temples, this was the first time I had seen a group of initiates who all had Haitian heritage, and all lived in the United States. The outfits they wore were different from the broader community to signify their status as initiates, but they were still wearing dresses with a patchwork of different patterns and colors made from denim and cotton fabrics. The fabrics had plaid and floral designs, as well as solid colors in blue, green, and pink, with white cotton between the different patches, connecting them together. The initiates wore straw hats which they had to continue wearing for several days after leaving the *jevo*. They also wore *kolie* beads wrapped around their chests to connote their recent initiation. The night before, the initiates had received their Manbo names and were baptized by a Haitian man who regularly performed Catholic rituals, who sprinkled holy water on them and burned frankincense in a thurible, which is a type of container that carries incense and is burned during Catholic religious rituals.

Kouzen's presence during ceremonies is signified through several items of adornment. Possessed practitioners don the items and then interact with the audience, asking for money and offering advice. After the initiates emerged from the *jevo*, Kouzen mounted eight initiates and practitioners. To signify his presence, the initiates and practitioners were adorned with a blue or red sash on their arms, a straw hat, and a straw *makout*. They began asking people in the audience for money, holding out their hats, their satchel, or their hands. Some also carried a cane to represent a version of Kouzen who was older. Their satchels were decorated with multicolored bandanas, tied at various points on the bag. Kouzen also carried a machete and a rake to symbolize his role as an agricultural worker. The money they collected goes to Manbo Maude's temple at the end of the ceremony to support the spirits and the ritual work. It was a playful, often

humorous exercise. The varied Kouzens sometimes asked for ridiculous sums of money and ran from person to person, or they would collect the goats offered as gifts and jealously guard them from other Kouzens for the rest of the ceremony. They also attempted to steal money from one another. People offered them money and usually asked for favors in return, such as help in their love life, their financial situation, or for overall protection. He held his satchel open and asked people for money, or took the money offered and tucked it into his chest. Kouzen would sometimes listen very intently to what he was being told or would sometimes fixate on the money and listen distractedly.

I had already met Kouzen in Mattapan and Jacmel in previous ceremonies and was familiar with the process, so I saved money for the event and knew to spread my money out evenly among the Kouzens, which I accomplished by using small bills of 25, 50, and 100 *gourdes*. However, I did not account for the length of the ceremony, and how many times Kouzen would rotate through the room asking for money. I had given him everything I brought with me relatively early in the ceremony and had to tell him I had nothing left several times. I held out my empty hands, shrugged my shoulders, and put my head down. Kouzen looked sad, or asked why I had nothing, or told me it was okay and still offered his blessing, before moving onto the next person. It was a frustratingly redundant experience and I was not pleased I had run out of money. But I had to remember that the repetition was a part of the process of the ceremony and that the discomfort I felt was ultimately a reflection of my own relationship to money. Kouzen's presence, and the ritual processes prompted by his manifestation, encouraged thoughtfulness about personal finances, and emphasized the fact that money was often inconsistent: sometimes I had it, and sometimes I did not, but either way my relationship with it would always need to be negotiated. Kouzen's presence during ceremonies is a dramatization of *negotiatory labor* and how this brand of labor is often necessitated by the precariousness of people's financial situations. When practitioners do not have money to give Kouzen, they often make promises to give him money labor in exchange for his favor and advice.

During ceremonies, Kouzen exhibits the same willingness to negotiate as Manbo Maude, reaching deals with practitioners and audience members even if they have no money to offer him. In Jacmel, Kouzen mounted Mando Maude's daughter, Nadia, during the ceremony. Earlier in the evening, she changed out of her initiation outfit into a dress that was the same as her mother's and the rest of the practitioners. The dress was a mix of denim and cotton fabric. The top was plain blue denim and the sleeves were ruffled, multicolored, plaid in five tiered layers. Each layer of cotton featured different colors and designs. The fabric choices signified an agricultural lifestyle and the type of clothing worn by farmers. Mando Maude used these traditional elements but beautified them by creating an elaborate ceremonial dress with many layers and ruffles. Manbo Maude and Nadia's dresses included an open skirt, which revealed denim pants underneath. They were the only two practitioners whose dresses featured this design because Manbo Maude wanted to distinguish her status from the rest of her practitioners and to represent her connection with her daughter. Wearing denim jeans was also another gesture towards the agricultural roots of Kouzen. While possessing Nadia, Kouzen interacted with a young, male, Haitian initiate who had no money to offer the deity in exchange for help. But he tried to negotiate, promising that if Kouzen would bless him with a better job, he would bring money with him to the next ceremony. Kouzen was sad. He looked disappointed, though he still listened carefully to what the initiate said. Kouzen was satisfied and promised to aid him in his search for employment. After this period in the ceremony, the Kouzens went into the *jevo* and emerged with food that they carried in half of a calabash shell. The food included rice, corn, plantains, goat, chicken, and pork. They drank couronne, a type of orange soda. A lit candle also sat inside the calabash shell. The Kouzens sat in chairs, on the floor, or on the *poto-mitan* and ate their fill of the food.[135] When they finished, they offered the rest of the food to other practitioners and initiates, who had been blessed by their touch. One of the female initiates handed me a large piece of goat meat, which I gleefully ate, famished by the duration of the long ceremony. Slowly, the mounted initiates began

[135] A poto-mitan is a sacred center pole in a Vodou temple.

to faint as they were released from their possession. Other initiates and I cared for them by offering chairs for rest and water for recovery.

The ceremony celebrating Kouzen exemplifies the process of *spiritual vogue* because of the interaction between the spirits, the audience, and the practitioners through Kouzen's use of ritual accessories. Kouzen is honored through sartorial displays and ritual tributes, and the audience receives advice, blessings, and food. The practitioners, through their interaction with Kouzen, facilitate communication between the spirit and the audience, and in turn these practitioners receive money, which is used to maintain the temple where the ceremony takes place. The interconnectedness of the spirits, audience, and practitioners illustrated in this ceremony defines *spiritual vogue*: all three elements impact the others and shape the religious experiences of the people involved. Analyzing these factors together through the use of *spiritual vogue* highlights how each piece contributes to the success of the ceremony honoring Kouzen, and how the act of looking, tasting, moving, and touching reinforces the faith of the religious community. The interaction of the three elements in *spiritual vogue* demonstrates the symbolic importance of money in Kouzen's presence: the possessed practitioner acts as a vessel for Kouzen, who uses his straw hat and *makout* to receive offerings from audience members and other practitioners, which enables their negotiatory communication with one another. His accessories not only visually signify his spiritual connection to the marketplace and agriculture; they are ritual items that indicate his interest in financial matters and facilitate his interest in discussing such issues with devotees.

Kouzen has a special place in Manbo Maude's life because of his ability to negotiate economic transactions. When Manbo Maude created her garments, she navigated the financial demands on the practitioners in her temple by saving money from her jobs as a social worker and a priestess to buy fabrics and subsidize the living conditions of some people in Haiti with a stipend, not only for their personal lives, but for the upkeep of her temple in Jacmel. Throughout the ceremony and the labor in preparation for the ceremony, Kouzen exemplified the role of *negotiatory labor* and how Manbo Maude negotiates the economics of operating her Vodou

home, creating ritual adornment, and providing for her community. The importance of *negotiatory labor* in Vodou is not exclusive to Manbo Maude or Kouzen and applies to numerous spirits and practitioners. *Negotiatory labor* defines the constant communication between practitioners and spirits, as well as the practical monetary needs of maintaining a religious community, emphasizing the material costs of ceremonial pageantry and healing.

**Working the Spirit, Working the Fashion**

Figure 7. Laurel, with a male practitioner, pounding ritual leaves in preparation for a ceremony.

Manbo Maude is constantly engaging in *emotional* and *intimate labor*, negotiating interpersonal relationships in an effort to maintain not only her spiritual efficacy, but the structure of her religious community in Jacmel. This labor means getting involved in the day-to-day interactions and arguments of workers and practitioners at her religious sites. The work in Manbo

Maude's temple is often divided by gender, with men largely attending to tasks that involve more difficult physical labor and construction, and women concentrating on tasks that involve household cleaning and cooking. Both men and women retrieve supplies, like chickens, small goats, flour, alcohol, fruits, vegetable, gasoline, and bags of water. Sometimes, gay men move between these delineations and are involved in cooking. However, I have not seen any men wash ritual clothing, and in a home so dedicated to sartorial presentation, washing ritual clothes is an important task. In Jacmel, there was a member of Manbo Maude's spiritual home, named Nikol, who washed ritual and everyday clothing, and who had garnered a difficult reputation.[136] Nikol was viewed as strange among many of the people who gathered at Manbo Maude's temple in the summertime. Practitioners and workers were not fond of her and considered her dishonest, prone to fabricating wild and implausible stories. She was also given to staring at people for periods of time long enough to make them uncomfortable and frequently interrupted other people's conversations. Nikol had a hard time making friends among the other women. She usually helped with the laundry, a form of *aesthetic labor* because it involved washing ritual dress for use in ceremonies, and a necessary task at the temple. Manbo Maude has scolded people in the past for not washing ritual clothes correctly, because the clothing is an integral part of her spiritual home and her reputation as a Manbo. Eventually, Nikol became uneasy with the worksite because many women openly gossiped about her. Perhaps exacerbating some women's frustration towards Nikol was the fact that she could speak English and communicate with many foreign visitors, which opened up potential opportunities for material and financial benefit.[137] She was able to travel with Americans during their time in Haiti and translate for them, for which she received a fee. Unwilling to endure the ongoing alienation, Nikol left Manbo Maude's compound and did not return for a year. The following summer, at a marketplace near her home in Jacmel, Manbo Maude saw Nikol and asked her why she no longer attended her temple. Nikol explained that she felt uncomfortable working around the other women because she did not feel welcome.

[136] Nikol is a pseudonym.
[137] Because Manbo Maude's temple in Jacmel welcomes many visitors from outside Haiti, usually from the United States, speaking English can become a valuable asset for Haitians. They are able to offer their services as a translator and travel to places they might not have had access to otherwise.

Frustrated by the situation, Manbo Maude told her to return and promised to resolve the problem. Several days later, Nikol came back to the temple, and when she arrived Manbo Maude took her by the hand and brought her to the laundry area. She told the women in the room that Nikol deserved to be a part of the community and that no one should be bothering her or speaking ill of her. As a result of Manbo Maude's intervention, Nikol resumed her work at the temple.[138]

The *emotional labor* involved in resolving this conflict was clear: Manbo Maude had to listen to Nikol's concerns and respond to them by negotiating the interpersonal conflicts between her practitioners and workers. This was a microcosm of the larger truth that she could not maintain the integrity of her religious space without attending to the social experiences of the people who occupied it. Moreover, the *emotional labor* inherent to her position as a Manbo extended to the economic elements of this personal issue. One of her workers, Nikol, was no longer able to provide *aesthetic labor* because of the interpersonal encounters on her property, which impacted the economic system that allowed her to stage the ceremonies performed in Jacmel. Manbo Maude had to show that she cared, or act as though she did, because the problem ultimately effected the production of her religious fashion and services. This aspect of *emotional labor* can be performative, in that the affective qualities of caring can be used in service of solving an interpersonal problem. Her position as an authority figure is reinforced when she successfully resolves these types of problems. Her authority in this situation was also secured by the economic arrangement. She controlled the money that these women earned from their work in her laundry area, so it was beneficial to their financial situation to heed her commands. Whether they completely ceased gossiping about Nikol or not, they understood the hierarchy of the temple well enough to know that openly engaging in this behavior was unacceptable and could jeopardize their employment. Resolving the conflict, and other similar conflicts, is an unavoidable part of maintaining Manbo Maude's religious community, and an unavoidable responsibility as a Manbo.

