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Religion, Activism, & Social Change

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Black Femmes Black Gods: *Magic as Justice*

Marcelitte Failla, *Emory University*

Abstract

Conjure to poison the slave master, spells to protect from the police, and spiritual healing circles to grieve the homophobic and transphobic violence inflicted upon queer and trans communities are all part of why black femmes choose African-heritage religions. This essay explores the legacy of using magic for justice and healing and the subversive nature of black femmes' current use of these technologies. Through interviews with black femme practitioners and explorations of community spaces, such as the black-led healing collective Harriet's Apothecary in Brooklyn, New York, I examine what draws them to this religiosity, how it manifests in their everyday lives, and how it influences community organizing work. I argue that for many black femmes the act of healing through African-heritage religions is an act of resistance because it creates new definitions of self that counter homophobic and racist pre-established notions. An African religiosity acts as a conduit to this new concept of self because it reflects both blackness and queerness as sacred.

Keywords: Black Feminism, Magic, African Religions, Social Justice, Queer Studies.

After the June 2016 Pulse nightclub mass murder in Orlando, Florida, queer and trans people gathered in a community garden in Brooklyn, New York to light candles, read names, and share prayers in honour of the victims. Sage was passed throughout the circle as Adaku Utah, a black femme, stood in the middle and led us through a meditation. I sat there with my sister's hand in mine silently screaming in fear and anger over the homophobic violence that continues to threaten our communities. As I looked around at the familiar faces, I also felt deeply grateful for spaces like these that affirmed both my black and queer identity. It was made possible through a collaboration between the organization The Audre Lorde Project, which works for queer and trans people of colour, and the

all black-led healing collective Harriet's Apothecary. This day was one of many in a long legacy of black femmes using black magic for social change. African derived religions are used to actively combat oppression from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the prison industrial complex.¹ This resistance occurs in the form of knowing the herbs necessary to poison the slave master, creating spells to protect from the police, heal mental and physical wounds from the dehumanizing effects of racism, and by developing oaths of invincibility, as in the case of the Nat Turner Rebellion.²

I am interested in how queer femmes use magico-religious³ practices to subvert what bell hooks calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,"⁴ as exhibited both within secular and sacred realms. By sacred, I am referring to the dominant interpretation of Christian doctrine that produces a form of misogynoir⁵ by proclaiming and enforcing God as a white man to be feared and how black women and femmes have internalized this notion. In the secular realm, our identities as black, queer, and femme⁶ live at an intersection where we experience in varying degrees anti-blackness, femmephobia,⁷ homophobia, and/or transphobia. Through interviews with black femme practitioners of African-heritage religions and by delving into the spaces they create, I explore how these practices manifest as healing and resistance. I argue that healing, which I define as the forming of mental and emotional space to feel whole and tactical acts of subversion, is resistance for black femmes and allows us to continue the legacy of our ancestors' struggle in the fight against white supremacist necropolitical power. African-heritage religions, as a hybrid eclectic practice and religiosity used by both current femmes and those of the past, acts as a conduit because they affirm blackness and queerness as sacred.

I knew that in researching this paper, I wanted it to be an exchange between myself and other black femmes. As a member of many online occult spiritual groups and a known practitioner in my community of queer and trans people of colour, I am connected to black femmes who might be interested in discussing their spiritual practice. I sought out people who were spiritually involved and affiliated either directly or indirectly with social justice organizations

or cultural centers. I interviewed seven femmes either in person or via video calls and visited with and drew upon prior knowledge from my involvement with the discussed organizations. As mentioned, I am also a practitioner of an eclectic African hybrid spirituality. In Christian theological research, this shared belief between researcher and respondent is advocated for in the approach to ethnography.⁸ Similarly, I would argue that my relationship to my respondent's practice does not obscure my ability to study their engagement with it but widens the space for the interpretation of a modern growing spiritual and political consciousness.

