

# **R**ITUAL OBJECTS

SPIRITS, HEALTH & DECOLONIZING THE STUDY OF  
AFRICAN POWER FIGURES

by

JENNY L. DAVISON

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2020

© Copyright by Jenny L. Davison, 2020

# Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Consecrating <i>Agbalegba</i> .....	1
1.2 Power Figures: Healing from Stigma.....	4
1.3 Chapter Overview .....	7
1.4 Literature Review & Theoretical Perspective .....	9
1.4.1 Power Figures Across the Atlantic .....	9
1.4.2 Challenging Stigmatization .....	11
1.4.2.1 Traditional Religion.....	11
1.4.2.2 Traditional Medicine.....	12
1.4.3 Tradition in Modernity .....	15
1.4.4 Interpretivism in the Decolonization of Power Figures.....	18
Chapter Two: Methods .....	21
2.1 Overview .....	21
2.2 Figure .....	22
2.3 Medicines .....	24
2.4 Spirit.....	28
2.5 A Note on Referencing.....	30
2.6 Contributions.....	30
Chapter Three: An Assemblage of Power Figures .....	31
3.1 From Africa.....	31
3.1.1 <i>Agbalegba</i> .....	31
3.1.2 <i>Minkisi</i> .....	33
3.1.3 <i>Bocio</i> .....	36
3.2 From the Diaspora.....	38
3.2.1 <i>Pakèt Kongo</i> .....	38

3.2.2 <i>Voodoo Doll</i> .....	41
3.2.3 <i>Mojo Bag (Mojo Hand)</i> .....	43
Chapter Four: The Figure.....	46
4.1 Access & Acquisition.....	46
4.2 Availability of Materials .....	50
4.3 Personalizing Power in Off-The-Rack Rituals.....	51
4.4 On Display: Museums vs. Botánicas.....	53
4.4.1 Etic vs. Emic Descriptions.....	53
4.4.2 Pockmarks in the Plexiglas.....	57
Chapter Five: The Medicines.....	75
5.1 A Selection of Medicinal Ingredients in Power Figures .....	77
5.2 Availability, Substitution, and Syncretism.....	87
5.3 Traditional vs. Biomedical Interpretations.....	89
5.4 Local Conceptualizations of Disease, Disconnects, and Impact on Patients .....	95
5.5 “‘Voodoo’ Death” & The Placebo Taboo .....	103
Chapter Six: The Spirit .....	111
6.1 The <i>Voodoo Doll</i> & Assumptions of Evil .....	112
6.2 The Devil’s Music.....	117
6.3 Ritualists’ Responses.....	125
6.4 The Spirit of the Law: <i>Obeah</i> on Trial.....	129
6.4.1 Laws Against <i>Obeah</i> .....	131
6.4.2 The <i>Obeah</i> Man Trial .....	136
Chapter Seven: Conclusions .....	144
7.1 <i>Manbos</i> , Motherboards, and “Modernity” .....	144
7.2 Navigational Difficulties.....	146
7.3 Power Figures: United in the Face of Stigma .....	147
References.....	154

## List of Tables

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.....	79
Table 2: Value-laden and derogatory terms used to describe power figures, associated spirits and traditions.....	116

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Recorded intents of power figures studied in this data set .....	54
Figure 2: The biomedical view of healing .....	90
Figure 3: Healing within the worldview of traditional medicine.....	93
Illustration 1: Datrefonyo holds a severed squirrel’s tail .....	3
Illustration 2: The contents of my <i>agbalegba</i> coffin.....	3
Illustration 3: Datrefonyo sprinkles a white powder atop the coffin .....	4
Illustration 4: An <i>agbalegba</i> coffin that is in the possession of Dr. Jonathan Roberts .....	31
Illustration 5: Contents of the <i>agbalegba</i> coffin pictured in Illus. 4.....	32
Illustration 6: <i>Power Figure: Male (Nkisi)</i> , item 1979.206.127, a Kongo <i>nkisi</i> figure .....	33
Illustration 7: <i>Power Object, Nkisi</i> , item 1935.001.015, composed by the Songye people.....	34
Illustration 8: A <i>bocio</i> figure from the Fon people of Benin.....	36
Illustration 9: A <i>pakèt kongo</i> for Papa Legba, made by ritualist Gaston Jean-Baptiste.....	38
Illustration 10: <i>Nkisi Mumba Mbondo</i> .....	39
Illustration 11: <i>Nkisi Maziolo</i> .....	39
Illustration 12: A ritual kit advertised by ritual shop Voodoo Authentica.....	41
Illustration 13: Perfumes on the shelf at Original Products Botanica.....	47
Illustration 14: Coyote tails, clay pots, shells, etc. for sale at Original Products .....	47
Illustration 15: A syncretic figurine depicting Jesus on the cross, surrounded by seven <i>orishas</i> .....	48
Illustration 16: A diverse array of incense .....	48

Illustration 17: Oils for a variety of purposes .....	48
Illustration 18: An unfinished <i>agbalegba</i> coffin containing a plastic doll.....	50
Illustration 19: A bocio figure created by the Fon people of Benin, dubbed by Jacques Kerchache <i>Chariot of Death</i> .....	60
Illustration 20: “Medicine dolls” (YPM ANT 250242), bloodstained fabric over a stick armature .....	62
Illustration 21: <i>Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe</i> (item A065) created by ritualist Manmi Maude (Marie Maude Evans) .....	63
Illustration 22: <i>Power Object, Nkisi</i> (item 1935.001.006), fashioned by the Songye people.....	65
Illustration 23: Pendant (item YPM ANT 009815), stolen from the neck of a chief.....	65
Illustration 24: Horseshoes and iron railroad nails for sale at Original Products Botanica.....	78
Illustration 25: Watchover Voodoo’s <i>Voodoo Pirate</i> doll.....	113
Illustration 26: <i>Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume</i> , sold on HalloweenCostumes.com .....	115

## Abstract

Composite ritual power objects are used throughout West and Central Africa and across the Black Atlantic. These sacred objects are composed of a material figure, medicines, and spirit power, and can be constructed to perform a variety of functions from generating luck or love to warding off illness or seeking revenge. As part of the material culture of holistic healing in African and Disaporic traditional religions, these figures act as important objects within traditional medical systems. However, they, like the traditions of which they are a part, have long met with stigma in the West, being outlawed, destroyed, demeaned, and dismissed by those who thought them heretical, barbaric, irrational, and unmodern. Western assumptions have tended to interpret power figures and their traditions according to Western categories of what constitutes art, religion, and medicine, leading to flawed and incomplete representations by outsiders. This study reveals that all aspects of power figures – from the physical figures, to the medicines, and the spirits – have been subjected to the same stigma. Through object and content analysis of these sacred objects, their ingredients, and their records in museums, art galleries, popular culture, public discourse, and legal documentation, and also in *botánicas*, ritual shops, and ritualists' blogs, this work aims to produce a decolonized study of these sacred objects – one that attempts as much as possible to see these figures and their power on their own terms – while also providing insight into what these objects can teach us about how we might heal.

## Chapter One: Introduction

...Africans know not the soul and matter but just a human being – it is the whole person who suffers. (Koenane 2014: 364)

### 1.1 Consecrating *Agbalegba*

Datrefonyo<sup>1</sup> met us at a small, single-roomed dwelling in a fishing village in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. He was a ritualist, a petite but solid man with short-cropped white hair, suggesting he was perhaps in his sixties. He was pleasant and obliging. I had been told that, from him, I could acquire a powerful figure used to enact revenge on someone who has wronged you, a figure with the power to kill. The concrete-walled structure was lit with daylight through a tarp stretched over a skeleton of rough boards. A shirt hung on a hook on the wall, flanked on one side by a line on which hung a bath towel. On the other, the wall was marked with lines in white chalk as if the inhabitant had been counting something. Wooden benches stood off to the sides facing a small table at the centre of the room, on which Datrefonyo had placed a small wooden coffin. I was accompanied by my friend, Nyaanyo, who acted today as my guide and translator. It was my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I had come to see the ritual consecration of *agbalegba*.

I had first come across the figures in an undergraduate class. I was fascinated by the interesting conglomeration of objects – a humanoid figurine carved from wood, a mixture of herbs, pieces of rope, scraps of cloth, money, and a variety of other items gathered together and placed in a miniature wooden coffin. The practice is in many ways a subversion of Ga funerary customs; and many of the inclusions are symbolic of actual practices used to prepare a dead body for burial (Roberts 2011). My interest in these figures had brought me here, to Datrefonyo's workshop, where countless others came for this and other rituals; but instead of my motivation for seeking out this form of *agbalegba* being revenge or social rectification, I had come out of fascination.

---

<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed for the sake of privacy.



Datrefonyo was aware that what he performed for me would be a demonstration. We would not be killing anyone that day. As such, portions of the ritual, like the invocation of powerful malevolent spirits and the inclusion of the ingredients to tie the charm to a particular victim, were omitted. Even so, Datrefonyo sometimes seemed nervous to proceed.

First, Datrefonyo poured libations from a calabash gourd onto the ground next to the coffin. The coffin was open, its sole inhabitant then a simple genderless wooden figure, its plain carved features staring emotionlessly up at the tarped roof. This figure represented the target of the curse, the victim it was designed to kill.

Once the ancestors had been acknowledged, Datrefonyo produced a selection of items to be included within the *agbalegba* coffin. He held up a piece of cloth, pointing out some rust-colored stains. *Otofo mama*, he told me, cloth from someone who has died, especially someone who died a violent death. The cloth calls forth the forces of such misfortunate spirits, presumably angry and resentful of their death, and directs their attention to the curse. He tore a strip of the cloth, removed the small figurine from the coffin and wrapped the cloth around it. He then placed it back inside its tomb.

Next Datrefonyo picked up a piece of white paper, representing purity, and wrote seven names on it. They were the names, he said, of prominent Ga ancestors. The paper would act as a message that the spirit of the dead person would take into the land of the dead and pass on to those who had come before them, telling the ancestors how their descendants were faring in this world.

From a small, black bag, Datrefonyo took out two items: a bundle of rope and a curved animal tail. He cut a piece from the rope, explaining that its purpose was to bind the curse to the victim. The severed squirrel's tail, he said, lopping a piece off the end, was to quicken the curse, allowing it to carry out its duty more swiftly. The squirrel, after all, is a fast animal. This reminded me of the inclusion of mongoose claws in Congo *minkisi* figures, so the power figure might snatch its prey (Macgaffey 1988: 194), as well as other such symbolic medicinal inclusions in African and Diasporic power figures. (For crocodile heads and other faunal ingredients in Beninese and Togolese *bocio*, see Blier 2011a; for the inclusion of rabbit feet in



Illustration 1: Datrefonyo holds a severed squirrel's tail, a piece of which was incorporated into my *agbalegba* coffin. (All photographs and sketches in this thesis are the work of the author.)

there, the goddess of the sea, and Sakumo, the god of war, and so too was Korle, the goddess of the local lagoon. He completed the list with six others. Nine, Datrefonyo said, because that is the number of orifices in the human (male) body, the ritual connected to science and biology. He also said that the number of gods named must be an odd number, though he didn't say why. We didn't include the exuviae, hair or fingernails for example, of a person we wished to kill.

As Datrefonyo placed the final item in the coffin, he paused, visibly nervous. "I could chant," he said. Though something in his voice told me he didn't want to. Nyaanyo and I exchanged a glance and shook our heads. Datrefonyo needn't go any further.

The ritualist closed the coffin.

*mojo bags* in New Orleans, see Original Products Botanica 2017; also see Chapter Three of this volume).

While the white paper represented purity and was used to connect with benevolent ancestors, the black piece of carbon paper Datrefonyo began writing on was much different. Black was used for malevolent acts, he told me, and the nine words he now wrote upon it were the names of Ga deities he wished to invoke. Nae was



Illustration 2: The contents of my *agbalegba* coffin, minus the squirrel tail which was confiscated at customs.



Illustration 3: Datrefonyo sprinkles a white powder (possibly cassava flour) atop the closed lid of the coffin.

Mentioning powder, he left the room and returned a moment later with his fingers covered in white dust. He sprinkled it atop the coffin's lid and held the small box to his lips.

This coffin, when it is buried, is connected to the earth, he said. There are four elements: earth, fire, water, and air. This, he said, indicating the powder, will help the curse to travel fast on the air, like this.

He blew and the powder curled into the air of the small room. While some of it took flight, some stayed resting atop the tiny box, a blanket of white over the contents within.

We didn't bury it in a graveyard. That is the final step. But I did go there and spoke with some gravediggers who paused in their work long enough to tell me that yes, people use these objects fairly frequently. They are buried in their cemetery a few times a week.

## 1.2 Power Figures: Healing from Stigma

Having repeatedly visited different health care providers, [Tamil refugees in northern Norway] often complain that they are not understood and are treated "as organs, rather than as persons" (Grønseth 2001: 507).