[138] Laurel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Jacmel, 23, 2018.

Another woman in Manbo Maude's community who provided *aesthetic labor* was an initiate named Laurel.[139] Laurel had known Manbo Maude for over eighteen years and watched her spiritual home grow from a tent into the home and temple it was now. Despite her long acquaintance with Manbo Maude, she was only initiated recently in 2017 after deciding to prioritize being initiated by a woman. She was worried that in another temple that was led by a man, she would be pressed into exchanging sexual favors for religious services when she was unable to find the money to pay for them. In Manbo Maude's temple, she felt safe, and when she could not afford to pay for the dresses for ceremonies or the religious services she needed, Manbo Maude allowed her to work in exchange for the services. Laurel explained:

> My services is what I can give and Mami Maude did not take money from me for me to Kanzo and I can't give her money. But what I can give her is my services because even if I had a husband, because you know there shouldn't be sexual contact in the moment that you're serving the spirits. So even if I had a husband, I would send him away because Mami only comes once a year, so I need to devote that time to her.[140]

In service to Manbo Maude and her religious home, Laurel cleaned the temple and the house, laundered and ironed clothes, and helped set up altars. She emphasized her dedication to Manbo Maude by stating that even a husband could not compromise the work she was committed to doing for her religious home. For some members, sexual contact while preparing for ceremonies and serving the spirits could be a distraction and detract from the religious nature of the work, so Laurel decided to eliminate it from consideration during the time Manbo Maude spent in Jacmel. Laurel was one of the people that Manbo Maude sent a stipend for her continuous work maintaining her home and temple throughout the year. Felipe, a male *houngan* in his mid-twenties who is also a member of Manbo Maude's temple, elaborated on his relationship to these stipends, saying:

> So throughout the year I work in construction to get work. But Manbo Maude still provides in terms of food and everything. She still sends money, but I don't wait

[139] Laurel is a pseudonym.
[140] Felipe, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Jacmel, 23 July 2019.

> around until she sends [me] money. So like I work in the meantime until she gives us some.[141]

Felipe prided himself in his abilities in construction, and often used these skills to maintain the infrastructure of Manbo Maude's home and temple in Jacmel.[142] During the summer when she was in town, he was called upon almost constantly to help with constructing the altars, carry large loads of supplies, or fix the generator that often broke down. In fact, it was difficult to interview Felipe without being interrupted by someone looking for assistance.

Felipe and Laurel use part of the stipend that Manbo Maude sent to pay for the clothes they wear in Manbo Maude's ceremonies, as well as other ceremonies they attend in Jacmel. They, like many others, often attend ceremonies outside of their spiritual home, not only for religious fulfillment, but also to socialize with friends and to judge the quality and spiritual effectiveness of other temples, as well as to pay respect to other temples through their physical presence at ceremonies. It is also common for people to leave one temple and join another. The fact that Laurel, Felipe, and members of Manbo Maude's temple frequent other ceremonies provides some of the motivation for the stipends she sends to Haiti, because they are essentially advertisements for her temple. Laurel and Felipe are walking fashion statements for the ritual efficacy of Manbo Maude's home. If they appear well taken care off, then their appearance might convince other people to join Manbo Maude's temple. They are proof that Manbo Maude has the resources to sustain her temple and its members. When I asked Laurel why the fashion in Manbo Maude's ceremonies was important to her, she explained, "I like to be beautiful, whenever I go to ceremonies or places like that, I like to be beautiful. I love when people come up to me and tell me 'oh you look so good' the dress looks so good on you. I live for that."[143]

When I visited Manbo Maude's temple in Jacmel in the summer of 2018, other participants and I would "Vodou hop" with Manbo Maude, traveling from one ceremony to another when she was not throwing one herself. It was occasionally frustrating for me, because these additional ceremonies eliminated the time for rest after preparing for and attending Manbo

[141] Felipe, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Jacmel, 23 July 2018.
[142] Felipe is a pseudonym.
[143] Laurel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Jacmel, 23 July 2018.

Maude's events. However, attending other ceremonies is part of Manbo Maude's routine, and as a participant in her temple it is important for me and for the members of her home to show our faces throughout Jacmel. Manbo Maude uses these visits to showcase her fashion and the material wealth it implies by wearing elaborate dresses that have been created for events from previous years. She did not don the dresses she created for the ceremonies she was leading in her own temple that same summer. She also makes dresses for the specific purpose of attending ceremonies in other spiritual homes, but she does not compromise the surprise and glamour of her own ceremonies by previewing the fashion that will be on display in her temple. Usually, she wears white dresses to other ceremonies, occasionally accessorized with a colorful head scarf. As a *Gwo Manbo*, or head Manbo, Manbo Maude must pay respect to other people's temples by appearing in their homes, just as they have done for her. As members of a Vodou home, we could expect to be treated with even more courtesy than other people in the audience. The practitioners at the temples we visited pulled out extra chairs to make sure we had seats and offered us drinks. If seats were not available, the practitioners found room for us in the front of the ceremony to ensure we could see the proceedings.

Manbo Maude and her practitioners show the same courtesy when members of different Vodou homes appear at her temple, as well. When Manbo Maude visits these ceremonies, she is both an audience member and a participant: sometimes she aids in spiritual work, and in other instances she only makes an appearance. Manbo Maude's sartorial choices are always being viewed by the larger community in Jacmel. She is part of a broader Vodou ideology that emphasizes the idea of community, not only within her own home, but with other Vodou temples. She articulates this by making dresses and pants for other initiates in other people's homes, so they can fully participate in her ceremonies and to emphasize her material wealth. They pay for her labor just as any of her own practitioners would, but her willingness to lend her skills to creating clothes for members of other temples helps construct an image of benevolence and generosity. This underscores the idea that she is an unselfish Manbo and encourages participants to continue frequenting her ceremonies or consider becoming a part of her home. If I

had allowed my fatigue and annoyance at the continual travel to prevent me from following Manbo Maude and her initiates into these ceremonies, I would have missed the opportunity to observe the importance of her presence and her spiritual clothing outside of her home. She is making statements with her fashion throughout the entirety of her time in Jacmel.

My attention to fashion in Vodou led me to modify my own behavior and by doing so, I gained invaluable insight into the meaning of fashion in Manbo Maude's home, and how fashion changed my ability to participate in the ceremony. After visiting Jacmel and Manbo Maude's temple for the third time, I changed my own approach to fashion and my engagement with the community. While I was packing in preparation for the trip, I included more colorful dresses and skirts suited for different deities that would be honored instead of the white clothes I had worn in the past. Throughout the year, I practiced my skills at head wrapping, learning more elaborate styles and choosing more colorful fabrics. It occurred to me that if I wanted to continue to pursue research focusing on the fashion of Manbo Maude's temples, I should put more effort into my own appearance. I could not always afford the dresses she created, but I could change the way I dressed, wrapped my hair, and wore makeup and accessories in order to participate in her religious community in a different way. The results were worth the effort. In preparation for the ceremony honoring Kouzen, I wore bright colors: a baby blue linen skirt, a blue blouse, and a red, sequined head wrap. I wore a necklace and a big bracelet that was attached to a ring by a small chain. I opted to wear contact lenses as opposed to my usual glasses in order to highlight the eyeliner and the green and brown eye shadow I applied for the event. I also wore dark purple lipstick. When I arrived at the ceremony, people were shocked. The next day, Manbo Maude told me she had not even recognized me. She shared that people told her they knew I was pretty, but that night I looked like a goddess and I should be a Manbo.

When I approached the ceremonial circle, Laurel and two other women said, "Eziaku, *ou bel!*"[144] They told me I was beautiful again and again that night. During the ceremony, people in the circle came up to me and dabbed my face with the wash cloths they kept tucked into the

[144] Laurel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, in person, Jacmel, 23 July 2018.

waists of their skirts, wiping the sweat from my forehead, careful to make sure they did not smudge my makeup. Women often did this for others during ceremonies, but never for me. People playfully pulled me towards the drummers to dance. When they passed around a bottle of Barbancourt rum, I was included. Usually, I brought my own rum to the ceremony and saw other people sharing, but I had never been invited to share before. I recognized that by putting more effort into my appearance, I was also putting more effort into the ceremony itself. By dressing up and wearing makeup, by engaging in *aesthetic labor*, I was signaling to the other participants in the room that I was a part of their community and that the ceremony taking place was important to me; it was worth my labor. I felt more absorbed in the process of dressing for religious ceremony. In the past, I did the bare minimum and it took me very little time to put on my plain, white clothes. The other women would spend hours preparing their outfits, their hair, and their makeup, while I was ready in fifteen to twenty minutes. Even the men would take at least thirty to forty-five minutes, asking other men to cut designs into their fades and make sure their facial hair was neat. They also took the time to iron their clothes, or to ask women to iron their clothes for them. Because I was doing very little preparation, I was not participating in the same way that they were, though I did help others to get dressed.

Vodou ceremonies are a social space, and by presenting myself well, and in accordance with their aesthetic expectation, I was more integrated into that space. Ceremonies are also where people try to make romantic connections, and my appearance attracted more attention than usual. Dressing up and applying makeup allowed me to participate in the ceremony as more than just a researcher, but as a welcomed guest or an immersed participant observer. My clothing allowed me more access to the temple and signified the respect I had for not only the community, but the preparation process involved in religious ritual and the spirits themselves. Dressing up and wearing makeup affected my role as a participant, and my role in *spiritual vogue*, by impacting the way I interacted with other participants and the audience. I garnered more attention and praise as a practitioner, which ultimately increased my worthiness to honor the spirits. During the ceremony, I was invited to dance in front of the drummers, which is an act that honors the

spirits. As dancers, our movements were determined by the speed and rhythm of the drums, which dictated the swivel in our hips and the swiftness of our footwork. Usually, I was not afforded this opportunity. By participating in forms of beauty and glamour that projected a traditional type of femininity, I was able to shift the way I was perceived and received in Manbo Maude's temple. I successfully made my femininity legible by appealing to broadly acceptable ideas of beauty through makeup and clothes.[145] I dressed up for six ceremonies during this particular trip to Haiti, and in the midst of my visit, I had a drink with a member of Manbo Maude's temple in the bar of a hotel bar in Jacmel. In the middle of our conversation, he told me, "I like you better this year. You seem more comfortable and you seem more connected. You have a presence."[146]

Considering faith work through the lens of *aesthetic*, *emotional*, *intimate,* and *negotiatory labor* provides avenues through which to explore Manbo Maude's religious innovations, her use of fashion, and the economic negotiation that defines her religious efficacy and distinguishes her Vodou temples from other houses of worship. The *aesthetic labor* required of Manbo Maude and her practitioners in her ceremonies is all encompassing. Manbo Maude's self-presentation was is solely about her dress; it involves all aspects of how she prepares and presents her temple during her ceremonies. Manbo Maude brings *negotiatory labor* to the forefront of her religious practices because of her innovations in dress and the inclusion of such lavish celebrations in her service to the spirits, as well as her willingness to negotiate payments depending on the needs of the people in her religious home. She offers her practitioners and guests a spectacle that honors the spirits and emphasizes the unique experience of her home and the services she offers. In her home, all participants are invited to indulge in the elaborate sartorial display and to find a sense of community through this experience.