In September 2016, *Broadly* published an article entitled "Jesus Hasn't Saved Us: The Young Black Women Returning to Ancestral Religions," written by Yomi Adegoke. In the article Adegoke asserts that black women are turning away from Christianity because of its colonial and white supremacist history and are instead turning to African-heritage religions. She argues that a shift in religious consciousness is the last step in decolonizing the black woman subject because it instills a black feminist sensibility that Christianity cannot hold. By adopting African-heritage religions, black women, and I would argue femmes, are healing from centuries of structural and internalized racism and misogyny.⁹ Social media provides another avenue through which we can analyze the turn to African-heritage religions. Bri Luna, most commonly known as The HoodWitch on Instagram, is an African descended woman who sells products and spreads awareness about the occult with a focus on African-heritage traditions, namely Vodou. Like Adegoke, Luna identifies a black feminist healing potential in African-heritage religions. She states, "As we move further away from patriarchal beliefs, traditions, and political systems, we're reclaiming parts of ourselves that have been suppressed, beaten down, and hidden throughout history." She continues, "In the past, if you were psychic, or even just more sensitive, society taught you to dismiss and suppress those feelings. Now, we're finally starting to move away from male-dominated beliefs that demand only hard facts."¹⁰ Luna has 366,000 followers on Instagram and has been featured on media outlets throughout the nation. But as Luna stated, the resurgence was not just about spirituality.

The height of the Black Lives Matter moment between 2013 and 2016 began with the brutal murder of 17-year-old Travon Martin. The acquittal of the killer, George Zimmerman, sparked protests around the nation and bolstered a greater consciousness surrounding black death and necropolitical power. At this moment, social justice organizations and individuals in the quiet of their bedroom, at the altar, or in the collaborative space of the kitchen table turned to an eclectic construction of indigenous American and African-heritage spirituality.¹¹ The relationship between growing political consciousness and a religious turn to African traditions as illustrated by Yomi Adegoke and *The HoodWitch* is not new and holds a long history of its development in the United States.

Throughout the 1960s we see an increase in followers of post-Euro Christian black religious movements,¹² such as the Nation of Islam and African North American religious cultures including Yoruba, Vodun, and Akan. This increase was primarily due to a growing political consciousness, the black power movement, black is beautiful, to name a few examples, and in response to the inability of Christianity to make blackness sacred. Despite the black Church's efforts to reinterpret the Bible in ways that affirmed a people who had survived chattel slavery (that is, understanding the Exodus as freedom from captivity),¹³ it did not give them a past or a land to contextualize their history. A black religious consciousness allowed people to ask: "what would our lives be like if slavery had not existed?" And it created symbols that validated blackness as sacred, creating new origin stories and definitions of a black-self. Embarking on this spiritual journey was healing for many black people because it re-established a connection to the earth, reflected God in their own image, built community and petitioned deities that offered immediate results to earthly concerns.¹⁴ African-heritage religions, such as Yoruba Orisha traditions, may have been newly introduced to black power movements of the 1960s but African-Americans of the South in the slavery and Jim Crow eras were aware of the use of African-derived magico-religiosity for change intimately, namely conjure.

In conjunction with the efficacy of the spell, the practice of hoodoo, also commonly referred to as conjure, gave enslaved people a sense of control in an uncontrollable environment. Hoodoo manifested in the US South as a magical practice that harnessed energies through materials that hold metaphoric and metonymic significance used to produce the desired result. For example, red pepper is used to heat a situation, rose to bring love, chamomile for luck, or a horseshoe for protection. Hoodoo is not religiously specific; a practitioner can employ conjure practices alongside Christianity or Vodou as they worship Christ or the *Loa*. Yvonne Chireau tells a typical story of an enslaved woman who resisted forced servitude with conjure: “A conjurer once gave a bondwoman he knew a special ‘bag of sand’ to keep her cruel master from whipping her. ‘Dat same day,’ he noted, ‘she got too uppity and sass de massa, cause she feel safe.’”¹⁵ The possession of such an object gave its owner a sense of empowerment in the face of dehumanization.

Magical practices were not only used in individual cases but also in mobilized uprisings, as in the case of the Nat Turner Rebellion and the New York Conspiracy of 1712. The New York Conspiracy was made up of Native Americans and blacks who, after experiencing the particular hardships of slavery, decided to “destroy all the whites in town.”¹⁶ The conspirators burnt down a significant building and as they fled, killed nine white people. Eventually prosecuted, all thirty-nine members were sentenced to death. What is particularly relevant is before they embarked on the uprising, they took an oath with an African conjurer. Oath taking is an ancient African practice that connects participants by ensuring protection from the spirit realm and giving power and strength to its initiates. A broken oath meant the spirits or gods could punish members. Its primary use was as a mobilizing tool in times of war. In the New York Conspiracy, it “involved a ritual in which blood was drawn and shared among members by sucking [...] of each other’s hands [...] The conspirators were bound together by the act, having sealed a covenant between themselves and the invisible forces of the supernatural world.”¹⁷