A ritual power figure contains three parts: First, it requires a container. This might be a carved wooden human or animal, a miniature coffin or a glass bottle, or a simple cloth bag drawn tight with a string. It could be decorated with feathers and shells, wrapped with rope, hung with adornments, or painted. Second, there are medicines, an assortment of herbs, animal parts, clays,

written words, and other ingredients that are added to the figure, giving it its power. Without these the power figure would be dead (MacGaffey 1977: 173). Third, the figure, consecrated by a ritualist, is further infused with the power of one or more spirits which are invoked by libations, incantations, or other means, and harnessed within the power figure for a particular intent.

Power figures come in various forms throughout West and Central Africa and across the Black Atlantic, their visages as diverse as the intents for which they are made and the people and traditions that inspire them. Despite their variety, all of these figures are created to heal a problem, whether physical (warding off or treating illness), social (attracting love or eliminating an enemy), or spiritual (banishing evil, protecting from malevolent spirits), and are vital components of traditional holistic systems of healing.

Power figures, however, do not fit well within Western-defined categories and are frequently interpreted inaccurately. This has led to various contortions and flawed portrayals, which often overemphasize menacing attributes of select power figures and fail to recognize the complexity of their roles as medical devices, contributing to the stigmatization and persecution of not only the figures, but of entire traditions and the people who practice them. This stigmatization is levied at many non-Western practices, punishment for not fitting the categories Westerners so fastidiously protect and proclaim true. It seems that no matter into what category African-derived traditional practices are placed, no matter what portion of them are looked at, they meet persecution at the hands of Westerners.

This study reveals that, despite Western tendencies to break things down into categories and deal with them separately under distinct disciplines, all aspects of power figures – from the physical figures, to the medicines, and the spirits – have all been subjected to the same stigma. Downcast as heathen and evil, power figures' physical bodies have suffered confiscation and destruction by missionaries. Once disempowered and considered dead relics, they faced misrepresentation in Western museums. The stigma levied against power figures' healing medicines slandered them as unscientific; their effects simply dummy placebos unless they could be found to please the biomedical model with consistent and measurable physical effects. This has resulted in alienation of non-Western patients in the healthcare system through doctors' resistance to holistic models of healing and dismissal of patients' broader mental and spiritual

concerns (Grønseth 2001). Stigmatization of the types of spirits drawn to power figures and the traditions that consecrate them has led to flawed and incomplete representations of power figures in media, pop culture, and public discourse, resulting in public slander and legal persecution of the figures and their human followers. That power figures persist and are still used by their people to heal the many aspects of their lives, even in the face of such scrutiny, is a marker of incredible resilience.

In following power figures, healers of a holistic world, we find stigmatization at every turn. This provides powerful insight into the impacts of Western biases on the lives of practitioners. If we are to decolonize power figures, we will need to examine how each aspect of their being has suffered from Western decrees of what modernity ought to look like. But the narratives levied against power figures and their traditions can be difficult to detect. They are insidious, woven into the very fabric of Western worldviews, the words used to describe these traditions coming to inform and infect the pictures in the minds of not just Westerners, but Africans too (Koenane 2014). Power figures are but one example of the West's aversion to things that do not fit its moulds, and the slanderous stories it tells to rob them of their power and undermine their legitimacy as answers to problems. Until we expose these narratives – and their ever-growing insidiousness makes this hard to do – we can't hope to shed them. But by shining a light on them, exposing them for what they are, and rejecting their version of the world, we might hope to see change.

Today, power figures within the scientific, secularized, and segmented Western worldview get dissected. Their containers become art, not of individual people but of vast places, with no function, only pretty faces. Their medicines get extracted, reduced to the chemical compounds they contain, cherished or discarded based on their performance on the biomedical stage. Their spirits are disparaged, labelled anything from savage and silly superstitions to evil or illegal acts; while whispers of stigma are used to excise them from figures and leave them dead, to convince practitioners to no longer believe or to feel shame and hide if they do, hopefully quarantining belief. But power figures must be taken as wholes to be considered at all. This alone is a lesson we might take from them. Unfortunately, the West's worship of categories has rendered biomedical public health fragmentary, with each genre of ailment barred off from the others – physical, mental, social, spiritual – many with powerful stigma attached. In such a

world, people too are left feeling fragmented, misunderstood, and misrepresented. It is therefore no small wonder that Westerners have for so long struggled with how to interpret a power figure. For a power figure cannot be torn asunder in such a way and still be called by its name. It is dead without its body, its medicines, its spirit. So are we. Power figures, then, in addition to mirroring the suffering of their practitioners at the hands of Western stigma, can also teach us something about how we might move forward. They provide a powerful example of holism in healing, and a valuable lesson in how, even from within academia itself, we might endeavor towards decolonization.

### **1.3 Chapter Overview**

Chapter One situates this thesis within a history of persecution of non-Western religions and healing traditions, including the othering of traditional practices inherent in the creation of the separate categories of religion and magic, as well as the assumptions of disenchantment that became disentagable from Western presumptions of modernity. The endurance of these narratives and the stigmatized contemporary climate they have formed, including the implications of this treatment for practitioners, will be introduced here and become further substantiated throughout the work. Chapter One will also establish the interpretivist perspective I have taken in this project, using power figures, vital and heavily stigmatized components of intricate worldviews, as keys to beginning to understand the people who use them and the impact of this systemic and pervasive stigma on practitioners' lives.

Chapter Two describes an overview of my methods which include object and content analysis, as I investigate what can be learned from power figures themselves and how they are represented etically (by outsiders to their traditions, like academics, museums, and art galleries) and emically (by insiders to their traditions, like ritualists, practitioners, and ritual shops). The three foci of this work are also established here. In fidelity to power figures, which cannot be considered fully, nor considered alive, without all three parts, this work too will ensure full consideration is given to each the material figure, the empowering medicines within, and the spirits and spiritual traditions with which they establish connection.

Chapter Three serves as a brief introduction to a selection of power figures from Africa and the Diaspora that are referenced in this work. This will help to familiarize the reader with their individual methods of construction, characteristics, intents and uses, what makes each distinct and different, and what links they share.

Chapter Four discusses the form of the power figure, the physical container and outward appearance of these devices and how they have been treated by Western concepts of modernity. Where to find the materials to construct power figures in international yet interconnected locations, the availability of these materials, adaptation and substitution of them, and the effects of mass production will all be discussed. Herein I analyze the differences between two common showcases for power figures – museums/art galleries and ritualists’ shops/botánicas – in how they portray these figures and the value and uses they ascribe to them. This chapter concludes with an investigation of the ways in which power figures have been misinterpreted and mistreated by Western exhibits and how decolonization might lead us toward truer representations.

Chapter Five explores the medicines within power figures. Here I present a limited selection of herbal, faunal, and manmade products that have been used in power figures both historically and today, and offer information about their availability and substitution in a world of globalization and internet communication. Chapter Five will also discuss the differences in the traditional and biomedical interpretations of these medicines and how disconnects between biomedicine and traditional conceptualizations of health and disease can impact patient wellbeing. Finally, the notions and implications of the “‘Voodoo’ Effect” (a concept explored by Walter B. Cannon in 1942 in an attempt to explain away documented cases of death following a patient’s belief they were cursed) and what I have termed the “Placebo Taboo” (biomedicine’s model for eliminating and slandering the inherent healing powers of the mind) will also be explored.

Chapter Six tackles the stigmatized treatment of the spirit of power figures in the West, including the deities themselves and the traditions and worldviews of which they are a part. Skewed Western perceptions of *Voodoo* dolls and assumptions of their evil intent will be considered, as well as the demonization of African- and African-American-rooted musical influences such as blues, often referred to as the “Devil’s music.” Chapter Six will also

investigate the codification of stigma into law, including the continued illegality of *Obeah* in Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, and the 2008 court case concerning a Canadian police operation in which an officer deliberately impersonated an *Obeah* ritualist to illicit confessions from suspects with Jamaican heritage.

Chapter Seven will consider some conclusions of our investigation and offer recommendations for how we might move forward.

## 1.4 Literature Review & Theoretical Perspective

### 1.4.1 Power Figures Across the Atlantic

Power figures of diverse types from West and Central Africa and throughout the Black Atlantic have been studied by numerous scholars (MacGaffey 1977, 1988, 1993 & 2000; Blier 1995 & 2011; Roberts 2011; Daniels 2013). Jonathan Roberts (2011) considered coffin-type *agbalegba* figures of the *Ga* people of Ghana, used for revenge, as subversions of traditional funerary practices. Wyatt MacGaffey (1977, 1988, 1993 & 2000) has written extensively on the *minkisi* figures of the *BaKongo* people of the former Kingdom of Kongo (today's Congo-Angola region), used for a variety of purposes, from protection to warding off illness and seeking revenge. Suzanne Preston Blier (1995) studied the protecting *bocio* figures of the *Fon* and *Ewe* people of Benin and Togo as examples of art. These objects all form an integral part of traditional methods for dealing with the physical, mental, and spiritual misfortunes of life, while reflecting local artistic conventions, botanical knowledge, and sacred worldviews.

During the transatlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, these figures, like the people who bore them, were taken to the New World, to places like Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, and the United States, where they mixed with Christianity and New World influences and re-emerged in new forms. In the Diasporic traditions of *Obeah*, *Vodou*, *Voodoo* and *Hoodoo*, power figures are still used today, though the forms they take represent a composite of their lives before slavery, during, and after, and into modernity. Far from only being able to



get one of these sacred objects by visiting a ritualist directly on the African continent, power figures pre-consecrated by ritualists can be readily purchased in ritual shops in the Caribbean and the United States, and even online.

The term Black Atlantic is used by Paul Gilroy (1993) to describe the culture that emerged around the Atlantic Ocean following the transatlantic slave trade, a syncretic creolization that was at the same time African, Caribbean, and American, and yet something entirely original. African roots (Kongo, Yoruba, Fon, Ewe, Ga) were evident in these traditions, but so too were a variety of New World influences, like Christianity and Native American healing, creating unique manifestations that responded dynamically to contemporary realities. As Mary Nooter Roberts noted of African and Diasporic art exhibitions that link the traditional and the contemporary, they present "...traditional forms and performances while demonstrating constant refabulation through contemporary diasporic heterotropias – that is, meaningful places that are not bound by geographical fixity, but determined by epistemological flows and networks of thought and communication" (2012: 6). The same can be said for cultural traditions of the Black Atlantic that remain as unbound by physical space as are ideas, and demonstrate a geographical fluidity that defies confinement to a set location.

The transnational links and porosity of borders expressed by Gilroy between traditions on the African continent and those throughout the Diaspora have also been noted among scholars of material culture. Kyrah Mikayla Daniels (2013) discusses the connections between Congolese *minkisi* and Haitian *pakèt kongo*, while Suzanne Preston Blier (2011b) links *Voodoo* dolls and *pakèt kongo* (1995) with Beninese/Togolese *bocio* figures. Less work has been published on *agbalegba*, something this study will seek to rectify through primary object analysis. It is important to note, however, that while certain ideas, intentions, and iconographic symbolism link these figures with others across the Atlantic, their differences must be emphasized. These figures come from different religions, countries, continents, tribal affiliations and ancestral connections. While they can be seen to be related, they are nonetheless each individual constructions that cannot be reduced to mere approximations of one another. Each power figure plays its own specific and sacred role within a highly specialized and dynamic tradition of healing (see Chapter Three).

## 1.4.2 Challenging Stigmatization

### 1.4.2.1 Traditional Religion

Despite their resilience, power figures, as part of traditional religion, have encountered stigma throughout history. Practitioners of what has been at times called magic, other times superstition, traditional religion, paganism, witchcraft, even heathenism, have often been forced underground as their practices were met with opposition, fear, disdain, and were sometimes even outlawed (Dirks 1997; Meyer 1998; McCarthy Brown 2001; Ramsey 2011; Boaz 2014; Connelly 2018).

What constitutes magic and what practices are believed to fall within that category have changed throughout history. A dominant pattern throughout colonialism was early missionaries, philosophers, and anthropologists who used such terms to denote whatever non-Western traditions were held by the peoples being colonized – allegedly heathen for their sin of difference – whom they believed it was the West’s mission to convert to Christianity and civilize in accordance with Western models ([Herber 1819 in] Tambiah 1990; MacGaffey 1993; [E.B. Tylor in] Josephson-Storm 2017). In the fifteenth century, *minkisi* figures were confiscated and destroyed by the masses by the newly converted Christian monarchy in *BaKongo* territory for fear such traditional practices would act as subversion to newly acquired Christianity and social order (Wyatt MacGaffey 1993: 30; see Chapter Six). By the Protestant Reformation, “magic” was used as a slanderous term to describe the Catholic sacrament of transubstantiation by Protestants who sought to contest their rival religion’s purity and legitimacy (Tambiah 1990:18; Muir 2005).