[145] Marica Ochoa is helpful for exploring the production of femininity through symbols and performance, as well as how femininity can become material. Marcia Ochoa*, Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[146] Personal communication. 25 July 2016.

Figure 8. Manbo Maude at the ceremony honoring Kouzen.

Figure 9. J.S. asking for money from the audience while possessed by Kouzen.

Figure 10. Me with Manbo Maude and three of her new initiates at Kouzen's ceremony.

CHAPTER 4

*Wedding the Divine: Spiritual Marriages and Devotional Adornment*

Figure 11. Zeta spiritual wedding to Kouzen in Jacmel, Haiti. July, 2015

In July of 2015, I spent my nights sleeping in the master bedroom in Manbo Maude's home in Jacmel, among the barrels of ritual clothes she kept stored next to the bed. Some of the clothes were from past ceremonies, and some she kept for other people for upcoming events. There were packages of food and water along the wall, and under the bed she kept baskets filled with sacred *koulie* beads, *moushwa*, and *asons* for initiation rituals and ceremonies. Shori and I shared the room, where people came in and out all day and in the evenings to grab clothes or food, or to take naps or gossip with one another. One of the ceremonies Manbo Maude and her practitioners were preparing for was a spiritual marriage for an initiate named Zeta who has since moved to a different Vodou home, but at the time was excitedly preparing for the marriage being performed in Manbo Maude's temple. Zeta was a Black American woman in her mid-thirties with a heavy southern accent whose ancestry is rooted in Louisiana and Texas. Zeta's marriage was one of the first spiritual marriages that I witnessed in Jacmel. She married seven male spirits, including Kouzen, the spirit of agriculture. Spiritual marriages take months and possibly years to

prepare, however because of prior circumstances, Zeta had only three months of clothing and ritual preparation[147]. Before the ceremony, she discussed the experience of getting married,

> It was all going so fast! So it was like a blur. People had to zip me up on the back and throw me back out to get married to spirits. I had so many costume changes, I felt like a model! Overall it was a good feeling. I couldn't see how I looked like because there was no mirror. The spirit was waiting for me and people were rushing me back down stairs. Although I had no mirror, I could see the spirits face looking back at me and he [Kouzen] was smiling. And he commented on how good I looked. You can see it on his face. [The spirits] look you over. They are excited to see you. Although I felt flushed, they were happy. And that's all that matters.[148]

Dressed up in a plaid and denim outfit, Zeta stood tall inside the temple waiting to be married to the spirit. "He's country, like me!"[149] Zeta explained, associating Kouzen's country or agricultural identity to her southern heritage.

I asked her how the dress felt, and she described the fabric as hot and heavy because of the denim. Her dress was big to accentuate her status as a Manbo, and to emphasize that this was her wedding day. This was her time to shine. Manbo Maude and other practitioners sang Vodou songs to call Kouzen and welcome him into the ceremony. Kouzen arrived and mounted a dark-skinned, Haitian female initiate. Practitioners loosely tied a royal blue *moushwa* around her neck and handed her a straw satchel. When Kouzen looked at Zeta, he was overjoyed and gave her a kiss on the cheek, inspecting the ring on her finger, which was a silver band with a red jewel imbedded into it. Zeta had the ring made for her marriage to Kouzen. He smiled and kissed her hand multiple times, embracing her in appreciation. Zeta and Kouzen took each other's hands and walked to the altar, where a priest, or *pret savann* in Haitian, and several witnesses awaited. As a *pret savann*, the priest is not ordained by the Catholic Church, yet he sometimes dons the vestments of an actual priest and usually wears a cross around his neck. Though *pret savann*'s are not ordained, they still hold religious responsibilities during the weddings, such as officiating the event and repeating traditional Catholic and Vodou prayers and blessings. Manbo Maude has

[147] Zeta, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, video recording, Jacmel, 24 July 2015.
[148] Zeta, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, video recording, Jacmel, 24 July 2015.
[149] Zeta, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, video recording, Jacmel, 24 July 2015.

officiated weddings in both Mattapan and Jacmel, however she has more people to aid in her ritual work in Haiti, and so she prefers to have the priest officiate so she can focus on other religious responsibilities. During the ceremony, the priest took off Zeta's ring and blessed it with Florida Water cologne, which participants used to cleanse ritual objects and blessing participants and spirits during ceremonies. The scent of the cologne was also useful in attracting the spirits. To please Kouzen, the altar featured tobacco and food that had been prepared earlier in the day, including corn, avocados, bananas, cassava. Because Zeta was marrying seven spirits, their food, alcohol, and ritual objects were also displayed on the altar. The priest asked Zeta and Kouzen if they wanted to take each other's hands in marriage. They both agreed. He presented them with a spiritual marriage contract, which stated the promise being made between the spirit and the practitioner, as well as the obligations they would need to fulfill as a part of their union. Both Zeta and Kouzen had to sign the contract. It included the signatures of two witnesses. The witnesses could be anyone who was a part of Zeta's spiritual home. After they signed the contract, they kissed each other on the cheek. Manbo Maude and her practitioners sang a song to usher Kouzen out of the ceremony and out of the body of the initiate he had mounted. As the initiate was recovering, Zeta left the temple to change into another outfit for the next spirit she would marry. When she returned to the temple, the process started anew.

Spiritual Marriage, or mystical marriage, is a sacred institution that provides allegiance between the practitioner and the spirits. It is a symbiotic relationship that provides a ritual commitment that the spirit will aid the practitioner and in turn, the practitioner will serve the spirits. Spiritual marriages combine African and Christian religious practices that include dancing, saluting, a religious ritual contract, witnesses, and an officiator. Spiritual marriages are a multisensorial practice involving the smell of food on the altar, the donning of clothes, the touch of hands and lips, and the rhythmic sound of ritual drums. Practitioners and spirits communicate directly in order to make religious commitments to one another, and the audience and other initiates confer legitimacy to the union by acting as witnesses. In this chapter, I argue that *spiritual vogue* offers a useful framework for analyzing this practice, especially regarding the role of

gender because of the expectations placed on women and their fashion and adornment choices. Ultimately, the ritual depends on the interconnectedness of the spirits, the practitioners, and the audience. The religious fashion involved in spiritual marriage extends beyond ceremonies into the everyday lives of practitioners through the ongoing use of ritualized clothing and adornment, signaling a personal connection with the divine, aiding ongoing communication, and facilitating the crucial possibility of sexual contact between practitioners and spirits. These sexual interactions, which happen in dreams, or *nan dòmi*, which is Haitian for "in sleep," emphasize the commitment between practitioner and spirit and play a significant role in spiritual marriage. The scholarship on spiritual marriage is limited and largely explores the practical ritual elements of the tradition.[150] My work unpacks the importance of spiritual marriage as a way to connect spirit and practitioner, and as a way to understand how fashion facilitates this union.

**Say 'Yes' to the Spirits: Spiritual Marriage in Manbo Maude's Temples**

If practitioners expect the gods to help and protect them, then they must show their dedication and commit themselves. In exchange for protection, the gods expect to be shown favor by the practitioners they wed. In an evening phone conversation, Manbo Maude emphasized the mutual responsibility created through spiritual marriage, saying, "Spiritual marriages are done because it places the responsibilities on spirits. Letting them know that they owe you protection. They owe you stability…They know they have you. They know they can invest in you."[151] This investment carries with it a lifetime commitment, which alters the everyday choices of practitioners, infusing their actions with spiritual significance. I am unaware of how long spiritual marriage has been in existence. Manbo Maude accepts it as a practice with roots in Haitian culture, history, and the traditions passed down by her spiritual mother, saying, "This is

[150] Georges René and Marilyn Houlberg, "My Double Mystical Marriages to Two Goddesses of Love: An Interview," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou,* ed. D. J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 287-299. Adam McGee, "Dreaming in Haitian Vodou: Vouchsafe, Guide, and Source of Liturgical Novelty," *Journal of the Association for the study of Dreams* 2 (2012): 83-100.
[151] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.

what we do. This is what I have been taught."[152] In service of the spirits, practitioners adorn themselves with rings and devote days of the week to the spirits they married. Rings are a consistent adornment practice for male and female initiates and are often purchased at a jewelry shop or are custom made by a jeweler. The type of metal and jewels used in the design of the rings depends on the preferences of a particular spirit. They can be expensive and meaningful, and some rings that were family heirlooms are converted into spiritual rings. On the days that are dedicated to the spirits, practitioners dress in the colors that are traditionally associated with the spirits they married, abstain from sex with any human partners, light candles at their altar, and engage in ritual prayers. Practitioners also expect to receive messages from the spirits they commit to, especially on the days that are designated for them.

In chapter three I emphasized the role of labor in Manbo Maude's temples, and when I spoke with her she explained that spiritual marriage also impacts the labor required in her religious community by relieving her of some of her responsibilities. As a Manbo, she is continually engaged in educating practitioners and initiates about Vodou and its many rituals. She provides guidance to the people in her home on both religious and personal matters by communicating with spirits through spiritual readings and other ritual services. When practitioners marry spirits, Manbo Maude no longer has to function as a primary mediator and members of her home can consult with the spirits directly. "[Practitioners] become more confident," Manbo Maude explained, "they don't have to consult with me all the time because the spirits start taking over. I have less work to do with the person."[153] Doing less work with her practitioners lessens her responsibilities, but it also affects her personal finances. The spiritual readings and ritual work she performs cost money and when practitioners communicate directly with the spirits more often, she loses profit. However, Manbo Maude is invested in fostering practitioners and initiates who are spiritually independent and confident in their abilities within Vodou. She maintains a commitment to passing on knowledge of Vodou and its rituals and understands this to be a fundamental aspect of her role as a Manbo. Moreover, when she ushers members of her

[152] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.
[153] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.

community into a more self-reliant relationship with the spirits, she can spend more time with newer members and with her own family. “Doing the spiritual marriage is like taking the responsibilities off of me,”[154] Manbo Maude concluded.