In the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831, it was said Turner himself possessed divination and prophetic capabilities, leading some historians to believe that “religion and magic sustained Nat Turner’s rebellion.”¹⁸ According to another commentator, “he traced his divination in characters of blood, on leaves, alone in the woods; he would arrange them in some conspicuous place, have a dream telling him of the circumstance [...] and he would interpret their meaning [...] by means of this nature, he acquired an immense influence, over such persons he took into his confidence.”¹⁹ The uprising resulted in the death of fifty-five whites in Southampton County, Virginia and instilled fear in slave owners leading up to the civil war. It should come as no surprise that African derived practices were occurring as the majority of Africans in the mainland were untouched by Christianity until the early eighteenth century, and retained much of the African religious beliefs that impacted how African Americans conceived of justice.²⁰

Coming into the Jim Crow era, blacks used conjure to fight discriminatory de-facto and de-jure practices. In Zora Neale Hurston’s research in the American South on hoodoo, she collected many spells explicitly created for protection from the police. One spell called for the root High John the Conquer, an old razor, and graveyard dust and was designed to keep the police from entering your home. Items used in this spell contain material that has been passed down for centuries with particular objects used for symbolic purposes. A rabbit’s foot or the highly sought-after bone of a black cat, for example, endowed a practitioner with great power.²¹ Hurston’s collection “Hoodoo in America” was produced in the 1930s during prohibition and while Jim Crow laws were in full effect. Protection from the police was a matter of survival for most black southerners and survival is an act of resistance.

Nat Turner’s Rebellion, the woman who “sass de massa, cause she feel safe,”²² and the black femmes who I will discuss, are engaging with different levels of violence and immediate threats to their bodies, yet are all subverting anti-black necropolitical power. Whether the act of subversion has lasting results or is but a halting “No!” to

systems of control, it breaks an illusion and disrupts exploitative normality.²³ These disruptions are healing for black communities because they affirm that the cyclical pattern of white supremacist patriarchal power is but a construction and any pain or discomfort one experiences is legitimate. Healing for black femmes can look like poisoning the slave master or meditating on self-love, and through their affirmation of blackness are acts of resistance.

Nia, who I met at a retreat for people of colour in Austin Texas, is a 26-year-old practitioner of the Yoruba based religion *Ifá* or *Orisha*.²⁴ She echoes the connection between the political and spiritual and argues that ethics of justice are integrated into the religion of *Ifá*:

What I like about *Ifá* is it is not this space of rose-coloured glasses. And even in the stories of the *Orishas*, these are stories about how humans and gods with human characteristics move from low vibrations to higher vibrations. There is a way in which marginalized people have the tools to manifest their destiny and their joy. There have been hardships that black people have fought and gone through and the spiritual practice akin to it has provided a space of self-determination and empowerment. You can be angry and still be spiritual, and that anger is a religious practice.²⁵

What I would presume Nia is referring to when she says “*Ifá* is not a space of rose-coloured glasses” is the ethics of justice constructed by African-Americans in their remembering of Yoruba religiosity. The *Orisha* tradition prescribes that the ultimate achievement of human life is to obtain *Iwa Pele* or gentle character by demonstrating honesty, integrity, compassion, and empathy, among other characteristics.²⁶ While *Iwa Pele* is fundamental to the religion, there does not exist the same dualistic binary notions of good and evil as is commonly understood in Christianity. African traditions understand energy as neutral and dependent on the practitioner. When these religions were employed within the brutal conditions of slavery the ethics of

using the powers for justice became unquestionable and necessarily adapted to their environment. Albert Raboteau has observed that in the American black diaspora, “the primary categories were not good and evil but security and danger.”²⁷ For Nia and other black femmes like her, this magico-religiosity is a source of power where rage can be harnessed and used towards productive ends.

The subversive healing nature of black femmes’ use of African-heritage religions is not only in resistance to white supremacy but also in its queer characteristics and applications. My respondent Nia adopted *Ifá* because within it she found queerness represented in the *Orishas* and amongst the practitioners. As a queer person and previously a member of a Christian church, she quickly realized that her church was not supportive of members of the LGBTQ community. She left the church but still yearned for a spiritual space. In her mid-20s she committed to *Ifá* and has been a practitioner since. She explains:

I come to this practice in a way that embraces queerness. It encompasses an expansive identity politic and broad love practice. When I hear about homophobia and *Ifá* throughout the diaspora, I always raise my eyebrow because I know that that was a construction of people and not from the energies themselves. In fact in multiple stories, you can see how masculine and feminine energies move through the *Orishas*, and you can see that even more in the people that embody those different deities. Queerness for me is about expansiveness and allowing others to be expansive about their identity politic in ways that do not set limitations.²⁸