When Christian witch theory emerged between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries in some parts of Europe, it undercut earlier distinctions between healing white witchcraft and harming black witchcraft (or *maleficum*) and instead proclaimed that all witchcraft, good or bad in intent, was the product of a pact with Satan (Larner 1984: 3; Muir 2005). As Christina Larner said, “This meant that the village healer was as likely to be prosecuted as the local scold” (1984: 4; Lüdtke 2008). Thus, distinctions of intent were no longer made. To heal one’s neighbour or to poison him, all amounted to devilry. In Germany and

France, Christian witch theory was institutionalized. Laws were enacted to reflect its understanding of witchcraft, and the authorities were granted the power to prosecute offenders accordingly (Larner 1984: 4).

By the nineteenth century, evolutionary anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1861, 1865, 1871/1891, 1881) contended that human beliefs evolved from animism to polytheism to monotheism as societies ascended from primitivism to the rationalism of civilization. Tylor proclaimed that it was ethnography's objective "to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction" (Josephson-Storm [quoting E.B. Tylor] 2017: 99).

Western assumptions about everything from space and time to race, have been identified by Linda Tuhiwai Smith as part of the "'archive' of knowledge systems, rules and values" that are taken for granted as empirical truths by the West but in fact represent culturally-specific perspectives quite at odds with other worldviews (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 93; see also King 2002). In this way, terms like magic and superstition were used in what Tuhiwai Smith (2012) refers to as the "western archive" to denote anything that fell outside what authorities of a particular time sanctioned as official religion, science, or even medicine.

#### **1.4.2.2 Traditional Medicine**

In many West and Central African cultures, and in many traditions throughout the Black Atlantic, health and illness are not simply the result of physical factors; they are also influenced by relationships in society and with spirits (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Tabi et al. 2006; Daniels 2013; Moran-Thomas 2013; Koenane 2014; Adinkrah 2015; Kpobi & Swartz 2018). Regardless of whether power figures are created to attract love, ward off illness, grant protection, or enact revenge, they exist to heal problems, be they physical problems like disease, or social problems like vengeance.

Within West and Central African healing traditions, lingering illness is often thought to be the result of witchcraft. However, this does not mean that causality is not understood in these traditions. As E.E. Evans-Pritchard has shown in his work among the Central African Azande

people, what the Azande saw as witchcraft was not divorced from logic or empiricism; rather it emphasizes the *why* over the *how*.

In Zandeland sometimes an old granary collapses. There is nothing remarkable in this. Every Zande knows that termites eat the supports in course of time and that even the hardest woods decay after years of service... [I]t may happen that there are people sitting beneath the granary when it collapses... Now why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed? [...]. To our minds the only relationship between these two independently caused facts is their coincidence in time and space. We have no explanation of why the two chains of causation intersected at a certain time in a certain place...Zande philosophy can supply the missing link. The Zande knows that the supports were undermined by termites and that people were sitting beneath the granary in order to escape the heat and glare of the sun. But he knows besides why these two events occurred at a precisely similar moment in time and space... Witchcraft explains the coincidence of these two happenings. (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 69-70)

Despite Western scholars' perceptions of magic as contrary to rationalism (Tylor 1871/1891; Weber 1958), African healing traditions often understand the *how* of illness and misfortune (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Heaton 2013; Koenane 2014). But in order to get to the root of the problem and find a cure, they are often more concerned with the *why*.

But even in the fifth century B.C.E., Hippocrates, popularly considered the father of Western medicine, was seeking to excise magic and traditional practices from the discipline, using them to distinguish the self from the other. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock explain, "Hippocrates and his students were determined to eradicate the vestiges of magico-religious thinking about the human body and to introduce a rational basis for clinical practice that would challenge the power of the ancient folk healers or 'charlatans' and 'magi,' as Hippocrates labeled his medical competitors" (1987: 9).

In the eighteenth-century, Europeans still endeavored to move away from traditional religious and magical healing practices toward more formal, certified versions of medicine (Horden & Hsu 2013). Healers were only "legitimate" if they graduated from universities and were approved by professional associations, and only authorities could sanction other authorities (Larner 1984: 143; Zimmermann 1992). Yet, in many cases, there was still little to separate official medicine from traditional healing, save its new administrative trappings. As Larner reveals:

Let us consider the contents of a certain medicine chest. It contained within it spider's web, ants eggs, snakes skin, extract of wood lice, extract of foxglove, beetles blood and, in pride of place, an elixir with seventy-nine different ingredients. This was not, as would be reasonable to suppose, the first aid kit of a local witch left behind and found after her arrest, it was part of the pharmacopoeia of the University of Glasgow found by William Cullen on taking up his appointment as Professor of Medicine in 1751. (Larner 1984: 142)

Despite these historical similarities, biomedicine today is often only concerned with the physical aspects of illness and wellbeing, those with empirical symptoms and measurable results, and a preoccupation with organs and bodies (Grøsenth 2001). Unlike traditional medicine, it is far from holistic, and is predicated on the segmentation of health into defined fields and categories; an approach embedded in Cartesian dualism, and the idea that the mind and body are separate entities that must be studied separately, by different disciplines and with different tools (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987: 9). Interestingly, this dichotomy began because of a religious crisis. In the seventeenth century, René Descartes, a Catholic and a philosopher, needed to reconcile the study of the immaterial soul with that of the material body. He did this by declaring the soul's seat in the pineal gland of the brain; this released the rest of the body to be able to be studied scientifically, whilst reserving the study of the soul for theology (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987: 9). Unfortunately this dualism would become entrenched in the foundations of biomedicine.

Colonialism, along with religious conversion, also contained a biomedicalizing mission, wherein colonizers sought to exterminate traditional medicine and instead force the locals to adopt a purely biomedical understanding of health. As Nicholas King discusses, "Europeans contrasted their own medicine and public health, symbolizing rationality and modernity, with putatively superstitious and primitive indigenous medical beliefs, which they denigrated and sought to eliminate as part of the larger 'civilizing mission' of colonialism. The medical modernization of native populations, via export of Western medical theories and practices, was part of the 'ideology of colonial healing', that justified colonialism as an ultimately humanitarian endeavour [Comaroff & Comaroff (1992): 222]." (King 2002: 765)

This was in part an endeavor to make the colonies medically safe for the Westerners – military, traders, settlers – that might set foot there (King 2002: 765), and also an element of the West's self-appointed mission to lift non-Westerners out of their own supposed savagery and

teach them “proper” (read, “Western”) ways of thinking, doing, believing, and curing (Arnold 1993). By the twentieth century, the demise of subsistence economies and capital penetration meant border crossings for labour migration were increasing (Heaton 2013) and diseases were no longer contained within foreign countries, only a threat to those who braved them. Now diseases were capable of infiltrating the West itself. Efforts to biomedicalize the world were thus reworked as measures of protection for American and European citizens against new “emerging diseases,” and the problem of foreign health was reframed as a threat to national security (King 2002: 767). By using ““a medical rationale to isolate and stigmatize social groups reviled for other reasons’, particularly immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities that personified frightening social change [Markel (1997): 4]” (King 2002: 765) the West was able to appeal to medical authority – a strong influencer among its citizens who were coming to prize science as the utmost authority of modernity – to legitimate its own racially-charged and self-indulgent ideologies and enterprises. Thus, when traditional holistic views of health butted against Western coloniality and modernity, power figures suffered twice: first as the wrong religion, and then as the wrong medicine.

#### **1.4.3 Tradition in Modernity**

Dualism and strict categorization were not just features of biomedicine; they became the underpinning of the burgeoning Western idea of “modernity” (Latour 1993; Muir 2005; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). In the eyes of the West, modernity wasn’t a simple society where every part was interconnected, with magical rites to divine the courses of kings or incantations to increase crop production. Modernity was a complex, ordered system of discrete categories where everything had its place. Not only was magic placed in a different compartment from religion, but so too was religion barricaded from government, from economy, from science. “The past,” as Bruno Latour once quipped, “was a barbarian medley; the future, a civilizing distinction” (Latour 1993: 130). Latour has criticized the West’s attempt to construct modernity through the proliferation of categories and to mould its own identity around it. Given the nature of real problems, like the disintegrating ozone layer, to bleed into a vast network of allegedly discrete categories – from environmental science to politics to chemistry to sociology – Latour argues that we have never

been successful in keeping the categories separate. If the West stakes its claim to modernity on its ability to do so then “we,” in effect, “have never been modern” (Latour 1993: 11).

In 1918, sociologist Max Weber made the assertion that with the rise of rationalism and science that was shepherding in modernity, the world would no longer need magic, because there would be no question science could not answer. In short, we were entering into a world where there would be no more mysteries (Josephson-Storm 2017: 282; Weber 1958: 116-117). His prophecy, which came to be known as the *theory of disenchantment*, nonetheless went unfulfilled. Traditional practices including magic remain an active part of modernity for cultures around the world, including in Africa and in the West.

Simon Dein, speaking of H. Moore and T.D. Sander’s book *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities*, noted:

...despite the predictions of countless modernists, sources of mystic power have not diminished by the increasing influence of modernity. Far from progressively weakening under the influence of science and education, beliefs in the magical have remained central to the ways African people see contemporary realities and they vote that the evolutionary paradigm of earlier theorists is thoroughly flawed of unilinear progress and development. (Dein 2016: 3)

Dein relays that, far from disappearing, Moore and Sander claim that magic is “not only contiguous with, but constitutive of African modernity” (Dein 2016: 3). Furthermore, it is not just a lingering relic of the past. In fact, magic is to be found in even greater capacity in highly modern aspects of society and represents a unique manifestation of local cosmological responses to capitalism and globalization (Dein 2016: 3). Fishermen in North America, despite being Western, modern, and technologically advanced in many respects, with their frequent use of devices like sonar, radar, GPS, and advanced emergency technologies, frequently turn to taboos and carry luck charms aboard their ships, a phenomenon noted by several scholars from Texas to New England to British Columbia (Mullen 1969; Poggie & Gersuny 1972; Boshier 1999). In addition, the internet, considered the epitome of modern technology, far from making religion and magic obsolete is being used by spiritual practitioners all over the world – including in the West – creating religious congregations that bridge continents, and expand the availability of

spiritual communities from local to global (Helland 2000: 216). It also allows online ritual shops to supply power figures to adherents around the world.

Despite enduring beliefs in magic and continuation of such practices well into modernity to today (Mullen 1969; Poggie & Gersuny 1972; Boshier 1999; Helland 2000; McCarthy Brown 2001; Dein 2016; Josephson-Storm 2017), Western ideas of what constituted modernity had already had an effect. The disenchantment thesis had bred the stigma that to believe in magic was unmodern and unWestern, a sentiment unconcealed from believers. Anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown (2001) spent over a decade with Alourdes Margaux, also known as Mama Lola, a Haitian *Vodou* priestess who resided in Brooklyn, New York. While Mama Lola had a large following and often held ceremonies in her row house, she never hired drummers for fear of inviting unwanted attention.

...Alourdes, like the great majority of Haitian healers in New York works in her home... She does not usually have drummers; they are expensive, and, more to the point, she does not want to attract the attention of her neighbors. Given the negative image Vodou has in the United States, many devotees prefer that their Vodou “families” operate on a small scale. (McCarthy Brown 2001: 4)

McCarthy Brown first published those words in 1991, just four years after laws prohibiting *Vodou* were finally lifted in Haiti itself. From 1835 to 1987, practicing *Vodou* had been illegal in Haiti, a decision influenced by American and European ostracism due to fears that Haiti, an independent black nation, might provide inspiration for black people in other countries to uprising (Ramsey 2011; see Section 6.4). *Obeah* is still illegal in Jamaica, Antigua and elsewhere (“The Obeah Act” 2016; Connelly 2018), with current talks of its potential legalization in Jamaica meeting much Christianity-based public resistance and online outcry (“Obeah law could be repealed soon” 2019). In the 1990s, Pentecostal churches in Ghana were calling for the purge of traditional influences from their congregations (Meyer 1998). Likewise, indigenous groups in North America have long found their health practices banned or stigmatized (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Anthropologist Felicitas Goodman waited until she retired in 1979 to publicly admit to her belief in spirits, which appeared in English in her book *Where the Spirits Ride the Wind: Trance Journeys and Other Ecstatic Experiences* (Josephson-Storm 2017: 302). Fishermen in Texas, New England, and British Columbia despite carrying charms and



observing taboos are frequently embarrassed to admit their true beliefs in the supernatural (Mullen 1969; Poggie & Gersuny 1972; Boshier 1999).

#### **1.4.4 Interpretivism in the Decolonization of Power Figures**

In selecting power figures for this study, I follow in the footsteps of many scholars of African material culture (MacGaffey 1977; Blier 2011b; Roberts 2011) who investigate objects and their meanings as windows to understanding the people who use them. I have also drawn on the work of those who have sought to build bridges across the Black Atlantic by finding links between power figures on the African continent and those in the Diaspora (Blier 2011b; Cooksey, Polynor & Vanhee 2013; Daniels 2013). As well, I have continued the tradition of scholars who emphasize the mistreatment of these objects by Western hands and ideologies as evidence of selective stigmatization and the enforcement of unequal power dynamics (MacGaffey 1993; Ramsey 2011; Reuber 2011; Boaz 2014).