In my time observing spiritual marriages, I have found that it is typical for initiates to marry at least three spirits during a single ceremony. In Manbo Maude’s home, they often marry more. Initiates in her home marry three to seven spirits in one ceremony. She explained that initiates marry multiple spirits because it creates balance. She also offered a more practical reason, saying,

> I know for a fact that women when they are getting married, they should marry Danballa, that’s the first spirit, Danballa, Ogou, and Kouzen Zaka. So that’s the norm, that’s what I know. But, because there is so much money that goes into a spiritual marriage, it’s not something that you want to keep on doing. Like you know, you do one today, and then the next time you do another one. It’s better to look, to search for who wants to marry the person. So what I do, I will ask questions before. I will do divination, or ask with just a candle, and say ‘can you tell me now because I don’t want you to tell me after the person already gots the ring and stuff to get married, can you tell me now.’ So that’s how I search, I look.[155]

When Manbo Maude spoke of “the norm,” she was referencing the fact that much of what she knows about spiritual marriages came from her spiritual mother and what she learned while an initiate in her temple. The grouping of Danballa, Ogou, and Kouzen Zaka reflects the importance of the idea of balance through the combination of Petwo spirits and Rada spirits, establishing equilibrium by balancing their cool and hot temperaments. Danballa, the serpent spirit of wisdom, and Kouzen are both Rada spirits. Ogou, the god of iron and war, is a Nago, or Yoruba, spirit and can be both Rada and Petwo, moving between the categories depending on the version that manifests. Ogou is a warrior spirit who is sometimes depicted as handsome and heroic, and conversely, as a violent drunk capable of destroying himself and others. Ogou has a potentially countless number of incarnations reflecting an array of personalities.[156] Because of Ogou’s capacity

[154] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.
[155] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.
[156] Brown, *Mama Lola,* 96; 235.

for anger and war, he often needs to be balanced by the cooler, calmer Rada spirits. This balance between the personalities of the spirits aids initiates with decision making in their everyday lives. Manbo Maude encourages initiates to marry all of the spirits they have an affinity for in one ceremony out of concern for the cost of spiritual marriages. She uses divination, which usually consists of card readings and other rituals I am not privy to as a non-initiate, to seek out the spirits that are connected to a given initiate so they will not have to go through the marriage process again in the future. In addition to divination, Manbo Maude also has numerous conversations with initiates about their dreams, past ceremonies where spirits have demanded rings, and life experiences that suggest interest from specific deities.

Manbo Maude also mentioned the cost of spiritual marriages because she is constantly concerned with not only the finances of her temples, but the financial responsibilities being placed on her practitioners and initiates. She considers having more than one marriage ceremony an unnecessary financial burden. The ceremonies involve paying for the labor of fellow initiates, the musicians, the animals involved, and the food and drinks being served, in addition to the costs of traveling to Haiti for protégés outside the country. When the marriages are combined into one ceremony, the initiate only has to pay for these elements once. For example, the food purchased, like pork, beef, rum, and wine can be offered to all the spirits being called down for the marriage during the ceremony, whereas these offerings would have to be purchased anew for a separate ceremony. Another important consideration is the expense of the dresses that female initiates don for the marriages. In Zeta's ceremony, she married seven different spirits and wore different dresses for each one. She married Danballa, Ogou, Ogou Ferray, Kouzen, Agwe, Simbi, and Gede. She had a dress specially made for each spirit except for Ogou Ferray, because he is a variation on Ogou and belongs to the same family and could therefore be honored by the same dress as Ogou.

As I explored in previous chapters, the clothing worn in Manbo Maude's temples varies greatly by gender not only in style, but in price as well. Depending on a female practitioner's status as a Manbo or the closeness of their relationship to Manbo Maude, extra fabric and trimmings are included on the dresses, which can increase the price. For male practitioners, style does not change according to status: a senior Houngan often wears the same clothes as other male members of the temple. The cost of ritual clothing can be significantly less for male practitioners because their outfits are less complicated and require less fabric. This difference in ritual clothing persists during spiritual marriages. As previously mentioned, Zeta wore a new dress for every spirit she married. Because she did not regularly attend ceremonies in Mattapan or Haiti, she had to spend more on the creation of her dresses than many other initiates did. I have observed another spiritual marriage where a female initiate who frequented ceremonies in Mattapan and Jacmel was able to use dresses that had been made for past ceremonies. For her marriage, she only had to purchase one new dress. Overall, the stylistic expectations for ritual clothing demands more from women than men in cost and appearance. Manbo Maude makes sure her female practitioners have the dresses necessary for their marriages. She inquires as to which dresses they already have and which ones will need to be made in preparation. If female practitioners do not have a dress for a particular spirit, Manbo Maude sends their measurements, possible dress styles, and fabric to her seamstresses in either Mattapan or Jacmel so that the outfit will be ready for their wedding. The cost of ritual dresses usually ranges from fifty to two hundred dollars, and if an initiate cannot afford one for their wedding or for a ceremony, Manbo Maude sometimes dips into her own savings to help pay for the outfit. In Manbo Maude's temples, gender impacts ritual responsibilities especially in relation to fashion, which affects the financial investment of female initiates.

When considered through the lens of *spiritual vogue*, the gendered dynamics of spiritual marriage reveal the malleability of the interactions among the audience, the

practitioners, and the spirits during ritual practices in Haitian Vodou. In spiritual marriage, these interactions are subject to change in reaction to the identities of the practitioners. The spiritual marriages in Manbo Maude's homes are dependent on female practitioners presenting a particular vision of femininity to the audience and the spirits. Marriage ceremonies are not divorced from the gender politics of everyday life that stem from larger cultural and societal constructions of gender. Zeta and other female practitioners like her are marrying men, even if those men are spirits, and this fact carries with it traditional expectations of gender presentation. In my time in Manbo Maude's temples, I have not seen a female practitioner wear anything other than an elaborate dress. They are using what scholar of Feminist Studies Marcia Ochoa calls "symbolic resources," which are the indicators of glamour and beauty that are used to connote femininity.[157] To please the spirits and the audience, Zeta and other female practitioners must dress and adorn themselves beautifully, and in Manbo Maude's home, beauty is signified by elaborate, feminine dresses, makeup, and jewelry.

In Manbo Maude's temples, spiritual marriages are heteronormative: female initiates marry male spirits, and male initiates marry female spirits. This holds true for all initiates, whether heterosexual, homosexual and/or transgender. Although Manbo Maude performs heteronormative weddings, she has initiated transgender people according to their gender identity. For example, she initiated a transgender man as a Houngan. However, when this same initiate was spiritually married, he married male spirits. Manbo Maude believes that initiates need to be married in relation to their sex at birth. "I am not going to marry a man to a man, because that's how the tradition was," she explained when I interviewed her, "If it's changing, I don't like to change tradition like that, it's not up to me to do that."[158] Manbo Maude learned how to perform spiritual marriage from her spiritual mother and wants to maintain those traditions. She asserted that Manbos and Houngans who married male initiates to male spirits and female initiates to female spirits were practicing the ritual incorrectly. This is a topic I have discussed with her on

[157] Ochoa*, Queen for a Day,* 2.
[158] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.

numerous occasions, largely because she welcomes queer and transgender practitioners and participants and allows gay men to perform rituals during ceremonies that are traditionally performed by women. Manbos and Houngans choose how they want to honor tradition in their spiritual homes, and for Manbo Maude, heteronormative spiritual marriages are a tradition she continues to maintain.

The subtleties of *spiritual vogue* are also determined by the genders that are prescribed to the spirits during spiritual marriages. During Zeta's marriage, Kouzen, although male, was mediated by a Haitian woman that he had possessed. I asked Zeta if she cared that the body that Kouzen rode was a woman. She explained, "You have to remember that when I look at Kouzen, I don't see the female body, I see him. I am marrying a male spirit. Also, there were not a lot of males present for Kouzen to take over."[159] Zeta's comment derives from the idea that in Vodou, the bodies of practitioners are vessels during possession. Therefore, the gender of the mounted practitioner during a spiritual marriage ceremony is irrelevant and overwritten by the gender of the spirit possessing them. This idea is typically articulated through the possession of female practitioners; it is less common to see men become possessed by female spirits, and so their genders are displaced by spirits in far fewer instances. Zeta was seeing the spirit, not the body it inhabited, because of the ritual and adornment practices she and other practitioners engaged in during the ceremony. The gender of the spirit determines how the audience and the practitioners view the body and personality of the mounted person. In Manbo Maude's home, this perception solidifies not only the marriage, but the heteronormative nature of the marriages performed in her homes. *Spiritual vogue* operates to reinforce the perception of a heteronormative marriage through the interaction of the spirits, the audience, and the practitioners, who are engaging in the marriage ceremony as though the body of the practitioner is immaterial.

[159] Zeta, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, video recording, Jacmel, 24 July 2015.

During the marriage ceremony, the gender of the spirits takes precedence over the physical body of the practitioner who is mounted. The possession is a multisensorial performance of gender, animated by body language, the intonations of voice, and adornment. During Zeta's marriage to Ogou, the audience and the practitioners understood that Ogou was present through his loud voice, stern facial expressions, his demands for his sword, and his expansive body language, including flexing and strutting around the room. The possessed female practitioners also donned red and blue *moushwa*, which were tied around their arms and chest. Wearing *moushwa* and gesturing with ritual items signifies that the body of the possessed practitioner is no longer defined by their sex, but by the gender of the spirit mounting them; the ritual and adornment items represent this shift in identity during a ceremony. The differing colors of *moushwa* and their positions on the body indicate which version of Ogou has arrived at a ceremony. Ogou's masculinity is hyper-masculine, which aligns with his connection to war. He is a reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of this brand of manhood; sometimes, he is an uncontrollable drunk who is perpetually angry, or he is hypersexual, and other times he is a noble warrior and protector.[160] This image of masculinity is not the only one represented by the Vodou pantheon, and when Zeta married Kouzen, he represented another vision of masculine representation. Kouzen does not perform an aggressive masculinity, but instead offers mannerisms that are courtly and calm. His voice is typically even and cool, and his body language is composed. His presence is also indicated by his straw hat, his *makout*, and the *moushwa* that is loosely tied around his neck, indicating his role as a farmer. He converses with the audience and practitioners, which is a consequence of his roots in the marketplace, where negotiation is necessary for business. This does not mean Kouzen is incapable of anger, but his primary display of masculinity is humble and levelheaded. The behavior, sound, and appearance of the spirits indicates their gender, no matter what body they have mounted. Using *spiritual vogue* as an analytical framework illuminates how the multisensorial performance of gender during spiritual marriages determines how the audience and the practitioners view the body of the

[160] Brown, *Mama Lola*, 96.

possessed person, and ultimately allows for them to disregard their gender in favor of the spirits. When a practitioner is possessed, they are adorned with *moushwa* and other ritual items, such as Ogou's sword, which communicates to the audience the shift in identity and creates the opportunity for them, as well as other practitioners, to interact with the spirit. The *real presence* of a spirit is emphasized and reinforced through the adornment of that spirit through the possessed body of a practitioner. Throughout Zeta's marriage to Ogou, adornment helped solidify the *real presence* of Ogou and communicated his existence to other practitioners and the audience in service of the marriage ceremony.