The expansive queer politic, gender variety, and fluidity in sexual preferences that Nia was drawn to are not just reflected in but are crucial to African pre-colonial religiosity and communal life. In *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, Randy P. Conner and David Hatfield Sparks cite the Azande women who are from what is now the northern Democratic Republic of Congo, southwestern Sudan,

and the southeastern corner of the Central African Republic. They practiced a form of woman-woman or woman-transgender marriage which was thought to double the female power and was feared by most men. The Azande engaged in magical practices associated with witchcraft and were linked to the *adandara*, a supernatural wildcat. In folklore, it was believed that their lovemaking would lead to the birth of cat people.²⁹ Malidoma Somé, a West African writer and spiritual leader, notes that same-sex loving and transgender Dagara people of Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo, and Burkina Faso are known to be gatekeepers between the spirit and earth realms. He describes them as bridging this world and the other world and as people who “experience a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher and different, from the one a [heterosexual] person would experience.”³⁰ Every year among the Dagara, transgender and same-sex loving people would assemble apart from others and perform a ritual that was essential for the survival of the community.³¹

African gods also exhibit gender and sexual complexities. In the Fon/Dahomean influenced tradition of Vodou, divine beings are referred to as *Loa*. Ezili is a *Loa* who takes many forms, and as Ezili Freda she is associated with love, beauty, and sensuality similar to the Yoruba deity Oshun. Like Oshun, she has a special relationship with feminine gay men and is their patron spirit. As Ezili Lasryenn, she is a beautiful mermaid with long flowing hair and is the *Loa* of the sea. Like Freda, she rules love, but hers is in the form of maternal love, closely resembling the Yoruba *Orisha*, Yemoja. Lasryenn has a male partner but also a female or intersex companion Labalen. When intersex, Labalen is a whale, and as a woman, she represents fertility, maternal compassion, and receptivity. Many Vodou practitioners say that the two “always walk together” and that “Labalen often manifests as a lesbian being when she possesses a female devotee.”³² For black femmes, knowing that the gods of our ancestral background reflect the queer love practices of our lives is a form of affirmation. The femininity embedded in these deities is not a cite of shame or weakness, as claimed in Western patriarchy, but a source of power.

For many, to be femme means to be in touch with the deepest parts of ourselves, the vulnerable, the intuitive. This intuitive voice is what supports the erotic in Audre Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." She asserts it is the voice that proclaims, "It feels right to me' [...] acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge."³³ To have access to that part of ourselves, regardless of gender identity, is a source of power, often harnessed through spirituality.

For Sam, a 27-year-old reproductive justice organizer, her spiritual practice is an expression of her queer femme identity. Sam explains:

Femme-ness is defining my brand of womanhood, outside of what society thinks I should be. Being femme also implies self-acceptance of the emotional spectrum I go through on a day-to-day basis. I allow myself to feel all of the feels and actively choose to work through my issues with anxiety, insecurity, trust, and vulnerability. What is femme about my spiritual practice is that it allows me to be present in whatever emotional position I am in. It helps me figure out my emotional boundaries and triggers as well as helps me have much-needed honest conversations with myself.³⁴

This practice for Sam includes daily meditation, journaling, and the use of items such as crystals and the cleansing smoke Palo Santo. In these quiet moments of reflection and presence, she can more fully understand her emotional landscape and heal from the daily assaults, directly and indirectly, made on black femme bodies. Sam remarked that without her spiritual practice she would not have been grounded enough to successfully organize for equal access to abortion, conduct sex education workshops, and lead as the co-chair of a sex advocacy group. She asserts that "My spirituality is what is

helping me emotionally and spiritually survive in a world that doesn't want me to be here.”³⁵ For Sam and many black femmes like her, meditation, connecting to ancestors, and forming relationships with black gods is an internal act of resistance. It is the space that promotes self-love when we are conditioned to hate ourselves. The space that allows for the erotic knowledge to come forth which transfers, as it does for Sam, to the material, secular realm. As Lorde so profoundly states, “Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.”³⁶ In New York, there are two spaces that I want to draw our attention to that took on this call to create change out of the erotic.