When they were picked up by Westerners, power figures were often considered as objects of curiosity or art, appearing in museums and art galleries, but seldom as efficacious medical devices. Followers of Bronislaw Malinowski (Mullen 1969; Poggie & Gersuny 1972; Boshier 1999) believe magic is an attempt to manipulate the world out of a desire to reduce anxiety in the face of uncertainty. For these functionalists, power figures to protect, acquire, and avenge are solely hopeful performance, which give the practitioner a feeling of control over the unknown. These interpretations, like many generated in the West, whether they see power figures as art, cultural curiosities, or cultural constructs, often entail some form of selection and erasure. They are reductionist and result in the figures being portrayed very differently than they are by those who use them.

Emically, these figures are objects of healing, created with the practical intent of curing problems in a person's life – physical, social, or spiritual – and therefore ameliorating that person's overall health and wellbeing. My strategy in this work falls within the interpretivist paradigm. I see these beliefs as a "lived reality" (Jackson & Piette 2017: 3), rather than simply as cultural constructs with deducible origins and functions, and consider these objects as

meaningful and efficacious in the manner intended by the people who use them (Bernard 2018: 445). This approach also coincides with the decolonizing perspective of this work (Tuhiwai Smith 2012) and will further recognize the colonial and neo-colonial perceptions inherent in the erasures, contortions, and value judgments to which power figures have been continually subjected. This study critically assesses Western assumptions about what medicine looks like, what art looks like, what belongs in a museum and how it should be displayed, what should be secular and what is permitted to be spiritual, and which traditions are allocated respect and rights, and which are legal to exploit. By challenging the characteristics of Western-defined modernity, I work to combat the stigma that has been laden upon the use of these figures by the West through incomplete, flawed, and biased interpretations in academic and public discourse. This is in line with the works of other scholars (Wiredu 1998; King 2002; McCarthy-Brown 2001; Tuhiwai Smith 2012; Koenane 2014) who expose ingrained Western categories, deliberately flout their confines, and instead consider the full validity of other ways of knowing, living, and viewing the world. This shift is crucial to understanding the lived experiences of those who seek healing through traditional medical models. In this, I approach biomedicine, a perspective as culturally-constructed as any listed by Tuhiwai Smith or Latour, from a critical standpoint (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987; Grøseneth 2001; Moran-Thomas 2013; Heaton 2013; Frazer & Prudon 2017).

Anthropologists studying the use of traditional medicine in Ghana (Tabi et al. 2006; Kpobi & Swartz 2018), in South Africa (Koenane 2014), by Ghanaians in Toronto (Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008), and by Tamil refugees in Norway (Grønseth 2001) have noted a multiplicity of reasons why traditional medicine remains a valued option among its adherents and why biomedicine often leaves these patients feeling disbelieved and dismissed (see Section 5.4). Furthermore, unsuccessful biomedical initiatives can and have resulted from failures to take into account local understandings (Moran-Thomas 2013; Frazer & Prudon 2017; Graham, Lees & Le Marcis 2018; see also Section 5.4). In light of this, it is crucial that anthropologists work toward understanding local experiences of health and illness, especially those that emerge from medical traditions radically different from biomedicine. It is the experiences of complex and complete humans that biomedicine often fails to address, and that inform many traditional conceptualizations of health, including those that utilize power figures – “medico-religious” instruments, to borrow Danielle Boaz’s term (2014: 144) – in their cures. Some patients with

non-Western worldviews are already turning away from biomedicine (Fournier and Oakley 2018; Grøseneth 2001: 494) because they feel dismissed, unheard, and open to stigma, because public health refuses to see them as whole people (Oakley and Grosneth 2007).

## Chapter Two: Methods

### 2.1 Overview

This study is an investigation of the following questions:

- What have been the effects of Western “modernity,” including its ideologies, on power figures in terms of their three composite parts – the material figure, the medicines contained within, and the spiritual connections of the figure?

This includes how modernity has impacted the physical construction and distribution of power figures, how Western ideas of modernity have negatively impacted the interpretation of these objects, and the fallout of these failures for non-Western practitioners and patients. Western “modernity” includes the stigmatization of practices falling into the historical categories of “magic” and “superstition,” practices like African traditional religion, healing, and its instruments. Aspects of this main research question can be found in the sub questions below:

1. What elements (materials, medicines, spirits) are employed in the figures, and has this changed with modernity? If so, how?
2. How have these sacred objects been interpreted by outsiders versus by insiders?
3. How have ritualists, shop owners, and users of the objects responded to “modern” Western interpretations?
4. How has stigmatizing these figures and the healing traditions they are a part of impacted our ability to provide culturally relevant care within the biomedical public health system?
5. What relationship exists between stigmatization of power figures, their spirits and traditions, and their treatment by legal systems?
6. How might power figures be decolonized?

In analyzing the effects of modernity on these objects, physically and ideologically, and the fallout of stigma against them, I employed object and content analysis, investigating power figures and written records concerning them. My sources fell into three main categories (with overlap) in a manner faithful to the tripartite structure of power figures themselves. These are as follows:

- Sources considering the **material figure**,
- Sources considering the **medicines** contained within the object, and
- Sources considering the **spirit, spiritual connections, and consecrating traditions** of the object.

## 2.2 Figure

In my analysis of the figures, I selected 10 emic (insider-produced) and 10 etic (outsider-produced) records of power figures via judgment and convenience sampling, noting differences in the way the figures were constructed, depicted, and interpreted. This sample size was selected in accordance with Bernard (2011) who states that 10-20 is sufficient to reveal, “core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experience” (154). Furthermore, in a study of Ghanaian and Nigerian sex workers, Guest et al. (2006) conducted interviews with 60 sex workers but found that 70% (or 80 out of 114) of the themes that would ultimately be identified in the study were revealed by the first six interviewees; by the time Guest et al. had conducted 12 interviews, they had uncovered 88% of the themes they would encounter in the entire sample of 60, demonstrating the effectiveness of even relatively small sample sizes in exposing many major issues (Bernard 2017: 159-169; Bernard, Wutich & Ryan 2017).

“Emic” indicates records produced by the creators and/or users of the objects, or individuals who believe in the traditions of which the objects are a part (Franklin 2009; Oosten 2005; Jardine 2004). The information contained within these records is typically of an instructional and practical nature. These include descriptions of power figures by ritual shops and ritualists, and at-length discussions of the objects featured on ritual shop blogs and FAQ pages. “Etic” records indicates those written by individuals or institutions from outside the tradition of the object they are describing (Franklin 2009; Oosten 2005; Jardine 2004), and for which the information contained within the record is presumed to be useful primarily for educational and academic purposes.

Sources for the objects and records considered in this manner, all of which are in my possession or publically accessible online, and the themes for which they were coded, are as follows.

*Sources:*

Researcher Collections

- Researcher's *agbalegba* figure from Ghana obtained during fieldwork in 2013
- Personal collection of Dr. Jonathan Roberts of Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS

Museum and Art Gallery Collections

- Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT (publically accessible online)
- Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, CT (publically accessible online)
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (publically accessible online)
- Collection of Anne and Jacques Kerchache at Foundation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris (publically accessible online)
- Michael C. Carlos Museum, Atlanta, GA (publically accessible online)
- Duke University's "The Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic" exhibit, NC (publically accessible online)

*Botánicas* and Ritual Shops

- Original Products Botanica, New York, NY (visited in person and publically accessible online)
- Voodoo Authentica, New Orleans, LA (publically accessible online)
- Gaston Jean-Baptiste, Master Haitian Drummer and Vodou Houngan (BongaMusic.org) (publically accessible online)

- Conjure New Orleans, New Orleans, LA (publically accessible online); also part-owner of Conjure New Orleans and ritualist Hoodoo Sen Moise's book *Working Conjure: A Guide to Hoodoo Folk Magic* (Hoodoo Sen Moise 2018)
- Jam-Haitian Candle Shop, Kingston Jamaica (publically accessible online)
- Babalawo Orisha, ritualist in Benin, Nigeria, username: babalawo\_orisha (*Instagram*) (shop publically accessible online)
- Mama Ifawale, ritualist in Nigeria, usernames: dr\_aigbogun and powerful\_aigbogun (*Instagram*) (shop publically accessible online)

In considering these sources, I looked for themes that helped me to consider the following guiding questions, which pinpoint particular aspects of my wider research questions.

- What materials are used to construct these figures?
- How are these objects described in museum and art gallery records vs. by ritualists and vendors on *botánica* and ritual shop websites?

*Themes coded:*

- Materials used in figure construction and their representation
- Emic/etic perspective in written record
- Focus/purpose of writer
- Assumed knowledge level/intent of reader
- Tone, value judgments, understandings

## **2.3 Medicines**

In my analysis of the medicines contained within power figures, I compiled a list of 10 medicines used in their construction and compared the differences in perceived efficacy and value between traditional and biomedical sources. For example, one of the medicines considered in this study is camphor. Natural camphor is extracted from the wood and bark of the

camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) and is included in many *agbalegba* figures, which are constructed to rid a client of a toxic person in their life. Camphor is also sold in ritual shops; it is available in oil form from Original Products Botanica where the product is described as a tool to “chase away evil spirits” (“Camphor oil” n.d.: para. 1). Biomedicine, however, strips all the cultural history and meaning away from the plant and values only its physical effects (Hsu & Harris 2012). An article on Lybrate.com, an India-based online database of doctors, recognizes camphor as a malaria preventative (“Benefits of Camphor and its Side Effects” n.d.). It is antibacterial, anti-fungal, and repels mosquitoes which are the vector for malaria transmission (Patil 2018). In many West and Central African countries, lingering illnesses like malaria are often traditionally interpreted as an effect of witchcraft attack brought on by the ill will of a person within one’s social circle (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Adinkrah 2015; Roberts, Codjoe, Davison, Martin, Mills & Parsons, in press). Thus having camphor in one’s home in an *agbalegba* power figure would, under both traditional and biomedical explanations, help banish that evil.

I have also used data from medical anthropological studies (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987; Grøsenth 2001; Tabi, Powell, & Hodnicki 2006; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008; Hsu & Harris 2012; Moran-Thomas 2013; Heaton 2013; Horden & Hsu 2013; Koenane 2014; Frazer & Prudon 2017; Graham, Lees & Le Marcis 2018; Kpobi & Swartz 2018) concerning the use of traditional medicine versus biomedicine, and gaps in the ability to offer culturally relevant care through biomedical public health in Africa and the West by consequence of not recognizing local experiences of health and illness. I explored how ritual power figures, as important objects in traditional healing worldviews, fit into this schema and the implications of these studies’ findings for the decolonization of these objects. Finally, I considered Walter B. Cannon's work on “‘Voodoo’ Death” (1942) and biomedical considerations of the placebo effect (Benson and Friedman 1996; “Medical Dictionary of Health Terms: J-P” 2011) to establish a pattern of biomedicine seeking to eliminate challenges to its medical monarchy, despite documented evidence that non-science-based initiatives can greatly affect physical symptoms.

Sources for this portion of the project, all of which are publically accessible, and the themes they were coded for are as follows.



*Sources:*

Researcher Collections

- Researcher's *agbalegba* figure from Ghana obtained during fieldwork in 2013
- Personal collection of Dr. Jonathan Roberts of Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS

Traditional Medical Resources:

- Santo Products, Naples, FL (publically accessible online)
- Original Products Botanica, New York, NY (visited in person and publically accessible online)
- Voodoo Authentica, New Orleans, LA (publically accessible online)
- *Herbs of Ghana* (Dokosi 1998)
- "Magic plants in the south of Ghana" (Myren & van Andel 2011)
- "Fetishism revisited: Kongo nkisi in sociological perspective" (MacGaffey 1977)
- "Lulendo: The Recovery of a Kongo Nkisi" (MacGaffey 1987)
- "Funerals and Fetish Interment in Accra, Ghana" (Roberts 2011)
- *The quest for therapy in Lower Zaire* (Janzen & Arkininstall 1978)
- *Quelques plantes medicinales du Bas-Congo et leurs usages* (Kembelo n.d.)
- "Brutal Arts: Potent Aesthetics of *Bocio* – Vodun Arts in Coastal Benin and Togo" (Blier 2011a)

Biomedical Resources (publically accessible):

- Medical Journal Articles generated through searches for keywords via PubMed online search engine.
- Lybrate.com, an India-based website connecting users with doctors who can answer their medical questions.

- Secondary data from research on traditional vs. biomedicine and the importance of understanding local experiences of health and illness (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987; Grøsenth 2001; Tabi, Powell, & Hodnicki 2006; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008; Moran-Thomas 2013; Heaton 2013; Koenane 2014; Frazer & Prudon 2017; Graham et al. 2018; Kpobi & Swartz 2018)
- Sources demonstrating biomedicine's treatment of non-scientific phenomena producing measurable physical results (Cannon 1942; Benson and Friedman 1996; “Medical Dictionary of Health Terms: J-P” 2011)

In considering these sources, I looked for themes that helped me to consider the following guiding questions, which pinpoint particular aspects of my wider research questions.