In Manbo Maude's home, the flexibility in gender presentation does not usually extend to the marriages performed for male initiates. In these marriage ceremonies, female spirits almost always possess female practitioners. During other ceremonies, men are mounted by female spirits more often, though it is still rare. It is common and acceptable for women to be mounted by male spirits, but it is unusual and potentially uncomfortable for a male to be mounted by a female spirit during a marriage ceremony. The actions taken by a possessed practitioner during spiritual marriages, such as kissing, are socially unacceptable if the practitioner is a man mounted by a female spirit, offering these signs of affection to other men. I argue that this fact suggests the human body still plays a role in how gender is represented in spiritual marriage. In possession, gender is not anchored to the body, which challenges some elements of Manbo Maude's thinking on heteronormative marriages. This inconsistency between the enforcement of biological gender during spiritual marriage and the act of possession, which routinely invites practitioners to flout the borders between genders, showcases the complications of gendered representation in Vodou ceremonies. Scholar of Comparative Caribbean and Cultural Studies Roberto Strongman calls the gender dynamics during possession "transcorporeality," when "the commingling of the human and the divine produces subjectivities whose gender is not dictated by biological sex."[161] Strongman's assessment of the nature of possession is consistent with my observations in Vodou temples. My works expands this discourse on the subjectivities of practitioners during possession

[161] Roberto Strongman, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

by centering the role of fashion, adornment, and gender performance. I argue that the multisensorial performance of gender, which relies on fashion, adornment, and bodily representation of gender, ultimately defines how gender is perceived by many practitioners and participants in Vodou ceremonies. If the body were truly irrelevant, there would be more male practitioners possessed by female spirits in spiritual marriages. The fact that this is a relatively rare occurrence suggests that the body of the devotee is not completely immaterial to the audience and the practitioners. I have witnessed men who were mounted by Danto and Freda in ceremonies outside of spiritual marriages, which is why I argue both male and female spirits are unconcerned with the gender of the bodies they ride. The everyday lives and experiences of practitioners and audience members' influences how possession and spiritual marriage function: the beliefs of the practitioners and the audience affects religious rituals, and religious communities cannot exist outside of these societal and cultural perceptions. These perceptions are what prevent many male practitioners from being possessed by female spirits during marriages, and what limits the types of spiritual marriages performed in Manbo Maude's temples.

**A Match Made in Jacmel: Ezili Danto and Eddie's Spiritual Wedding Day**

Figure 12. Ezili Danto blessing Eddie with sacred dagger during their spiritual marriage in Jacmel, Haiti. July, 2015

Eddie was a twenty-seven-year-old native of Somerville, Massachusetts when, in 2015, he decided to marry five spirits in Manbo Maude's temple in Jacmel. He was raised in the Mystic Projects in Somerville and had been familiar with Vodou his whole life thanks to his Haitian parents, who were practitioners. Before them, his grandparents were *Vodouizans*, or practitioners of Vodou, and their ancestors as well, stretching generations back into his family lineage. Although he grew up around the religion, it was not a meaningful part of his life until he was an adult, when he was confronted by a nearly fatal experience. The event altered his perspective on his faith and his commitment to the spirits. When I first met Eddie in 2015 in Jacmel, he was preparing for his marriage, and a week after we met, I was there to witness the ceremony. The spirits I remember most vividly from the ceremony were the Ezilis: Ezili Freda, Ezili Danto, and Metres Ezili. When we spoke years later in 2019 through 'WhatsApp,' they were the marriages he described in the most detail. "There are others," Eddie explained, "But it's mainly the three."[162]

Several days before the marriage ceremony took place, Eddie underwent a ritual bath for good luck while others organized for a ritual designed to prepare him for the wedding and to rid him of any negative energy. Members of Manbo Maude's home brought half a dozen chickens, all hens, into the temple and tied a small string to their legs, attaching them to nearby chairs so they could not escape the room. The chickens needed to stay in the temple for a few days and nights and they clucked and crowed the entire time. The time in the temple made the chickens holy, designating them as animals to be used in ritual services and showcased them for the spirits. Sacred foods, rum, ritual objects, and elaborate fabrics were placed on the altar within the temple. In the afternoon before the marriage, Manbo Maude performed a ceremony. She and all of her practitioners wore simple, white clothes. During this ceremony, the chickens were moved by practitioners into the open-air area adjacent to the temple and rubbed with water that had been mixed with sacred herbs and leaves, and were fed cornmeal. Initiates cleansed Eddie with the

[162] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 4 February 2019.

chickens by wiping them against his body and making circular motions above his head and feet. When the chickens flapped their wings, they rid him of negative energy. The more they flapped their wings, the more negative energy escaped. During this ritual, two Haitian men tied a massive pig to the *potomitan,* or sacred center pole, in the center of the outside area and cleansed it with the sacred herbs and leaves. Previously, the pig had been tied to the sacred Mapou tree for two days, which made it holy. Once the pig was brought into the ceremony, Ezili Danto was called into the ceremony by practitioners. She possessed several female practitioners, including Manbo Maude and Eddie's mother. Red and blue *moushwa* were tied around their arms, head, and waists to signal Danto's presence. To show her acceptance of and appreciation for the pig, mounted practitioners rode the pig. While possessed by Danto, Manbo Maude was handed a dagger and mimed stabbing herself and the air around her. The presence of the dagger in her ceremonies represents Danto's status as a warrior during the Haitian Revolution. She also uses the dagger as a symbol of her protectiveness of her followers. When Eddie's mother was possessed, she approached him, and he knelt on the ground. She saluted him by pouring rum on his head and pressing her head against his. Eventually, the chickens and the pig were cooked and placed on the altar as offerings during the wedding.

The wedding ceremony started at ten o'clock that night inside the temple and in retrospect, Eddie described it as an exciting event, saying, "It's vivid. It's a dance. It's a party. It's a celebration."[163] Eddie wore all white, with his long locs pulled back into a bun. He wore a short sleeve button down shirt with all the wrinkles pressed out, and white jeans that were cuffed at the ankle. Unlike Zeta, he did not change his outfit to suit the different spirits he was marrying. The relative simplicity of his ritual outfit decreased the cost of his ceremony in comparison to many female initiates. Because he wore all white, he still met the requirements of honoring the spirits for his marriage, as white is an appropriate color for all the spirits. I have never observed a female initiate who wore only white during her marriage ceremony. The gendered expectations of religious fashion in Manbo Maude's temple did not demand Eddie wear anything elaborate, and

[163] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 4 February 2019.

the focus was on the overall neatness of his appearance. The spirits and the audience required a far less extravagant sartorial display than what was expected for female practitioners like Zeta. As previously discussed, within *spiritual vogue*, the interaction among the audience, the spirits, and practitioners is shaped by the identities of the people involved, which includes their gender. He tied *moushwa* of various colors around his neck to indicate the spirit he was marrying. Danto was one of those spirits. She arrived at the ceremony at around one o'clock in the morning after the initiates welcomed her with a song and drumming. Manbo Maude was the vessel through which Danto made her presence known.

Figure 13. Ezili Danto and male initiate enclosing Eddie in a circle of fire during spiritual marriage in Jacmel, Haiti. July, 2015

After mounting Manbo Maude, Danto was adorned with red and blue *moushwa* and handed her sacred dagger. Danto began to dance in front of the drums and inside the Vodou circle. Other practitioners were possessed as well, all of them female. A couple minutes later, she approached Eddie. Eddie saluted her through a short routine of ritual footwork while she watched with a dagger pointed at her navel. A male initiate flicked Florida Water onto Eddie during the

salute and while he knelt. Danto placed her dagger flat against his head and then tapped it on his shoulders. She moved the dagger around and across his body while dancing in circular patterns around him. She poured Florida Water around him in a circle. Danto tried to light her dagger, which had been doused in cologne, on fire by holding it over a lit candle that sat on the *potomitan*. A male practitioner rushed over to assist her. He lit her dagger on fire. Together, they set the circle of cologne that surrounded Eddie on fire. She went back to dancing and was greeted by other male initiates who were married to her. She looked happy to see Eddie and danced over to where he still knelt on the ground. The fire is symbolic of Danto's Congolese origins and the fact that she belongs to the Petwo pantheon of spirits, whose temperaments are volatile and intense.[164] Moreover, as Art historian Robert Farris Thompson wrote, fire signifies the "Petwos power to make things burn in a positive healing sense…[and] powerfully reflect this notion of salvation through extremity and intimidation."[165] When mounting practitioners during ceremonies, Petwo spirits are given to robust displays of strength, which reflect their ability to channel awesome forces in services of their followers. Anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown described how To accommodate their passionate personalities, Petwo spirits "are offered rum mixed with ingredients such as coffee, hot pepper, and gunpowder" along with "cracking whips and shrieking police whistles" during ceremonies.[166]

The priest stepped into Danto's path and gestured to her, telling her without words that she was there to marry Eddie. The only visible indicator of his status as a priest and officiator was the large, silver cross that hung around his neck. At this ceremony, he was not wearing any of his Catholic clothes and wore a white t-shirt with a large Vodou symbol printed onto it. He looked at Danto, waved his hand towards Eddie, and raised his eyebrows at Danto, as though asking for her approval for the marriage. Danto smiled. The priest told Eddie to get up by beckoning him with his hand. Eddie rose and Danto took his hand and admired his ring before they linked pinky fingers, one of the standard greetings between practitioners and spirits. She spun him in

[164] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 180.
[165] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 181.
[166] Brown, *Mama Lola*, 101.

clockwise and counter-clockwise circles with their fingers still connected. Danto flung more Florida Water onto Eddie. She spoke to him, gave him a kiss, and joyfully danced with him. Eddie followed her lead through the room towards the altar while they both held onto her dagger. The priest held their marriage contract, as well as a lit candle and a small, white porcelain plate with two rings on top of it. One of the rings was for Danto, and the other for Metres Danto. Because both of the spirits were manifestations of Danto, he did not have to marry them in separate ceremonies. Eddie would be placing both of them on his fingers. Eddie and Danto sat in two chairs that had been placed in front of the decorated altar. Eddie guided her into her seat. The priest stood in front of them and held out the plate with the two rings. “Other people wear silver,” Eddie recalled when I interviewed him, “But mines is white gold with the red ruby, that’s for Danto. Metres is white gold or silver with a blue stone.”