Casa Atabex Ache, located in a basement in the Mott Haven neighborhood in the Bronx, was started in 1995 by three women who saw a need for physical healing and mental and emotional support for black and Latina women of the South Bronx. Through a peer group program to support youth, workshops on reproductive rights, and their monthly healing circles, Casa helped women through domestic violence, mental health concerns, and family relations. Casa was grounded in the knowledge that a mixture of suffering from discrimination and not receiving the appropriate resources due to class, race, and gender disparities often becomes internalized as low self-acceptance, distress, physical health problems, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. The healing circles mirrored much of what my respondents mentioned. Members used items such as sage and Florida Water to spiritually cleanse the space, group meditation that encouraged participants to connect with their spirit guides, and massage to move energy out of the body. After this process of release, participants would claim what affirming energy they wished to fill themselves up with. For example, if you let go of grief, you might want to fill up with joy. Casa's reach was broad in New York City, encouraging many to engage spiritual healing, a process that is profoundly political and subversive in its reclamation of indigenous and African religions and its employment to transform the inner and outer lives of women of colour.

In 2006 Alicia, a black femme astrologer and healer, and I became members of Casa Atabex Ache. Although many years had passed, Casa had a lasting impact on us. I asked her about what she appreciated about the rituals, to which she expressed the joy of seeing African spirituality represented: “Having a space where our spiritualities are featured conveyed that this is not foreign. There is a place for you. This is for you. It’s a terrible fact that you had to hide your altars or put faces on top of specific goddesses so you could worship in peace and not get potentially killed.”³⁷ The violence, shame, and stigma inflicted upon those who openly practiced African-derived religions by Christian missionaries are present in the current generations.³⁸ For Alicia, having space to openly explore and learn about the methods of her ancestors was a liberatory experience. She was able to help heal her internal landscape while reclaiming African-heritage religious traditions that were violently repressed, which, as an act of remembering, is a subversive opposition to dominant Christian religious doctrine.

Casa’s legacy has also paved the way for the creations of other spiritual, social justice oriented collectives. One such community is Harriet’s Apothecary, started in 2014 in Brooklyn, New York, by black femme Adaku Utah. Harriet’s Apothecary expanded on Casa’s politic by reflecting the expansive gender and sexual variance of African gods. They are an all-black-led community of cis women, trans and gender non-conforming people who, according to their mission statement, are “committed to co-creating accessible, affordable, liberatory, all-body loving, all-gender honoring, community healing spaces that recognize, inspire, and deepen the healing genius of people who identify as black, indigenous and people of colour and the allies that love us.”³⁹ Utah discusses the collective’s dedication to social justice: “I am working with movement building and social justice organizers to create different kinds of change.”⁴⁰ Heavily rooted in queer communities of colour in the fight against oppression, they work with social justice organizations such as the Audre Lorde Project, a community organizing space that “though mobilization, education, and capacity-building [...] works for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice”⁴¹ for lesbian, gay, bisexual,

trans, two-spirit and gender-non-conforming people of colour in New York City. Utah also discusses Harriet's Apothecary's social justice framework within the context of a legacy of black magic and resistance: "A part of why Harriet's Apothecary exists is to illuminate how our ancestors utilized indigenous practices as a tool of survival."⁴² In their two-day seasonal gatherings, they offer workshops and handmade merchandise that incorporate African belief systems and practices as well as a variety of other spiritual modalities.

As black femmes seek healing, we undo racist, sexist, and homophobic understandings of self, which I argue is an act of subversion. African-heritage religions act as a medium for this undoing to occur because they reflect identities of gender and sexuality that are firmly rooted in the expressions of and relational configurations of our ancestors. Out of this whole self that spaces like Casa Atabex Ache and Harriet's Apothecary promote, we can "pursue genuine change within our world,"⁴³ as Lorde asserts. Historically and currently, African-heritage religions are used in movements for justice, such as the case of conjure in slave uprisings. Black femmes employing these technologies for healing purposes are utilizing these technologies as acts of resistance. As my respondent Alicia echoed: "Spirituality is not just for holding hands and hoping things work out [...] In a world where black people are murdered in the street and the prison pipeline, this is a tool if you know how to use it right. Let's talk about the reality of why we do these things. It's not just for fairy dust."⁴⁴ The anger, frustration, and sadness of black femmes are being transformed into spaces of survival, as large as Casa Atabex Ache or as quiet as tarot readings between friends. I believe what is most significant about these practices is the capacity for embodied power. It is a power in the knowledge that one is supported by their ancestors, that there is a quiet place for stillness and reflection when it is too much, and that by coming together, movements can be formed.