- What medicinal elements are found in power figures in Africa and among the Diaspora?
- How are the medicinal elements within the figures interpreted by ritualists and users vs. by non-believers, biomedicine, and in the Western “archive” of understanding?” (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 93)
- How are the measurable physical effects of non-science-based phenomena rationalized within the biomedical model?
- How has stigmatizing these kinds of figures and the healing traditions they are a part of impacted our ability to provide culturally relevant care?

*Themes coded:*

- Which plant/animal/manmade elements used as medicines?
- Available locally? Substituted?
- Efficacy based in spiritual, metaphorical, or physical effects of plant/animal/object?
- Traditional vs. biomedical interpretation
- Evidence of bias toward treatment of physical illnesses
- Evidence of attempting to verify traditional knowledge through scientific testing
- Evidence of explaining away observable yet non-science-based phenomena
- Availability of culturally relevant care, includes references to:

- region
- cost
- tendency to frequent western or traditional medical practitioners
- feeling misunderstood/judged by doctors
- hiding treatment choices, including from family, coworkers, or wider society

## 2.4 Spirit

In assessing the various ways in which the spirits and beliefs surrounding power figures have been interpreted, I compared 10 descriptions of *Voodoo* dolls (the most well-known and stigmatized of power figures in the West), other power figures, their spirits and consecrating traditions across media and public discourse. Sources included news articles, film, popular culture, novelty shops, and legal publications, including active laws and a docket from a Canadian court case. As well, I examined examples of responses and rebuttals to such depictions by ritual shops and practitioners. I also considered secondary sources describing the persecution of power figures historically (MacGaffey 1993; Meyer 1998; Ramsey 2011; Reuber 2011; Boaz 2014), revealing ongoing patterns of stigmatization.

Sources and meaning coded in the study of interpretations of the spiritual worldviews surrounding these figures are as follows:

### *Sources:*

- Depictions of *Voodoo* dolls, other power figures, their spirits and consecrating traditions in media, film, novelty shops, and visual art
- Rebuttals and other actions of resistance evident on ritual shop websites and blogs
- Legal sources concerning power figures and their traditions, including:
  - “The Obeah Act,” describing current active laws against *Obeah* in Jamaica and the punishments for breaking these laws
  - “The Bahamas International Religious Freedom Report” (2015 & 2018) regarding religious laws and reported realities in the Bahamas for the given years

- Court docket regarding application for appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal in the conviction of Jahmar Welsh, Ruben Pinnock, and Evol Robinson (*R. v. Welsh* 2013)
- Secondary sources on the stigmatization of power figures historically (MacGaffey 1993; Meyer 1998; Ramsey 2011; Reuber 2011; Boaz 2014).

In considering these sources, I looked for themes that helped me to consider the following guiding questions, which pinpoint particular aspects of my wider research questions.

- What images of power figures, their spirits and traditions have gained prominence among Western audiences?
- How have *botánicas* and ritualists responded?
- What is the relationship between stigmatization of these practices and the legal system?

*Coding for Meaning:*

- Evidence of stigmatization in the West, includes:
  - laws against
  - inequality in legal rights
  - religious persecution/destruction of objects
  - labels like *backwards, uncivilized, barbaric, unmodern, bizarre, evil, strange, violent, dangerous, superstitious, etc.*
  - judging against Western categories, ex. biomedicine, Western religions
  - value-laden and derogatory imagery/associations; selective, incomplete, flawed interpretations in popular culture, public discourse/understanding
- Evidence of effects on believers and methods of resistance, includes:
  - Discretion and secrecy
  - Rebuttals
  - Products and services offered / how described

## **2.5 A Note on Referencing**

This study includes the opinions, philosophies and practices of particular ritual shops, and of select museums and art galleries. Their publications often do not credit an individual author but rather are made on behalf of the organization. Despite this, each ritual shop holds its own philosophies of healing, their own opinions on power figures, the intents of these figures and their uses. Different museums differ markedly on how they describe and present the objects in their care. As such, I have treated these organizations as named authors in in-text citations, in the same manner as authors of scholarly articles. Ritual shops explaining their philosophies on ritual in blogs, and museums portraying ritual objects in their collections descriptions will therefore be referenced with their shop or museum name in the in-text citation rather than being identified by page name as is custom for pages with no named author under conventional formatting. This is deliberate. Retaining the names (or abbreviations thereof) of these institutions in in-text citations allows the reader to see to which institution ideas can be credited, and maintains clear fidelity to the group of people that is the source of the opinion being shared.

## **2.6 Contributions**

The goals of this project are thus. It seeks to challenge the deficiencies in many Western interpretations of ritual power figures by instead acknowledging these figures as efficacious objects of healing physical, social, and spiritual ills. By increasing understanding of these figures and their traditions, this work emphasizes what power figures can teach us about healing and how we can provide more culturally relevant care through biomedical public health systems. If we pay attention, traditional medicine can teach us a lot about providing care that allows patients to be considered as people, more complex than the sum of their parts. This work also has endeavored to expose the effects of a history of ongoing stigmatization and Western assumptions about modernity on these sacred objects and the people who turn to them for help, and to suggest avenues for decolonization and change. Finally, this study also seeks to highlight the resilience of power figures and the people who use them, despite continued oppression and dismissal of their worldviews.

## Chapter Three: An Assemblage of Power Figures

While the term “power figures” is used here as an overarching category, uniting objects composed of a container, medicines, and spiritual power and used to heal a problem, these objects are each as unique as the people who create them and the traditions of which they are a part. While many West African power figures share similarities in ideology and construction, and while many Diasporic power figures show evidence of their African ancestors at their roots, each is its own iteration and must be seen and handled as an individual. What follows are brief descriptions of a selection of power figures from Africa and the Diaspora. Volumes could be written on each one. As such, these entries are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, consider them introductions to the figures, for which you can find more information via the sources referenced. While it is worthwhile to note links the individual figures share with one another, it is equally important to note their diversity and the complexities of their individual stories.

### 3.1 From Africa

#### 3.1.1 *Agbalegba*

##### Origins (Geographical & Cultural):

Ga people of Accra, Ghana

##### Intent:

The particular form of *agbalegba* I will be referring to in this work is the miniature coffins interred in the ground to enact revenge by death (see Illus. 4). But the term *agbalegba* is used colloquially among



Illustration 4: An *agbalegba* coffin that is in the possession of my colleague, Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

the Ga people to denote “any secret fetish practice.” (Roberts 2011: 215) The secrecy with which these figures are constructed is multifunctional. For one, performing these rituals in secret allows the ritualist to conceal his or her knowledge of certain spiritual forces (Roberts 2011: 215). For another, some of the ingredients used in the assembly of these figures are illegal, many only to

be found on the black market and/or at high prices. Ghana retains statutes of British law that ban the trade and use of what are deemed to be “obnoxious medicines,” including ingredients like human body parts and *otofo mama* (cloth stained with human blood). (Roberts 2011: 224, n27) However, while *agbalegba* rituals are done in secret with illicit ingredients and sometimes with a vengeful purpose, their intent is still the rectification of a social imbalance. The goal is not sadistic but a restoration of harmony. *Agbalegba* coffins cannot be used to murder an innocent victim. There must be a justifiable reason for that person’s death. As Roberts states, “The way that fetish internment kills is analogous to murder and its practitioners will not conduct the rituals unless their client can show a legitimate reason for seeking revenge against a living person” (Roberts 2011: 215).



Illustration 5: Contents of the *agbalegba* coffin pictured in Illus. 4.

#### Construction:

This form of *agbalegba* has as its container a miniature wooden coffin, which typically encloses a carved anthropomorphic wooden figure or a plastic doll. The other ingredients vary depending on the ritualist. Often libations are poured; the figurine is washed with a tea of herbs that include *nyanyara* (*Momordica charantia*); and various items are placed within the coffin. Camphor is often present, along with *otofo mama* to harvest the attention and vengeance of spirits of people who have died violent deaths (through suicide, murder, car accidents, etc.) (Roberts 2011: 217). Metaphoric inclusions like a piece of severed squirrel’s tail might be added to quicken the curse, as might be pieces of rope to bind the curse to the victim. Words written on paper, like the names of ancestors and gods, can also be included to carry messages to the spiritual world and evoke the attention and power of its inhabitants.

Use:

Once the figure is assembled, ritual incantations are spoken. In the case of my *agbalegba* figure, white dust was sprinkled atop the lid of the coffin and blown into the air. Lastly, an *agbalegba* coffin is buried in a cemetery. This final act completes the curse, sending the malevolent forces the ritualist has summoned out to take their victim. The cemetery is a powerful location, a sort of crossroads between not only the living and the dead, but a meeting point where the spirits of those who have died good and bad (“*otofoi*”) deaths can both be found (Roberts 2011: 221). Ritualists often seek out the power of this location (see Section 3.2.3). My discussions with a pair of Ghanaian gravediggers in 2013 supported this, with the men confirming that *agbalegba* figures were indeed buried in their cemetery a few times a week.



**3.1.2 *Minkisi***

Origins (Geographical & Cultural):

BaKongo people of the former Kongo region (located in parts of modern day Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the Songye people of central DRC.

Intent:

*Minkisi* (sing. *nkisi*) are created for a variety of purposes from warding off illness to protection while in the bush.

Illustration 6: *Power Figure: Male (Nkisi)*, item 1979.206.127, a Kongo *nkisi* figure on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Note the variety of adornments that decorate the figure's body.



Each type of *nkisi* bears a distinct name. For example, *Nkisi Nkondi* is a revenge figure, used to punish people who have wronged you. It is also used in oath-taking (MacGaffey 2000: 113). *Nkisi Kinzenzi*, on the other hand, is used to facilitate childbirth (MacGaffey 1977: 173). Thus, the category of *minkisi* encompasses a variety of figures, each with its proper name and healing specialty.

#### Construction:

*Minkisi* containers are diverse. Sometimes they look like anthropomorphic carved wooden figures, with medicines packed into cavities in their bellies, atop their heads, or between their legs. Other times they look like animals, like the two-headed dog *Nkisi Kozo*. *Nkondi ya Nsanda* is a bag of maimed human figurines, while other *minkisi* look like necklaces and armbands, sunglasses and pens (MacGaffey 1993: 29). Generally the containers of *minkondi* revenge figures, if they resemble humans, are designed to look threatening, showing what the *nkondi* can do to its victims. Regardless of type, *minkisi* do not look like the spirit who embodies the figure (MacGaffey 1991: 5).

The medicines contained within *minkisi* are included based on their symbolic and physical associations with other things, what MacGaffey following De Heusch calls metonymic and metaphoric ingredients (MacGaffey 1977: 174). Metonymic medicines are those items chosen because they represent a physical tie to a being the ritualist wishes to incorporate into the power figure. For example, kaolin clay is often included. This clay is found at the bottom of riverbeds, its home akin to where the spirits of the dead are said to reside, underwater (MacGaffey 1991: 5). The hair and fingernails of the intended victim, sometimes included to tie the *nkisi* to its prey, or pieces of a stolen item for which the *nkisi* will seek retribution, would also be considered metonymic medicines because they establish a connection with a being (MacGaffey 1991: 5). Metaphoric medicines on the other hand are about

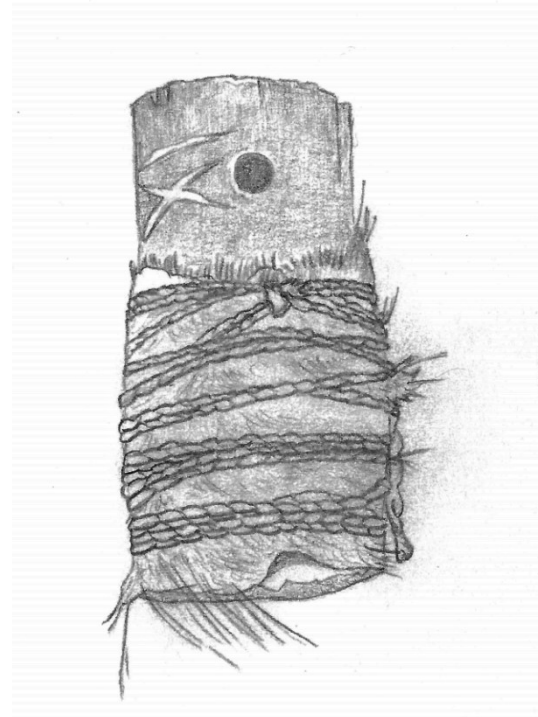


Illustration 7: *Power Object, Nkisi*, item 1935.001.015, held in collections at the Michael C. Carlos Museum in Atlanta, GA. This *nkisi* was composed by the Songye people, using wood, animal skin, and rope.

invoking a desired effect. This can be brought about with a visual or a verbal metaphor. Visually, the claws of a mongoose might be included so the *nkisi* can catch its victim. Here, part of an animal is used to represent the characteristics or abilities of the whole. (This is the same logic inherent in the inclusion of a squirrel tail in my *agbalegba* coffin to quicken the curse.) Verbally, this is represented with plays on KiKongo words. In *Nkisi Kinzenzi*, used to facilitate childbirth, snail shells are included because the word for them, *kodya*, sounds similar to the KiKongo word *kola*, which means “to be strong.” Furthermore, the spiral form of the shell is called *kizinga*, sounding like *dizinga*, meaning “long life” (MacGaffey 1988: 192).