Figure 14. Priest carrying spiritual rings and spiritual contract for the Ezili Danto and Metres Ezili for Eddie’s spiritual marriage in Jacmel, Haiti. July, 2015

Danto pressed her hand against her chest in surprised delight at the sight of the rings. She looked to Eddie and the priest, saying, “*Pou mwen*?” Haitian for ‘for me?’ The priest recited marriage vows in Haitian, holding the lit candle above the plate and asking them if they accepted the union. They accepted, and Danto poured Florida Water onto the rings. The priest used his

candle to light them on fire. Danto swirled the rings, the cologne, and the fire around the plate with her fingers. After the fire died, she inspected the rings. Once she was satisfied, she placed the rings on the index and ring fingers of Eddie's left hand. The priest asked Eddie if he was prepared to do what was needed to serve the spirit. Danto ran her dagger across her chest in the sign of a cross to signify her own commitment to protecting him. She took his hand and pressed it to her heart. She kissed his ring and pushed his hand back toward him, so Eddie could kiss his own ring. Danto put her arm around his shoulders and kissed him chastely on the mouth three times. They hugged each other while the priest made the symbol of a cross over their heads using his hand. Eddie remembered this moment fondly,

> I love how they embrace me and the love me and they hugging me and kissing me. I had the food out for them. They came. It was like a great time. It was a legit wedding, but it's almost like they were there. There's no denying that they are there. You had a legit marriage.[167]

Other initiates joined them at the altar in order to give them the food that had been offered to Danto. It consisted of plantains, fried pork, and *pikliz*, which was a Haitian condiment made from pickled cabbage, carrots, and bell peppers. Eddie fed Danto the plantain and then she started to eat her fill at will. Danto tipped a bottle of rum to Eddie's lips for him to drink before taking a swig for herself. The priest gave Eddie and Danto the marriage contract. They signed their names, and then he gave the contract to witnesses to sign as well. The witnesses were other initiates and myself. Later, Eddie kept the marriage contract and brought it home with him to reside as a ritual object on the altar he maintained in his apartment for Danto. After they married, Danto returned to the broader ceremony, linked arm and arm with Eddie, and blessed other male initiates. Together, they circled the *potomitan*. A few moments later, she detached from him and danced around the room alone. Eddie waited on the other side of the room. She looked towards Eddie and then abruptly sprinted across the temple, jumping into his arms. She continued dancing while in his arms. Danto left, releasing Manbo Maude, and she slumped in Eddie's embrace. Several initiates, male and female, rushed over to help Eddie place Manbo Maude into a chair to recover.

[167] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 5 February 2019.

When Eddie reflected on the marriage ceremony, he emphasized how the commitment changed how he lived his life and interacted with the world. I asked him what he remembered most vividly about the ceremony, and he described the support he received from his friends and family.

> It's new to me. So when you are there and I see you and you are supporting me. Shori is supporting me. I am nervous. It's like a real wedding. You are making a commitment, you are doing something and you see that your family is there. You got people that say 'you can do this, you got this.' That's how I took it as. The key thing was the support. Nothing felt better than turning around and looking at the corner and feeling like I got people who got my back.[168]

His recollection helped me understand that my presence, and the presence of other audience members and observers, shaped his wedding and his spiritual commitment. For Eddie, they were a physical reminder of the positive support for his spiritual marriage. Our presence was one of the factors that signaled the legitimacy of the ceremony taking place, emphasizing the role of the audience in *spiritual vogue* and illustrating the constant interaction among the audience, the practitioners, and the spirits. The union between the spirit and the practitioner is reinforced by the presence of the audience, who are the broader religious community essentially sanctioning and facilitating the marriage taking place. The rings, which are ritual adornment items, symbolize the marriage and are placed on the practitioner's hand in front of witnesses. The spirit, in this case Danto, placed the rings onto Eddie's fingers in front of the priest, other practitioners, and the audience, who bared witness to their spiritual marriage. Having witnesses at the wedding solidified the commitment Eddie and Danto were making to one another, not only because they were demonstrating their promise in front of their religious community, but because that same community was facilitating their ability to make the commitment in the first place through their physical presence and by participating in and preparing for the ceremony. By serving as witnesses during the wedding ceremony, the audience became a significant part of the ritual service being provided, grounding the demonstration of devotion between practitioner and spirits in their religious community.

[168] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 5 February 2019

Eddie's commitment to the spirits he married extended beyond the ceremony officiated in Jacmel. His unions are lifelong, and he expresses his ongoing devotion through numerous ritual practices. Some of these practices include designating particular days for an individual spirit, as Eddie explained, "Saturdays is for Ezili Danto, Tuesday is for Metres, and Thursdays are for Freda."[169] On the days he dedicates to the spirits, he wears the colors that are associated with them, lights a candle on his altar, and wears the rings he had custom made for them. He spent four thousand dollars for each of the three rings he wears for the Ezilis he married, which he had custom made by a private jeweler in Somerville. He designed the rings according to what suited the spirits, for example, he said, "Freda is a gold band, you can put diamonds on it or not, I chose diamonds to make it look pretty."[170] When I asked why he was concerned with making one of the rings especially pretty for Freda, he felt it was almost self-explanatory, "Well, its Freda and two, I am just a pretty dude so I like everything really pretty."[171] Eddie's impressions about what type of ring fit a specific spirits are formed not only by Manbo Maude, but by information he finds on the internet. Manbo Maude often encourages members of her house to look up information about Vodou rituals and history, and also posts information on her Facebook page about proper Vodou etiquette. Moreover, she posts videos of her ceremonies on YouTube, inviting attention to her home and to educate others about Vodou. Many practitioners and audience members discovered Manbo Maude through her online presence. Eddie saved for the significant expense of his spiritual marriage a year in advance after being told that he needed to get married during a spiritual reading a year after being initiated in Manbo Maude's temple in 2012. Eddie credited the spirits with the money he was able to save, and attributed his economic success to their blessings. While he was saving for the rings, he was also paying Manbo Maude for the ritual materials that would be necessary for his wedding ceremony, as well as for the labor provided by the cooks and the initiates assisting during the wedding. Some initiates paid for their weddings in

[169] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 6 February 2019.
[170] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 6 February 2019.
[171] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 6 February 2019.

installments throughout the year. Eddie paid for his ceremony all at once because he was able to save money.

In addition to the rings, Eddie also wears clothing in the traditional colors connected to the spirits: pink for Freda, red and blue for Danto, and white for all of them. “White is what I usually go with,” he explained, “White goes with everybody.”[172] Eddie does not wear clothing that was specially made for Vodou, but everyday clothes in the proper colors, such as t-shirts and blue jeans. Though these clothing items were not created for Vodou ceremonies, the intent with which he wears them illustrates his devotion to the spirits and his commitment to their marriage. Neglecting this practice after committing to the spirits, or forgetting to honor them on their days, can result in bad luck. Eddie also prepares his body in the ways he believes will please the spirits, such as bathing before going to sleep and wearing cologne, not only with the expectation that he might meet them in his dreams, but generally to remain clean and pure in honor of the spirits. I asked Eddie to describe a dream he had on a night dedicated to an Ezili, and he told me,

> I’ve had days where I see that I am dating like three different sisters and they are fighting over me. Where one would go to the kitchen and the other would go the room and they would tell me that they secretly like me and they would fight over me and it would pretty much be like your wives fighting over you, like they are jealous. Pretty much things like that.[173]

In dreams such as the one Eddie described, the spirits communicated their continued commitment to him and their marriage together through this vision of heteronormative domestic partnership. In his dream, Eddie was living in his home with his wives as the object of their affection and sexual desire. He described the three spirits fighting over him and vying for his affection. The playful interactions connoted a relationship built on mutual affection and respect. He was honoring them properly and therefore maintained their affection.

Before his spiritual marriage, Eddie used to seek spiritual readings from Manbo Maude once a month. After the marriage, he visited Manbo Maude for spiritual readings once a year. He credited this change to his stronger relationship to the spirits and the confidence he gained after

[172] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 7 February 2019.
[173] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 7 February 2019.

marrying them. Eddie also understood his marriage to the spirits as preparation for marrying a human woman, saying, "They've helped me because I used to doubt if I could commit to a woman if I really get married."[174] He views the commitment he made to the spirits as an opportunity to learn lessons about himself and how he relates to other people, and women in particular. "Now, if I found a woman that I truly love I can be dedicated and not cheat on her," he explained, "I know what's expected. [Spiritual marriage] teaches you self-discipline."[175] Because of the marriage, he feels more confident in general, and in his relationships with other people. Eddie's spiritual marriage affects his perspective on marriage in the human world. His dedication to the Ezilis, and his resulting willingness to stay faithful to them, proves to him that he can dedicate himself to a woman in the physical world.

**Divine Intimacies *Nan Dòmi***

Dreams play a significant role in spiritual marriage through the conveyance of messages, as well as the consummation of the marital commitment. Few scholars have focused on dreams in Vodou, and even fewer have investigated the sexual encounters with spirits during dreams, yet dreams are an inescapable and crucial aspect of the religion.[176] This dream state is often referred to as *nan dòmi*. *Nan dòmi* is a state of lucid dreaming that Vodou initiate and Haitian musician Mimerose P. Beaubrun described as "profoundly asleep and fully conscious."[177] For Beaubrun, *nan dòmi* is a space where mysteries are revealed, and a person is allowed "to see abstract things unknown until then."[178] Her definition emphasizes the fact that what happens in the dream world impacts the waking world. The messages received in dreams can be abstract, in which case the practitioner must decipher the meaning, or they can be much more literal, clear messages from the spirits. In either case, these dreams are often shared within a practitioner's

[174] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 8 February 2019.
[175] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 8 February 2019.
[176] Adam McGee, "Dreaming in Haitian Vodou: Vouchsafe, Guide, and Source of Liturgical Novelty," *Journal of the Association for the study of Dreams* 2 (2012): 83-100.; Erika Bourguignon, "Dreams and dream interpretation in Haiti," *American Anthropologist* 10 (1954): 262-268.
[177] Mimerose P. Beaubrun, *Nan Domi: An Initiate's Journey into Haitian Vodou* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2013), 48.
[178] Beaubrun, *Nan Domi*, 276.

religious community. A spiritual guide or family member can help a practitioner decode the messages in order to assess how to please the spirits. In other cases, the dreams and messages are kept private. A practitioner might understand the messages on their own, or choose to find meaning through their own analysis. Dreams, like possession, can be interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences within a spiritual community. The lucid nature of *nan dòmi* explains why practitioners are capable of recalling their dreams in such vivid detail, and why the decisions they make in the dreams regarding their relationships to spirits hold sway over their actions in the conscious world. The dream world is held in high esteem because it is one of the avenues used to converse with the spirits, and where practitioners are able to negotiate with the divine. This section explores how fashion and adornment, within *nan dòmi* or in preparation for it, fosters communicative relationships between practitioners and spirits, opening a space for negotiation and reaffirmation of commitment. I argue *nan dòmi* is not only a space to learn about the unknown, it is also where practitioners discern the desires of the spirits, respond to demands for material offerings, make commitments, and experience real, multisensorial contact with the divine.

A number of the practitioners I have interviewed discussed the sexual interactions they experienced during *nan dòmi* on the days dedicated to a particular spirit. By dressing and bathing for the spirits he married before sleep, Eddie invited the spirits to communicate with him within *nan dòmi*, which sometimes meant having sex. These sexual encounters foster a continued devotion to and communication with the spirits. For Eddie, these dreams were a visceral experience which remained vivid upon waking.

> I actually had a full wet dream…It was crazy. And a couple nights ago, I actually I almost had the same thing happen but it was almost like I woke up and I was like, 'what the fuck am I doing?' Like I was humping the shit outta this bed. But it felt so real. There were times that it feels like I was with this person.[179]

[179] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 8 February 2019.