Notes

- 1 See Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion, and Black Radicalism* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1973).
- 2 See Yvonne Patricia Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
- 3 I use the terms black magic and African-heritage religions interchangeably because as Yvonne Chireau contends, “African American ‘religion’ is not always distinct from what others call ‘magic.’ Instead, these are complementary categories, and they have historically exhibited complementary forms in African American culture,” (Chireau, *Black Magic*, 4).
- 4 bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2005), 17.
- 5 A term coined by queer black feminist Moya Bailey to connote the dual discrimination black women face due to race and gender. I am interpreting this term in the context of this paper to include all femmes.
- 6 Femme is a queer-specific gender identity that is not attached to biologically based gender assignments. For the paper, I have chosen to focus on femme identified people to explore these religious traditions in conversation with femininity. A more extensive study would include women/trans and gender non-conforming people who identify as masculine or look at misogyny more broadly.
- 7 The fear and hatred of femme identified people and all things commonly associated with the feminine, such as vulnerability, submission, beauty, sensuality, and so on. I believe all black femmes, whether trans, gender nonconforming, cis or nonbinary, experience femmephobia in varying degrees.
- 8 In the essay “Where is your Church?,” John Swinton argues that “choosing to use certain methods over and against others already implies a philosophical and epistemological positioning and [...] an implicit or explicit theological position.” This choice impacts how data is analyzed, the way research is constructed, the way it is presented, and which audiences are interested in the work. In efforts to dissolve the biases of the scholar (prejudices that often hold racist, sexist, homophobic and classist assumptions), phenomenology was developed to assist the researcher in bracketing said beliefs and to describe the phenomenon purely. To this methodology, Swinton critically asks “But how and why would a Christian ethnographer desire to bracket off her beliefs? Why would she be comfortable with a phenomenological worldview that excludes theology as an interpretative category?” (John Swinton, “Where Is Your Church?,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 79).
- 9 Yomi Adegoke, “Jesus Hasn’t Saved Us: The Young Black Women Returning to Ancestral Religions.” *Broadly*, September 13, 2016, accessed December

- 14, 2018. https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/bjgxx4/jesus-hasnt-saved-us-young-black-women-returning-ancestral-religions.
- 10 Linda Yang, "Not Your White Witch: The HoodWitch Is Taking Mysticism Back To Its African Roots." *Broadly*, February 9, 2018, accessed December 14, 2018. https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/mb5gja/the-hoodwitch-is-changing-the-face-of-modern-witchcraft.
- 11 See: "Harriet's Apothecary," accessed December 14, 2018. <http://www.harrietsapothecary.com/>.
- 12 A term coined by Dr. Dianne Stewart to connote African-heritage religious movements post-mass Christian conversion.
- 13 See Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 14 Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 1-120.
- 15 Chireau, *Black Magic*, 33.
- 16 Idem., 61.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Idem., 64.
- 19 Idem., 64.
- 20 Idem., 57.
- 21 Idem, 48.
- 22 Idem., 33.
- 23 I am thinking of Walter Benjamin's discussion of mythic and divine violence as it applies to black femmes. See Benjamin, Walter, and Peter Demetz. "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 277-301.
- 24 I use the terms *Orisha* and *Ifá* interchangeably to refer to post 1960s Yoruba religious movements of the African diaspora. *Ifá* has many meanings depending on the community of practitioners including the *Orisha* Orunmila, the divination system and is widely used to refer to the religion itself. See N. Fadeke Castor. *Spiritual Citizenship. Transnational Pathways from Black Power to Ifá in Trinidad* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 25 All names are pseudonyms. Nia, personal interview, August 14, 2016.
- 26 Gathered from conversations with the *Iya Olorisha* (*Ifá* priestess) Omolewa Eniolovwnopa.
- 27 Chireau, *Black Magic*, 75.
- 28 Nia, personal interview, August 14, 2016.
- 29 Evans-Pritchard, quoted in Randy P. Conner and David Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African-Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 35.
- 30 Hoff, quoted in in Conner and Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, 40.

- 31 Hoff, quoted in Conner and Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, 42.
- 32 Conner and Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, 60.
- 33 Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984), 56.
- 34 Sam, personal interview, August 17, 2016.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 59.
- 37 Alicia, personal interview, August 30, 2016.
- 38 For a study of the suppression of Vodou in Haiti, see Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).
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- 40 *Fieldworks: Adaku Utah, Harriet's Apothecary*, directed by A Blade of Grass, December 7, 2016, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/194716590>.
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- 43 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 59.
- 44 Alicia, personal interview, August 30, 2016.

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