The spirit summoned to the figure depends upon the duty the ritualist needs performed. Spirits invoked to perform healing acts are often water spirits, while those sought out to hunt down witches, adulterers, and thieves are often ancestral and aggressive (MacGaffey 1991: 6).

The following are the ingredients and some words of invocation for *Nkisi Kinzenzi*, reproduced from MacGaffey (1977: 173-174):

*Kodi*, a large shell, which is the container of the charm. Related etymologically to *kola*, 'to be strong', and by its spiral form to 'life' (*zinga*).

*Mpemba*, white clay, comes from streambed. The word means also 'cemetery' or 'land of the dead'.

The dead live in or under the water, and are white in colour.

*Nsadi*, red earth. As earth, also associated with the dead. Red colour implies transition.

Dust of *kitundibila* leaves. This plant, a kind of ginger (*Amomum alboviolaceum*) is used as an aphrodisiac. Its fruit is phallic in form, and it never loses its leaves.

*Mbika malenga*, squash seeds, representing infants in the womb.

Powdered *kinzenzi*, 'cricket'. Crickets and grasshoppers, eaten, are considered diarrhetics.

The charm is intended to remove obstacles preventing birth and allow the child to pass easily. It is invoked as though it were animate:

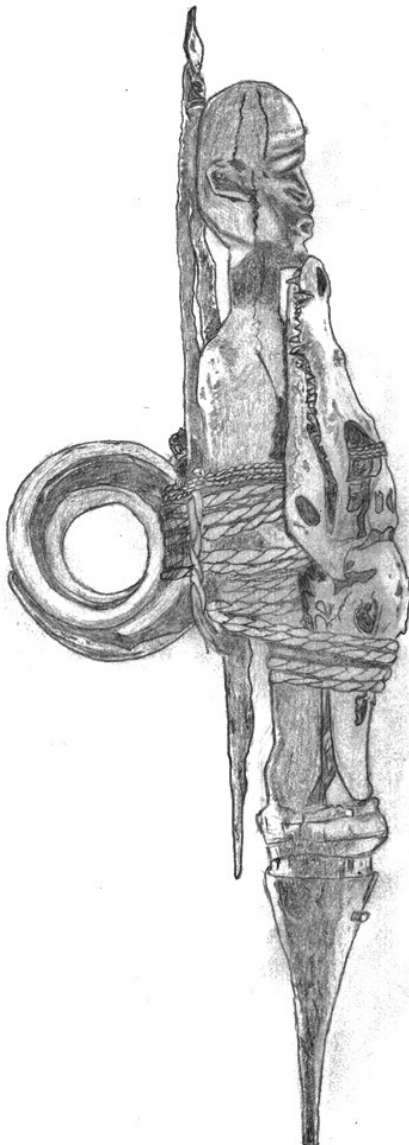
Eh! Kinzenzi, come, into this person, who desires to give birth, who desires to sleep. Come, remove the placenta and the cord, that they be not blocked. Come, stretch out, gently, for this our child. Thus our fathers had children, and thus our mothers.

Yet, it should be remembered that *minkisi* and other power figures are complex wholes and amount to more than simply an assemblage of ingredients and words. Not only is a ritualist (*nganga*) required to bring an *nkisi* to life, but so too are complex ritual elements like music and adornment. *Minkisi* are irreducible. As MacGaffey emphasizes, “The material apparatus includes musical instruments, the bodies of the *nganga* and the initiate or patient, articles of costume,

cosmetics, and (though not invariably) a focal object, a composite which is, in a narrow sense, the nkisi itself, the embodiment of the spiritual entity” (1991: 4).

Use:

The use of one of these figures depends upon the particular *nkisi*. *Nkisi Nkondi*, a hunter figure used in revenge to pursue and punish wrongdoers, is generally kept in the possession of the ritualist. Each time the *nkisi* is needed by a client, a nail is driven into the figure by the ritualist to aggravate the spirit and send it to work. But other *minkisi* work differently and are used accordingly. Some *minkisi*, for example, were worn on the body of the client to protect them while in the forest (“What are Minkisi?” 2011).



**3.1.3 Bocio**

Origins (Geographical & Cultural): *Vodun* practitioners of the Fon, Ewe, and other tribes from the areas of modern day Benin and Togo.

Intent:

*Bocio* are protection figures, designed to safeguard individuals, societal groups, and even possessions (from theft). They are also used to promote success in life, love, work and school, fertility, and court cases, and to banish illness and bring good health (Blier 2011b: 3; Djimassé

Illustration 8: A *bocio* figure from the Fon people of Benin, currently in the private collection of Anne and Jacques Kerchache. It was displayed by Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain in Paris, France in 2011. This *bocio* was constructed with wood, metal and clay, and features a peg for inserting it into the ground. It also retains sacrificial patina, remnants of blood from animal sacrifice. The skull of a crocodile and the bill of a duck are bound to the figure with rope.

2011). Their name derives from *bo*, meaning an empowering form, and *cio*, meaning corpse, the figures acting as decoy bodies to deflect misfortune, danger, and other problems from the intended victim, taking it instead unto themselves. They further protect their users by channelling the powers of the ancestors and other *Vodun* forces (Blier 2011b: 3).

#### Construction:

*Bocio*, like other power figures, are composite objects. The principal figure is often made of wood, carved, and may include a pointed base which can be driven into the ground. The type of wood used to make the figure may be chosen due to the specific properties of the species or the significance of the tree's location. Red karite, for instance, has protective medicinal properties, while other trees might be chosen for their proximity to a temple, or their having been struck by lightning (Blier 2011b: 4). Cloth figures were substituted when wooden religious figures were banned during the slave trade, and "found ready (and pejorative) reference in the Americas as 'voodoo dolls'" (Blier 2011b: 3).

Adornments affixed to the wooden figure can include cowrie shells and beadwork, as well as mirrors and padlocks (Djimassé 2011; Vilaire 2011). The figures are often wrapped and bound with rope or chains, something Blier theorizes may be a reference to slavery (Blier 2011b: 3). The type of fibre used to make the rope can even be significant. If made from a weed that grew near a fireplace, for example, the inclusion could be thought to evoke strength when confronting fire (Blier 2011b: 4).

Medicines are often secured within a hole in the figure with a wooden peg. Medicines include plant and animal matter, inclusions particular to the *bocio* depending on its desired effect. Parts from monkeys are believed to provide protection for hunters, as well as children and pregnant women. Bats protect against stomach ache; and lion fur increases one's strength (Blier 2011b: 4). *Bocio* are further empowered through invocations and offerings (Blier 2011b: 2).

#### Use:

Some *bocio* are kept inside the home by the person who owns them and are not displayed publicly. But others are staked in ground outside homes and places of worship where they serve

to protect people inside. They can also be positioned at crossroads and in marketplaces (Blier 2011b: 2).

## 3.2 From the Diaspora

### 3.2.1 *Pakèt Kongo*

Origins (Geographical & Cultural): *Vodou* practitioners of Haiti

Intent:

*Pakèt kongo* are power figures of the *Vodou* tradition which originated in Haiti. They share ideological, symbolic, and aesthetic connections with power figures from the African continent, like their use of binding and tying, and their composite nature, including a container, medicines, and spirit. But they are also unique. A *pakèt kongo* embodies a particular *lwa* or deity of the *Vodou* pantheon for which it was made. The figure works as a line of communication between the practitioner and the *lwa*, which can be called upon for assistance in particular areas of life (Duke University n.d.: item A065). As such, the powers of a *pakèt kongo*



Illustration 9: A *pakèt kongo* for Papa Legba, made by ritualist Gaston Jean-Baptiste. Note the anthropomorphic ball-and-cone form and thread bindings. This *pakèt kongo* is available for purchase on Jean-Baptiste's website BongaMusic.org for \$200.

depend on the *lwa* it attracts. Azaka, for example, is a *lwa* of agriculture and can be called upon to help in matters of health and to protect land and gardens (Jean-Baptiste n.d.: para. 6). Papa

Legba is the *lwa* who “opens the door to the spirit world;” a *pakèt kongo* for him works well placed on an altar and used in prayers or meditation (Jean-Baptiste n.d.: para. 9).

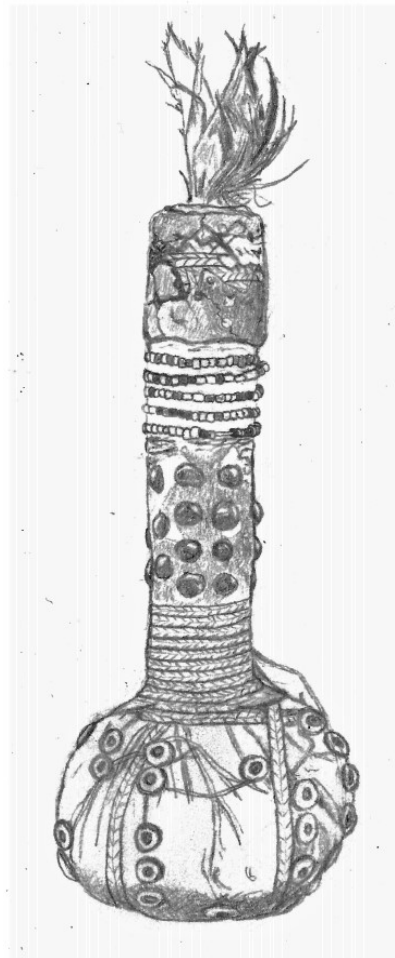
Construction:

*Pakèt kongo* employ what is often termed a ball-and-cone form (Duke University n.d.: item A065), the base bulbous and supporting a vertical rod-like body, sometimes fashioned to include a head and arms, making it appear anthropomorphic in shape. The ball is packed with medicines. The *pakèt kongo*'s ties to BaKongo *minkisi* are evident when comparing them (and 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century Haitian-Floridian



Illustration 10 (upper right): *Nkisi Mumba Mbondo*

Illustration 11 (above): *Nkisi Maziolo*



*Vodou* bottles made for spirits) to early 20<sup>th</sup> century African figures like *Nkisi Mumba Mbondo* (with its round bound

bottom and tall, wrapped and beaded neck topped with feathers) and *Nkisi Maziolo* (which is made from a bottle wrapped with vegetal fiber, adorned with fruit, and topped with feathers) (see Cooksey et al. 2013: 202-203 [*minkisi*] and 320-321 [Haitian-Floridian bottle figures and *pakèt kongo*]). In some ways, *pakèt kongo* even recall the bottle power figures used today in Nigeria (see Babalawo Orisha 2018), indicating Yoruba influences. *Pakèt kongo* are often tangled, bound or tied with rope, similar to *bocio* (Blier 2011b), *minkisi* (MacGaffey 1977: 175), and reminiscent of the piece of rope included in my *agbalegba* coffin to bind the curse to the intended victim. Links between *pakèt kongo* and

other African power figures have also been investigated by other scholars (see Blier 1995; Cooksey et al. 2013; Daniels 2013).

Use:

*Pakèt kongo* are often made for a particular *lwa* to attract his or her attention, attributes, and favors. For example, master Haitian drummer and *Vodou houngan* Gaston Jean-Baptiste has available on his website a *pakèt kongo* he constructed for Baron Samedi, the chief spirit of the dead and guardian of the cemetery (McCarthy-Brown 2001: 95). Baron Samedi can be called upon when a loved one passes on to help watch over them and keep them safe along their journey to the afterlife (Jean-Baptiste n.d.: para. 10). His help is also sought in matters of revenge, to heal a social problem (McCarthy-Brown 2001: 369). Baron Samedi is often approached to intervene in matters of serious illness, as no one dies before the Ghede spirits of the dead dig their grave; and no graves get dug without word from Baron Samedi (Original Products Botanica 2018: para 2). *Pakèt kongo*, like other power figures, are considered to be living objects and therefore must be treated accordingly. A *pakèt kongo* that is ignored will falter in its connection to its *lwa*. A *pakèt kongo* must be nurtured like a “friendship,” talked to, asked for help, and given offerings (lit candles, rum, preferred items, etc.), if it is to continue its work providing a line of communication to the spirit world (Duke University n.d.: item A065: para. 1). Baron Samedi, for example, likes offerings of hot peppers and other spicy foods, fried plantains, rice with beans, coconut, strong cold coffee, filterless cigarettes, spicy rum, and gin (Original Products Botanica 2018: para. 5).