I asked Eddie how he knew when he was having sex with a spirit in his dreams, and he explained that he knew through their physical appearance. When he saw a woman with a dagger, he interpreted it to be Ezili Danto because the dagger is a symbol commonly associated with her. A light skinned woman, on the other hand, represented Ezili Freda, who is always depicted as fair skinned.[180] Moreover, the fact that the two women appeared together, and that they were bickering, further supported the idea that they were the Ezilis, due to their sometimes contentious relationship as sisters. The sexual encounters like the one Eddie described are one of the results of spiritual marriage. Eddie refrained from having sex with human partners on the days reserved for the Ezilis: Tuesdays and Thursdays. He waits until sunrise on the following day to even think about having sex, as he has been scolded by the Ezilis *nan dòmi* in the past for having sex too quickly after their days have ended. Engaging in sex almost immediately after midnight, when the day has technically ended, was viewed as disrespectful by the deities, who felt slighted by the rush to end their time with Eddie.[181] Though sex with spirits is not reserved only for those who have married the divine, it is a commonly expected aspect of spiritual marriage that helps curry continued favor from the spirits. It is not a mandatory responsibility of initiates who marry and the spirits can communicate through numerous avenues. For those who do engage in sex with the deities, the experiences reaffirm their connection to the divine and can bring good fortune. Manbo Maude described the significance of sexual relationships with spirits as an exchange of energy and compared it to sex with human partners. Sex with anyone, human or spirit, is "divine." Manbo Maude told me, "Your body is your temple…its spiritual when you have relationships with people."[182] Spirits and initiates give and take energy from one another during these experiences. The fashion Eddie used to honor the spirits, wearing white or the more specific color associated with the spirits he married, as well as his rings, enabled this multisensorial sexual encounter within *nan dòmi*. For Eddie, this fashion and adornment is part of the ongoing ritual work of spiritual marriage and a necessary aspect of communicating with the spirits. Eddie was able to

[180] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 8 February 2019.
[181] Eddie, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 8 February 2019.
[182] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019.

touch, see, and hear the spirits. The adornment and fashion choices practitioners make to prepare their bodies facilitates a multisensorial, sexual interaction that reinforces their faith and their surety that the spirits are a tangible presence in their everyday lives.

Though Manbo Maude emphasized the importance of heteronormative spiritual marriages, there are practitioners who have affinities for same-gender spirits and have sexual relationships with them as well, inside and outside of her spiritual home. In Manbo Maude's spiritual homes and in many other Vodou temples, the gender conventions on display during spiritual marriages are often explained as tradition, but there are also cultural and societal reasons for these ritual preferences. When I interviewed a Houngan and scholar of Haitian Studies who I call Joel, he argued that the wide-spread reluctance to embrace same-gender spiritual marriages in Vodou was rooted in homophobia in Haiti:

> People would be horrified if we had a ceremony and I was going to marry Ogou Ferray and Ogou Badagri. People would be very offended. A Haitian would be very offended because they are homophobic…I blame Christianity for that. Because this is where they learn to discriminate against homosexuals.[183]

Joel described homophobia as being widespread, yet there are temples that embrace same-gender marriages. In Jacmel, there are Vodou homes that allow same gender spiritual marriage and permit transgender people to marry according to their gender identity. In 2018, I "Vodou hopped" to a spiritual home that was run by a gay, Haitian man who spiritually married initiates and spirits of the same gender. Although I have not witnessed these ceremonies personally, I have been told about them by Manbo Maude, as well as initiates in her home. I have focused on spiritual marriages that were officiated publically during ceremonies, but Joel asserted that his marriage to Ogou and the Ezilis happened in the dream state. When I interviewed Joel over the phone, he described his sexual encounter with two versions of Ogou: Ogou Ferray and Ogou Badagri. He had a strong connection with Ogou, despite the fact that he had never formally

[183] Joel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 24 February 2019.

committed to him during a public marriage ceremony. The sexual encounter was proof of their devotion to one another and of the tacit truth that spirits could have same-gender desires.

JOEL: I am married to two Ogous as a matter of fact. As a matter of fact about fifteen years ago, I woke up about five o'clock in the morning and I was covered with sperm and it was not my own. And I woke up and I went to a pile of CD's which I had never opened, that I had purchased and never played, went to the middle of that pile, pulled out a recording by a Haitian Band. [I] put on my CD player and here was a song that Ogou was singing to me in the dream. I have never heard that song before…I went straight to that CD and played the song that they were singing to me.
EZIAKU: So you woke up to a sperm that wasn't yours?
JOEL: No.
EZIAKU: How did you know that it wasn't yours?
JOEL: Because I know it was not mine, because I know mine.
EZIAKU: Because you know yours. Was the smell different?
JOEL: Yeah. And because I was making love all night to the two Ogous.
EZIAKU: Oh wow. So the two Ogous how did they look like. Were they dark skinned, light skinned?
JOEL: Well it's interesting, when I see those Haitian spirits I see them as light brown. Typically light brown. He comes to me from time to time and he is light brown. Or medium brown and green eyes.
EZIAKU: And so you had sex with the Ogou.
JOEL: It was *very* wonderful.[184]

During our conversation, I repeated myself because I wanted to make sure I understood the spiritual experience he was describing. His detailed description of his encounter with the two Ogous illustrates the intense sexual experiences that are possible *nan dòmi*. The residues that resulted from the dream are evidence of *real presence*, a mark left behind by the spirit to communicate their mutual affection and belonging. Joel also told me that Ogou gifted him with a ring during his dream to signify their commitment, another symbolic material offering signifying their union. Previously, he also had a wedding ceremony where he married Ezili Danto and Ezili Freda and engaged in all the rituals that were described during Eddie's marriage in a dream state. The Ezilis gave him rings to honor their commitment as well. In the waking world, Joel does not wear any rings for the deities on his fingers and considers the adornment that took place *nan dòmi* to be as fully binding as anything he might have done during a full ceremony with other

[184] Joel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 24 February 2019.

practitioners. Because *nan dòmi* is a lucid dream state, he was able to recognize the commitment he was making and the resulting consequences in the waking world. In his home, he has altars dedicated to the spirits and he sets aside days to honor them. Joel places very little significance on the type of marriage ceremonies Manbo Maude performs for her initiates, and instead emphasizes the direct connection between a practitioner and a spirit during the dream state. "I don't have to do it in a ritual and spend that kind of money,"[185] he concluded. His perspective on spiritual marriage and sex between practitioners and spirits provides an avenue through which to explore the reality of same-gender encounters.

Manbo Maude does not perform same-gender spiritual marriage in her home because it contradicts her sense of tradition. However, like Joel, she does have an affinity for a same-gender spirit: Ezili Danto. As previously mentioned, the Ezilis are some of the primary spirits who have influenced her innovative relationship to religious fashion. To honor her connection to Danto, Manbo Maude wears a ring and specific dresses during ceremonies. Moreover, she married male spirits who are affiliated with Danto, such as Ogou and Simbi, a freshwater spirit and healer. "I married them to show her my commitment toward her men,"[186] Manbo Maude explained when I interviewed her, "She won't be jealous that I am with her men. She will collaborate with me [because I am] taking care of her men." Manbo Maude's relationship to Danto is mediated through her marriage to male spirits who represent this important connection through their affiliation with Danto. When Manbo Maude said "her men," she was referencing larger ideas within the Vodou ethos that pair various spirits with one another in sexual or familial relationships. Danto, for example, is said to have taken Ogou as a lover and birthed his children, and has had a sexual relationship with Simbi. Instead of marrying Ezili Danto directly, she wears a ring and married the male spirits associated with her. Ogou and Simbi are not substitutes or stand-ins for Danto, but represent the broader family of spirits she is dedicated to and who help her perform spiritual services. It is also possible that the rigidity of the marriage traditions in Manbo Maude's home necessitated this arrangement, wherein her connection to a female deity could only be

[185] Joel, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Philadelphia, 24 February 2019.
[186] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019

ritualistically established through male spirits. Ultimately, the adornment practice of wearing a ring to show dedication to the spirits connects Manbo Maude to male and female deities whether she has married them or not, binding her to the spirits who have the most impact on her life and religious communities.

I spoke with Manbo Maude in 2016 about her connection to Ezili Danto, and she recounted how she came to acquire a blue ritual dress that was made especially for the spirit. During a dream she had in the early days of her tenure as a Manbo, Danto came to her and sexually propositioned her. Manbo Maude reacted defensively, forcibly shoving her away. Following the dream, several strange misfortunes befell Manbo Maude, and her spiritual mother advised that the bad luck was the result of Danto feeling disrespected. Her spiritual mother prescribed performing a series of rituals to regain Danto's respect. Manbo Maude followed the instructions, and after performing the rituals, she encountered the deity in a second dream. In *nan dòmi*, Manbo Maude observed Ezili Danto in a stream, engaging in sex with Ezili Freda, goddess of love and sexuality. Manbo Maude became frightened upon seeing Danto's nakedness and witnessing the goddess' sexual intercourse. She remembered Danto's earlier sexual advances and wanted to flee, but she feared disrespecting Danto a second time and stood by the water, petrified. When Danto and Ezili Freda were done, Danto ascended from the water and approached Manbo Maude. The spirit spoke with compassion: "I know you are not that way, and I will not do those things to you, because I know you don't like it. I will never do that to you because I know you don't like that. But I need you to know that you are mine and you belong to me, so wear this dress."[187] Danto handed Manbo Maude a blue dress. When Manbo Maude awoke she remembered the dress and sought out fabrics that mirrored the appearance of the garment in the dream. She created an elegant blue dress for Danto that she wore during a ceremony. "She never came onto me that way again," Manbo Maude recalled, "I was blessed after that and I stopped having problems."[188]

[187] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019
[188] Manbo Maude, interview by Eziaku Nwokocha, phone interview, Jacmel, 13 February 2019

As previously discussed in relation to spiritual marriage, sex is a common means through which the spirits communicate with those devoted to them. Although Manbo Maude was not married to Ezili Danto, the offer of sex represented a possible avenue of connection and favor. When Manbo Maude indicated that she was not interested in sex, Danto shifted to another means of communication through fashion. The dress symbolized the nonsexual relationship between Danto and Manbo Maude, while still indicating their dedication to one another. This encounter illustrates the ongoing negotiation between spirits and practitioners within *nan dòmi* and the importance of fashion as a conduit for such conciliation. The dress was a ritual object that articulated Manbo Maude's relationship to the spirit and the spirit's connection to her. For Manbo Maude and Danto, clothing marked their mutual affection and commitment. The decision made *nan dòmi* had real consequences in Manbo Maude's religious practices, just as the rings offered to Joel in his dream established real world connections with the spirits. Both practitioners were blessed with good fortune when they appeased the demands of the deities in their dreams.

Spiritual marriage is a multisensorial practice that allows practitioners and spirits to communicate, creating religious commitments between the human and the divine. This commitment is reinforced through the direct, personal communication facilitated through avenues such as *nan dòmi* and sexual contact with the spirits. *Spiritual vogue* provides an analytical construct for examining this religious practice, especially in relation to the role of gender and its representations during ceremonies and through possession. Spiritual marriage relies on the interconnectedness of the spirits, the practitioners, and the audience in order to establish legitimate unions in Manbo Maude's home and in Vodou in general. The religious fashion and gender presentation involved in spiritual marriage extends beyond ceremonies into the everyday lives of practitioners, as social and cultural influences impact how the human body is perceived during possession in spiritual marriages.