### 3.2.2 Voodoo Doll

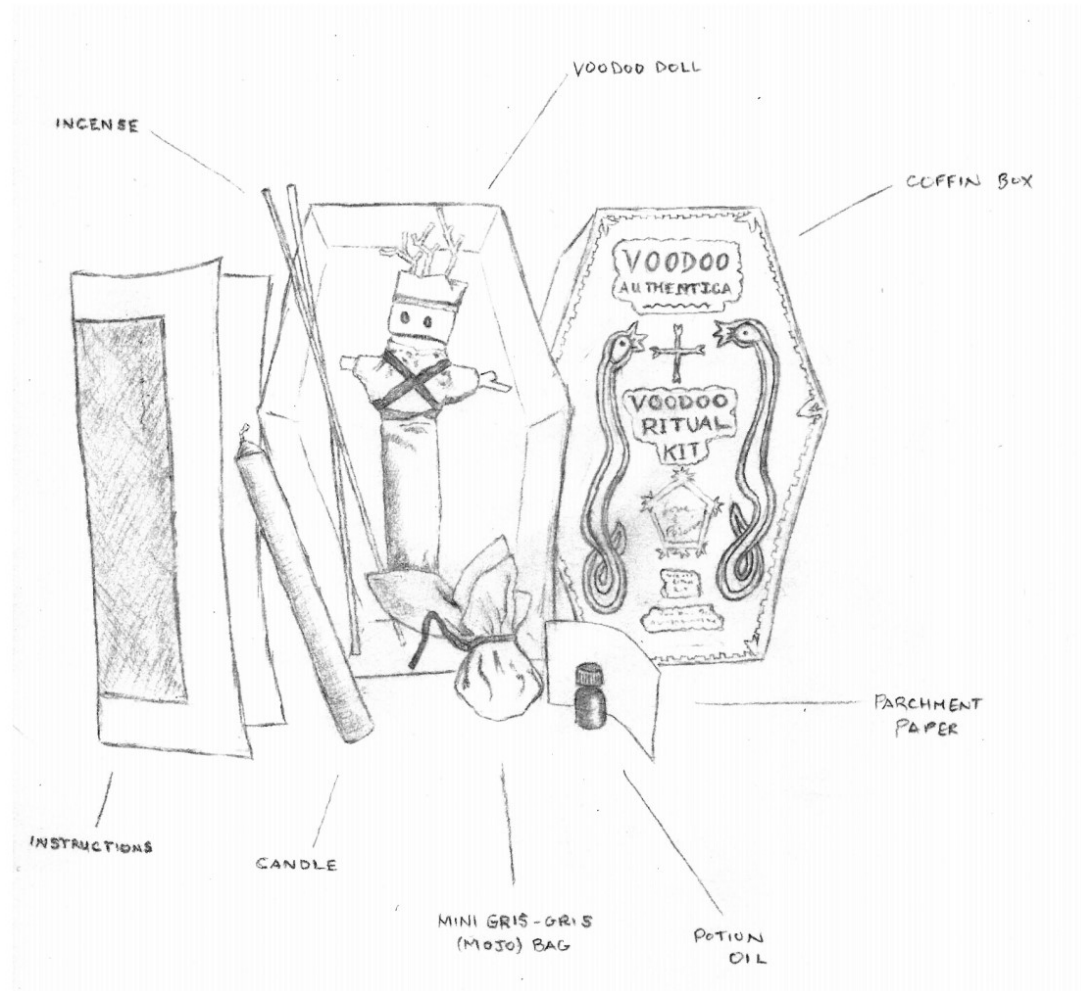


Illustration 12: A ritual kit advertised by the ritual shop Voodoo Authentica in New Orleans. This kit contains a Voodoo doll housed in a coffin box, which also contains a candle, incense, a miniature *mojo* bag, potion oil, and a piece of parchment, as well as instructions for use. It sells for \$47, and can be consecrated for the intent of your choice, including love, good health, protection, ridding yourself of an enemy, or winning in court.

Origins (Geographical & Cultural): *Voodoo* practitioners of New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.A.

#### Intent:

The lineage of *Voodoo* dolls traces back to the influences of early West African power figures like the *bocio* of *Vodun* and BaKongo *minkisi*, as well as the *pakèt kongo* of Haitian *Vodou*. When African descendants spread into New Orleans, Louisiana, a separate but sister tradition developed called *Voodoo* in which we find the *Voodoo* doll.



*Voodoo* dolls are perhaps the most well-known power figures in the West, the popularized version of which is an object of vengeance, used to inflict harm. Contrary to the popular understanding, however, *Voodoo* dolls are as multifaceted as their parent charms in Africa and other power figures in the Diaspora. *Voodoo* dolls can be used to attract love and wealth, and heal illness, as well as assist in regaining social imbalance through revenge.

#### Construction:

If fashioned by hand, these dolls are often constructed of materials local to the creator (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f), and are typically made of cloth with a stick armature inside for structure. They can be stuffed with cotton, moss or grasses. They are typically anthropomorphic in form, sometimes androgynous and multifunctional, and other times gendered, especially if the sex is relevant to the purpose of the doll, for example fertility or attraction. Like *bocio*, *Voodoo* dolls are sometimes bound with rope and feature other adornments like beading and feathers (Blier 2011b). They also contain various herbal, faunal, and/or manmade medicines. For instance, a practitioner might affix a coin to the doll to help bring them financial success (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f). *Voodoo* dolls, like *pakèt kongo*, can also be fashioned for connection to a specific deity to attract their particular powers and favors (Duke University n.d.: A065; Voodoo Authentica n.d.-a). These dolls are often adorned with symbols and objects or infused with herbs, foods, and oils that reflect the deity's preferences and personality, and can be bedecked in clothing of their favorite colors (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-a). *Voodoo* dolls are also sometimes placed in coffins, perhaps a legacy of Ga influences of *agbalegba*. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-g)

#### Use:

One of the most well-known and sensationalized features of *Voodoo* dolls are the pins stuck into them by their users, aesthetically reminiscent of the nails driven into *minkisi minkondi* (MacGaffey 1991 & 2000). Sometimes different colored pins are used for healing vs. harming purposes, or for specific duties. For instance, a green pin might be used to attract money, a purple pin for healing problems with the spirit realm, or a red pin for drawing power (Original Products Botanica 2015b). Where a pin is inserted into the doll can also have significance. A pin might be stuck into the groin to cause increased libido, fertility or impotence, or into the heart to

attract love. Like *minkisi* and *agbalegba*, *Voodoo* dolls can also be bound to a particular target, whether for positive or negative effects, by affixing to the doll a person's hair, a piece of their clothing, or a person's name or other goal-directing information written on paper (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f).

### 3.2.3 *Mojo Bag (Mojo Hand)*

It is widely believed that *mojo* bags are the man-made manifestation of a spiritual being and that they contain life-like properties. (Original Products Botanica 2017: para. 1)

Origins (Geographical & Cultural): *Hoodoo* practitioners of New Orleans, Louisiana

#### Intent:

*Mojo* bags, also called *mojo* hands, are a *Hoodoo* tradition, but they are also used more widely, by adherents of *Voodoo*, New Age religions, and Shamanism. *Hoodoo* is a form of folk magic which originated in New Orleans, a practice of conjure and rootwork influenced by African and Diasporic traditions, like Kongo and Yoruba traditional religions, *Vodun* (Benin and Togo), *Vodou* (Haiti), and *Voodoo* (New Orleans), Jewish mysticism, Christianity, European folk magic, and Native American healing; but it is also a tradition all its own (Sen Moise 2018: 1). Original Products Botanica cites a couple of potential origins for the *mojo* bag's name. It might derive from the Kongo word *mooyoo*. *Mooyoo* is ground bones and ashes of an ancestor and is one of the medicines included within the power figure *Nkisi Ndoki*. The bones of humans and animals are often ingredients in *mojo* bags (also recalling the medicines of African power figures like *agbalegba*, *minkisi*, and *bocio*.) (Original Products Botanica 2017). Or, the name of the bag may have originated from the word *mojuba*, used in West Africa to refer to a form of protective prayer. *Mojo* bags are sometimes referred to as a "prayer in a bag" and a "hex you can carry with you" (Original Products Botanica 2017: para. 2).

*Mojo* bags can be constructed for a variety of purposes, from luck to love, winning in court, financial gain, protection, warding off evil, domination, and health. Their interior medicines, the prayers and words spoken during their creation, and even sometimes the color of the cloth used to contain their elements, all reflect the intent of the figure. A *mojo* bag for luck,

for example, might include a lucky rabbit's foot, lucky hand root, fast luck oil, and a green cloth bag, while one for attraction and love might include a pair of lodestones, rosehips, and seduction oil enveloped by a pink or red bag (Original Products Botanica 2017). Many times a red bag is used regardless of the *mojo* bag's purpose.

### Construction:

What follows are the ingredients for a money-drawing bag designed to bring prosperity to the bearer, reproduced from a book by Hoodoo Sen Moise, rootworker, Haitian *Vodou Houngan Asogwe*, and *tata nganga* of *Palo Mayombe*.

2 pinches of thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) – used in prosperity work to bring money to you

1 pinch of cinnamon (*Cinnamomum spp*) – used to heat up work and has potency when it comes to raising passions and drawing money

A magnet – used to draw money in our direction

1 orange peel (*Citrus reticulata*) – use for prosperity work and for opening up doors of financial gain

1 High John the Conqueror root (*Convolvulus jalapa*) – used for its power to burst through obstacles and remove blockages

3 black-eyed peas – used in works of prosperity and financial stability (three to complete a cycle and to honor the Holy Trinity)

1 dollar bill or similar paper money from other currencies – used as the focus of what you are going to draw to you

A plate

A candle

A glass of water

Rum or whiskey

A cigar for smoke

A piece of green or gold flannel or cotton cloth, approximately 4-6 inches in size

18" of cotton string – used to tie the hand together – do *not* cut the string with scissors or a blade, as it can sever the work; use a candle flame to burn the string and split it from the roll

A trowel

A few coins

A few drops of rum or whiskey

A few drops of an oil (Allspice Oil works well for prosperity and money drawing)

(Sen Moise 2018: 48-49)

Once the ingredients for this particular *mojo* bag are assembled, Sen Moise recommends placing all the roots on the plate, placing the glass of water alongside, and lighting the candle. You can give smoke and liquor to the roots, present them to the four corners, and begin saying prayers, thanking the ancestors and spirits of the roots, and requesting of them what you need. The prayer Sen Moise recommends for this ritual is the Bible's Deuteronomy 28:1-13 (2018: 50). He then instructs practitioners to place a pinch of each herb upon the cloth and close the bundle with string, after which you should take the bundle to a location charged with monetary power – a bank. Similarly, if one were creating a *mojo* bag for winning in court, they might bury it near a courthouse; a *mojo* bag for revenge might be buried in a graveyard (Sen Moise 2018: 55). Discretely, Sen Moise recommends, find a patch of soil, dig a small hole in which you place a few coins, and then place the bag on top and bury it. Come back to claim it in a few days and it will be charged with the powers of the earth of that place (Sen Moise 2018: 54). Dirt, Sen Moise says, is incredibly powerful; for it is that in which our ancestors reside. They are the earth, and incorporating it into rootwork creates a powerful connection with them. “Most folks don't understand that the power of the root and dirt comes from the ancestors buried deep within the land,” Sen Moise relays, quoting his fellow rootworker and business partner at Conjure New Orleans, Starr Casas. “The power of their blood and bones mingles with the earth and draws forth the power of the roots that grow there. As the root lived, so shall it die and live again” (2018: 47-48).

Use:

*Mojo* bags are carried on your person, in your pocket or handbag, as a personal talisman at least for the first week. They need to be fed and recharged regularly (Original Products Botanica 2017). As stated on Original Products Botanica's blog, “Your *mojo* bag is only for your eyes and hands. No one else can touch or see it. Your *mojo* has its own name that you can use to speak to it and ask for its direct assistance at any time” (Original Products Botanica 2017: para 15).

## Chapter Four: The Figure

The figures, or physical containers, of power figures are many. As seen in Chapter Three, they can resemble anything from dolls to bags. They all, however, could be said to be bundles of some sort, grouping together an assemblage of powerful medicines, symbols, and spirits. The figure might be carved from wood, in the case of some *minkisi*, *bocio*, and *agbalegba* coffins, or they might be constructed of cloth, sticks, and moss like the *Voodoo* dolls sold by Voodoo Authentica, an online ritual shop based in New Orleans, Louisiana. Adornments and inclusions can also be manmade, like the locks affixed to some *minkisi* (Tuckey 1818), the horseshoe nails sold by Original Products Botanica in New York and recommended for inclusion in *mojo* bags for luck, and the railroad spike that forms the spine of Conjure New Orleans' *Big Mama Dollie* (Conjure New Orleans n.d.-a).