# CONCLUSION

## *Dènye Panse: Last Thought*

Ezili Freda glanced at herself in her golden mirror. She patted her face to check her makeup and carefully adjusted her light pink head wrap. She looked pleased. Male practitioners surrounded her as she stood in the middle of the temple, waiting to be adorned with a pink *moushwa*. A man handed her a lace, ivory colored hand fan and she primly fanned herself, unbothered by the growing number of men serving her. She pulled on the fabric of her skirt admiringly and fussed with the ruffled collar of her blouse until it rested on her chest the right way. The dress was made specifically for her and she was content with the design. A man sprayed the side of her neck, her hands, and her bare feet with perfume. The body they adorned was Manbo Maude's, but the material offerings were for Freda. Once she was satisfied with her own adornment, Freda walked through the audience, blessing male practitioners with perfume. To some of the male practitioners in the room, Freda was an honored wife. To others, she was a valuable source of advice and luck in their romantic and professional lives. The mirror, the fan, the *moushwa*, and the perfume made Freda feel welcomed. She needed to check her appearance before engaging the audience and other practitioners. Her arrival in the physical plane was assisted by the presence of these necessary items of adornment. Without them, she would not have felt honored or wanted within the Vodou ceremony. Without them, her presence during the ceremony was not guaranteed.

Freda and other deities within Vodou demand material adornment through fashion and ritual items. Freda demands her mirror and fan; Danto demands her dagger; Kouzen demands his straw hat and *makout*; Gede demands his top hat and pipe; Ogou demands his sword. These items speak to the broader Vodou cosmology that is understood by practitioners, and also to the larger history and culture that birthed the religion. The deities ask their devotees for specific sartorial choices, which shows their *real presence* in the lives of practitioners, as well as the agency of the divine. Fashion is an integral factor in Manbo Maude's religious practices, and it

ties together the audience, the practitioners, and the spirits. Through the analytical framework of *spiritual vogue*, the importance of fashion in combination with these three interconnected elements can be explored as essential to the ritual practice of Vodou during ceremonies. *Spiritual vogue* emphasizes how fashion reinforces faith and religious tradition. This is not only true in Vodou, but in other African Diasporic religions as well, such as Candomble, Santeria, and Black Protestantism. *Spiritual vogue* illuminates the social and religious constructions that animate Vodou ceremonies, and Manbo Maude's ceremonies in particular. As a participant observer, I witnessed and helped the women in Manbo Maude's homes in Jacmel, Haiti and Mattapan, Massachusetts as they prepared for her ceremonies, applying makeup, fixing their hair and their head wraps, and donning elaborate dresses. The care they put into their appearances before ceremonies sparked my interest in the use of religious fashion and inspired the realization that fashion is a lens through which I can explore a host of issues in Vodou, including gender, race, sexuality, and economics. By focusing on fashion, I am able to investigate the ways people express their religion through their sartorial choices, through their senses, *nan dòmi*, and in their everyday lives.

This dissertation focused on fashion, the senses, and materiality. I center the role of African Diasporic people in Manbo Maude's temples because their journeys into Vodou highlight African Diasporic worldviews that are shaped by fashion, location, language, and heritage. Some of the practitioners I spoke with were drawn into Vodou because of the possibility of Black sisterhood, and others because they were honoring the religion of their ancestors. In the future, this work can expand to include more theorizing around the role of performance, critical race theory, and queer theory and how fashion interacts with these issues.

The case study of Manbo Maude emphasizes the role of money and labor within faith and religious communities. I center economics in Manbo Maude's temples because she is able to move ritual materials in between Jacmel and Mattapan, which impacts the fashion on display in her ceremonies and her ability to support members of her religious communities. As a working class Manbo with a job in the United States, Manbo Maude is able to outfit the divine, express her

faith, and communicate with the spirits through elaborate sartorial choices. There are many other issues to be explored in this realm, including the question of how economic means impact religious ritual and expression. I wrote repeatedly about how women in Manbo Maude's temples have to shoulder much of the cost of religious fashion, and how their sartorial choices draw the most attention from the audience and other practitioners. I also described the stylistic expectations placed on men, who press their clothes and make sure their hair and appearance are neat, but who are burdened by much less of the financial cost of spiritual fashion. This difference in expectation and cost is not an anomaly and exists outside of Manbo Maude's temples as well.

Gender is also an important factor to consider when analyzing possession. During possession, fashion facilitates the transgression of gender lines, yet the gendered bodies that are allowed fluidity in their expression are most often cisgender women who are commonly possessed by male and female spirits. During these possessions, gender performances take place, where women take on stereotypically male directness and aggression, which can be used to confront male community members over their poor behaviors within their spiritual and personal relationships. Based on my observations, gay men sometimes traverse these lines by being mounted by female spirits. Very occasionally, I have witnessed cisgender, heterosexual men being possessed by female spirits, but this is not the norm and the possessions usually last for a shorter period of time. As much as Vodou creates ruptures with the expectations surrounding gender and sexuality, many of the ceremonies still conform to traditional ideas about the roles of men and women, and these assumptions impact how possessions take place and who gets possessed by which spirits. These ruptures and traditions are evident during spiritual marriage ceremonies, when gender is both contradicted and reinforced. There is more work to be done exploring the experiences of practitioners in relation to their varying gender and sexual identities, including but not limited to transgender practitioners and masculine presenting women who refuse to wear religious dresses. I am aware that my exploration of possession has so far focused on able-bodied people who are young or middle aged. Broader work on Vodou, possession, and

disability studies could illuminate the physical demands of possession and the ways in which religious communities navigate them while prioritizing the safety of elderly and/or disabled practitioners.

Increasingly, Manbo Maude uses technology to expand her reputation as a Vodou practitioner in Mattapan and beyond. She connects to new practitioners through videos that have been uploaded on YouTube and Facebook, showcasing her work as a Manbo and educating people about Vodou in general. Some of the initiates in her home use Instagram and write blogs about their experiences in her spiritual home, and some have written dissertations and theses on her temples. These online platforms allow Manbo Maude to highlight her use of religious fashion. Manbo Maude explained to me that she used to grow her community through word of mouth, and that the internet has allowed her to expand in a multitude of ways, including through a simple Google search. The use of media and technology within African Diasporic religions is a topic worth further exploration. Manbo Maude's example offers proof that technology has the capacity to expand the reach of religious communities and practices into a broader African Diasporic population.

Manbo Maude is one thread in the broader tapestry in how we think about adornment decisions in African Diasporic religious traditions. Manbo Maude stitches together the divine, her practitioners and guests though a religious spectacle that not only honors the spirits, but emphasizes the unique experience of her home and the services she offers. In her home, all participants and the divine are invited to indulge in the elaborate sartorial display and to find a sense of community within Vodou.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* Balitimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Barnard, Malcolm. *Fashion Theory: A Reader.* London: Routledge, 2007.

Beauburn, Mimerose P. *Nan Domi: An Initiate's Journey into Haitian Vodou.* San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2013.

Blier, Susan. "Vodun: West African Roots of Vodun." In *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou,* edited by. Donald J. Cosentino. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995.

Bourguignon, Erika. "Dreams and dream interpretation in Haiti." *American Anthropologist*, 1954: 262-268.

Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priest in Brooklyn.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Brown, Vincent. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Camp, Stephanie M. H. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Casselberry, Judith. *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of a Gay Male World, 1890-1940.* New York: Basic Books, 2019.

Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti.* London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953.

Desmangles, Leslie. *The Faces of the Gods.* Chapel Hill and London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992.

Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: The story of the Haitian Revolution.* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

Dunham, Katherine. *Island Possessed.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969.

Edmonds, Barrington Ennis, and Michelle A. Gonzalez. *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2010.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Glover, Kaiama L. "Exploiting the Undead: The Usefulness of the Zombie in Haitian Literature." *Journal of Haitian Studies* , 2005: 11.2.

Hammond, Charlotte. “Decoding Dress: Vodou, Cloth and Colonial Resistance in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Haiti.” In *Vodou In the Haitian Experience: A Black Atlantic Perspective*, edited by Joseph L. Celucien and Nixon S. Cleophat. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016.

Hansen, Karen Tranberg. "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2004: 369-92.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Herskovits, Melville. *Myth of Negro Past.* Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958.

Higginbotham, Evelyn. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880-1920.* Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hume, Lynne. *The Religious Life of Dress: Global Fashion and Faith.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica.* New York City: Harper and Row Publishers, 1938.

James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins.* New York: Vintage Books, 1938.

Jesus, Aisha Beliso-De. *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* . New York: Columbia Press, 2015.

Johnson, E. Patrick and Mae G. Henderson. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005.

Johnson, Paul Christopher. *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.

Kelley, Robin D.G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class.* New York: Free Press, 1994.

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Museums, Tourism, and Heritage.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1998.

Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs. Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Matory, Lorand J. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005.

McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

McGee, Adam. "Dreaming in Haitian Vodou: Vouchsafe, Guide, and Source of Liturgical Novelty." *Journal of the Association for the Study of Dreams*, 2012: 83-100.

Michel, Claudine and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith. *Vodou in Haitian Life & Culture: Invisible Powers.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Miller, Monica. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity.* Durham: North Carolina University Press, 2009.

Mintz, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power.* New York: Viking, 1985.

Mintz, Sidney. "The Caribbean as a socio-cultural area." *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale X No. 4*, 1966: 912-937.

Morgan, David. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.

Ochoa, Marcia. *Queen for a Day: Transformista, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Venezuela Femininity.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Olupona, Jacob. *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions Volume 3 of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of Religious Quests.* New York: Crossroads Press, 2000.

Olupona, Jacob K. *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity.* New York and London: Routeldge Press, 2003.

Orsi, Robert. *History and Presence.* Cambridge: Massachusetts, 2016.

Pérez, Elizabeth. *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions.* New York: New York University Press, 2016.

Promey, Sally. *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice.* New Haven: Yale University, 2014.

Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2004.

René, Georges and Marilyn Houlberg, “My Double Mystical Marriages to Two Goddesses of Love: An Interview.” In *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou,* edited by D. J. Cosentino. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995.

Richman, Karen E. *Migration and Vodou.* Gainesville: University of Florida, 2005.

S., Melville Herskovits and Frances. *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom.* New York City: J.J. Augustin, 1938.

Sanders, Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula. *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Scott, Georgia. *Headwraps: A Global Journey.* New York: Public Affairs, 2003.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hideen Transcripts.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Sheller, Mimi. *Democracy After Slavery: Black Public and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.

Strongman, Roberto. *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomble, Santeria, and Vodou.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Taylor, Paul C. *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics.* Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy.* New York City: Random House, 1983.

Tinsely, Omise'eke Natasha. *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Tselos, Susan. “Dressing the Divine Horsemen: Clothing as Spirit Identification in Haitian Vodou.” In *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Linda B. Arthur. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000.

Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance.* New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1986.

White, Shane White and Graham. *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Wisenfield, Judith. *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration.* New York: New York University Press, 2016.