The materials used to construct power figures have changed over time and space, adapting to new influences and new soil. The transatlantic slave trade brought people and their ideas of power figures into a new world. Globalization shrunk that world, so that countries previously oceans apart could easily trade their wares, and capitalism put a price on everything. In this increasingly interconnected global village, power figures had to adapt. And so did ritualists. Where and how ritual supplies are accessed, and what materials are used has been influenced by the new landscape, but that does not mean power figures have bowed to the West's idea of a secular, disenchanting, and commodified version of modernity. Power figures, in the hands of ritualists, are still capable of being personal and powerful, even if they must be shipped across the globe. But when they fall into the hands of Westerners, power figures have suffered greatly and continue to call out for decolonization.

### 4.1 Access & Acquisition

In Ghana, there exist a variety of places in which to acquire ritual supplies. For raw materials like herbs, animal pelts and skulls, and carved wooden figurines like those found in my *agbalegba* coffin, one can visit an open-air market that specializes in ritual goods, their wooden stalls lining networks of streets and alleyways. Near the heart of Accra, at Wato Junction, there

are also three neighbouring ritual stores, each more cluttered than the next, in which you can buy Stop Evil Oil, Black Cat Oil, and Triple Fast Action Jinx Removing Oil (some manufactured as far away as India and New York City), as well as revenge candles, protection rings, and more. In the United States and Canada, dedicated open-air ritual markets are less common, and outdoor farmers markets are not often accustomed to selling ritual objects. However, it is still possible to find supplies if one is looking for them.



Illustration 13 (above): Perfumes for a variety of purposes on the shelf at Original Products Botanica.

Illustration 14 (right): The shop also stocks coyote tails, clay pots, shells, bundles of sticks, baskets, and divination boards.

as perfume for the Orisha Elegua. Original Products Botanica also sold a variety of incense, including one labeled “Congo” and another “Morocco,” one depicting Jesus on the cross, another depicting the famous Diasporic figure High John the Conqueror, and incense marked for specific purposes like

On a trip to New York City in 2017, I visited Original Products Botanica in the Bronx. Upon entering the store, I was struck by how different it was than the shops I had visited in Ghana. Gone were the open-air stalls and small one-roomed stores with wooden shelves. In New York, this was replaced with a large store complete with the same beige metal shelves and price strips common in stores throughout North America. The items being sold, however, were kindreds to those in Accra, and in Latin America (Alves & Alves 2011). I could purchase cauldrons for the Orisha of iron, Ogun, Lucky Elephant Perfume and

Steady Work Perfume; St. Anthony Perfume was even on the same shelf



sandalwood for gamblers. Oils similar to those I had seen in Ghana were also available. I could buy oils to improve marriage, court cases, to control others, to forget, to draw money. They also sold books on a plethora of religions and religious CDs like “Sacred Sounds of the Female Orishas: Rhythms of the Goddess,” collected by Raul Canizares. There were figurines of the Catholic saints, and of the Orishas, in black-skinned and white-skinned forms, who are followed by adherents of a variety of religions including *Hoodoo*, *Vodou*, *Santeria*, and Yoruba traditional religions. One figure, noteworthy for its seamless syncretism, depicted Jesus upon the cross, at the foot of which stood seven Orishas, the base decorated with cowrie shells (see Illus. 15). Calabash gourd bowls overflowed from boxes on the floor beneath tied bundles of sticks. There was also camphor, frankenscense and myrrh. Crystal balls, cowrie shells, and coyote tails were available, as were an assortment of fresh and dried herbs, horseshoes, and rusting nails.



Illustration 15: A syncretic figurine depicting Jesus on the cross, surrounded by seven *orishas*. Cowrie shells adorn the base.



Illustration 16 (above): A diverse array of incense.



Illustration 17 (right): Oils to control others, win court cases, forget, banish evil, and bring good luck.

Not all botánicas and ritual shops are as extensive or aim to be as religiously inclusive as Original Products – which quotes *The New York Times* article on their website that dubbed them a “veritable Home Depot of Spirituality” (Original Products Botanica n.d.-a: para. 2). But, like Original Products, others too aim to provide traditional and spiritual supplies that are not as often available in Western supermarkets and department stores. Voodoo Authentica in New Orleans caters to adherents of *Voodoo*, a tradition with links to Haitian *Vodou* and West African *Vodun*, as well as BaKongo and Yoruba religions. Conjure New Orleans is a *Hoodoo* ritual shop, selling supplies for the form of syncretic folk magic that originated in New Orleans (Sen Moise 2018: 1). Jam-Haitian Candle Shop in Kingston, Jamaica sells products for use by adherents of *Vodou*, *Voodoo* and *Hoodoo*, as well as *Obeah*, a form of spirituality and folk magic used in Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Santo Products supplies practitioners of Yoruba traditional religion, *Santeria*, *Palo Mayombe*, *Wicca*, Alchemy, and Eggun worship from their location in Naples, Florida (Santo Products, n.d.-a).

Given that magic was once prophesized to disappear with modernity, it is all the more significant that each of these shops – Original Products Botanica, Voodoo Authentica, Conjure New Orleans, Jam-Haitian Candle Shop, and Santo Products – all have an online presence, whether through websites with fully functioning online shopping platforms, or simpler social media pages that post available products and share videos of them being used. What is more, individual ritualists have also set up shop online. Gaston Jean-Baptiste, professional Haitian Drummer and *Vodou houngan*, sells handmade *pakèt kongo* for \$150 to \$1000, depending on the figure. Papa Ebenezer White, an *Obeah* man originally from Trinidad, who lived in Jamaica for a while and has since moved to the United Kingdom, performs rituals over the internet. *Instagram* users *babalawo\_orisha*, a *Babalawo Ifa* priest from Benin, Nigeria, and Mama Ifawale (usernames *dr\_aigbogun* and *powerful\_aigbogun*) sell power figures for a variety of purposes over *Instagram* (*Babalawo Orisha* also has a website) and even post screenshots of text conversations with satisfied clients by way of positive buyer testimonials.



## 4.2 Availability of Materials

Globalization, capitalism and technology, defining features of Western modernity, have turned the whole world into a marketplace, designed to exploit natural and labor resources in developing countries and funnel the wealth into the West. However, this machine, the child of a modern world, instead of eliminating magic is actually facilitating its continued practice around the globe. Many products commonly used in the construction and use of power figures, like plastic dolls, metal amulets, spiritual candles, oils, and books, can be mass-produced and easily shipped internationally.

Other products are substituted. The absence of limiting rigidity in the adaptive nature of these practices allows for symbolic adherence to tradition. As we have seen, power figures in the Diaspora, and even in Africa, are not only constructed with carved wooden figures. While traditional *bocio* and *minkisi* figures in the nineteenth century may have been made with wood, and while many *agbalegba* coffins today still house



Illustration 18: An unfinished *agbalegba* coffin containing a plastic doll.

carved wooden figurines within them, that is not to say that all power figures need look this way today. Many *Voodoo* dolls, whether handmade by Voodoo Authentica in New Orleans or mass-produced and sold by Jam-Haitian Candle Shop in Jamaica, are made of cloth. A love charm made by Babalawo Orisha in Nigeria takes the form of a bottle containing a mass-produced plastic doll, and some *agbalegba* coffins also contain plastic dolls, showing that, even on the African continent, traditions are consistently adapting (Babalawo Orisha 2018).

### 4.3 Personalizing Power in Off-The-Rack Rituals

Commodification of raw goods and mass production of formerly handmade goods often strip products of their former cultural associations and artistry, rendering them little more than commodities and clones. A sacred tree becomes just another piece of wood after it is chopped down and milled and sold a world away where no one knows its stories, or what god once lay at its roots. A sculpture recreated by a machine loses the warmth of ever having been held in the carver's hand.

Ingeniously, however, ritualists have devised ways of continuing to offer personalized ritual objects, even if that means getting creative with the construction process. Original Products Botanica, for example, advocates for practitioners to construct their own *mojo* bags – even providing instructions of how to do so on their blog – out of various items the store sells, from natural herbs and roots to manmade amulets. In addition, they stock popular mass-produced items like protection candles, which can then be personalized by the botánica's "In-House Spiritualists," prepared, anointed, prayed over in accordance with the client's needs, and lit upon the botánica's altar (Original Products Botanica n.d.-n). Photos of your candle are even provided for assurance (Original Products Botanica n.d.-b).

Voodoo Authentica has all of their *Voodoo* dolls handmade locally by carefully-selected practitioners. But even handmade items need to be personalized before use. Just as my *agbalegba* coffin requires items like the remnants of the items stolen or the hair or fingernails of the person you wish to curse to direct the power within the figure against a specific deserving victim, so too do *Voodoo* dolls for love and success require a person toward whom to focus their power. Voodoo Authentica's website suggests wrapping a piece of your own hair around your *Voodoo* doll or writing your name on a piece of paper and affixing it to the doll to focus its positive effects onto you (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f). In this way, dolls can be prepared remotely by ritualists without ever having to meet the client face to face. The doll can then be shipped and the portion of the ritual that connects the doll with a target can be completed by the client when the doll arrives. The doll is the only one meeting the client, and the two solidify their relationship independently of the ritualist at that time. By dividing the ritual performance into two parts, completed to a certain point by the ritualist and then finished by the client, power figures can be

constructed on one side of the world and employed on the other, allowing interactions that were once only done face to face to be performed remotely from anywhere around the globe.

*Obeah* man Ebenezer White also performs rituals for clients remotely through his website ObeahRituals.com. In a client testimonial presented on his website, White reveals that he has had clients who were initially skeptical of the effectiveness of a remote, online ritual, but who were pleasantly surprised by the results. A client, identified as Keisha, said:

In Jamaica there are many [*Obeah* men] and I looked around a lot. Two of them took money from me but my husband kept cheating. I jus [sic] couldn't look more because someone would catch me and it would ruin my reputation if they knew I was doing Obeah.

Someone told me about Ebenezer in Trinidad but I didn't have the money to go there and find him. Then when I saw he has a website I said I would try one last time. The idea of Obeah on the computer seemed very strange to me because I had been having baths and sprinkling oils and powder. Ebenezer has a powerful reputation but I did not have full faith that you can do Obeah for people far away. But I found a friend who knew him and she said she did it. My marriage was getting worse and my husband had even moved out of the house by now. So it was all I could do.

I wrote to Ebenezer and had him do a spell for me. He told me what he would do and he said for my situation I had to buy some candles and go out at night but that it was a big secret. I knew it was my last chance to get my husband and family back. So I did what he asked and then I waited one week.

My husband came home in a week but was distant. He seemed very sad and he would not tell me what happened. In two weeks he admitted he made a huge mistake. He confessed he felt like he was under some force from that woman but then it stopped. She left him for a new man and kicked him out of her house. Part of me wanted to kick him to the curb too, but I forgave him. Really I wanted the family back more than anything and I still loved my husband. He has not cheated since and after some time I told him about the Obeah man. He was shocked but said it made sense. He said he always felt like she was putting something in his food to tie him.

All of this happened in February of 2011. We never saw the woman again but I am sure she is doing some evil on the island still. My husband and I are happy now and this is all in the past but I had to give a big thanks to Ebenezer. And I learned that Obeah isn't as scary or evil as our parents told us growing up a road. (White n.d.-a)

There is much to be taken away from this passage. One is the penchant of ritualists with an online presence to post testimonials from their clients to bolster their work, something that in the past would likely have been accomplished through word of mouth. But with the broadening of the community to a global scale, written support can travel much farther. Ritualists on

*Instagram* have been known to post screenshots of *WhatsApp* and other messaging apps allowing text-based conversations where clients lauded their services thanking the ritualist for solving their problems and ameliorating their lives. These text-imonials are a unique 21<sup>st</sup> century way for ritualists to share the stories of happy clients. Another point the passage demonstrates is that even believers of these practices are sometimes skeptical of the use of the internet in the execution of traditional rituals. The ability of a ritualist to work remotely and the power of a spell to act over such great distances are factors that have been put to the test by this new form of remote ritual activity. Finally, the stigma surrounding these traditions is forefront, highlighting the possible advantages of internet rituals given the discretion they can provide, especially in countries like Jamaica where these traditions are still illegal. In some countries, being caught performing such rituals or even commissioning their performance can commit one to fines and prison time (see Section 6.4).

#### **4.4 On Display: Museums vs. Botánicas**

##### **4.4.1 Etic vs. Emic Descriptions**

To the general public, some of the *minkisi* represent African art. But even if objects are collected according to this criterion, the present publication will make it clear that as a class, *minkisi* objects have an intrinsic meaning and function that supersedes the western designation given to some of them. (MacGaffey 1991: 3)

This study compared ten etic records on power figures collected from the websites of museums and art galleries, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University Art Gallery, Michael C. Carlos Museum, and Duke University, against ten emic records of power figures from the websites of botánicas and ritualists' shops, including Original Products Botanica, Voodoo Authentica, Jam-Haitian Candle Shop, Santo Products, and Conjure New Orleans, and from individual ritualists like *houngan* Gaston Jean-Baptiste, Babalawo Orisha, and Mama Ifawale. The intended uses of the power figures depicted were recorded and sorted into six overlapping groups (see Figure 1). Intended uses were taken as stated or approximate to those stated in the power figure's record.

Types of Power  
Figures in Data Set

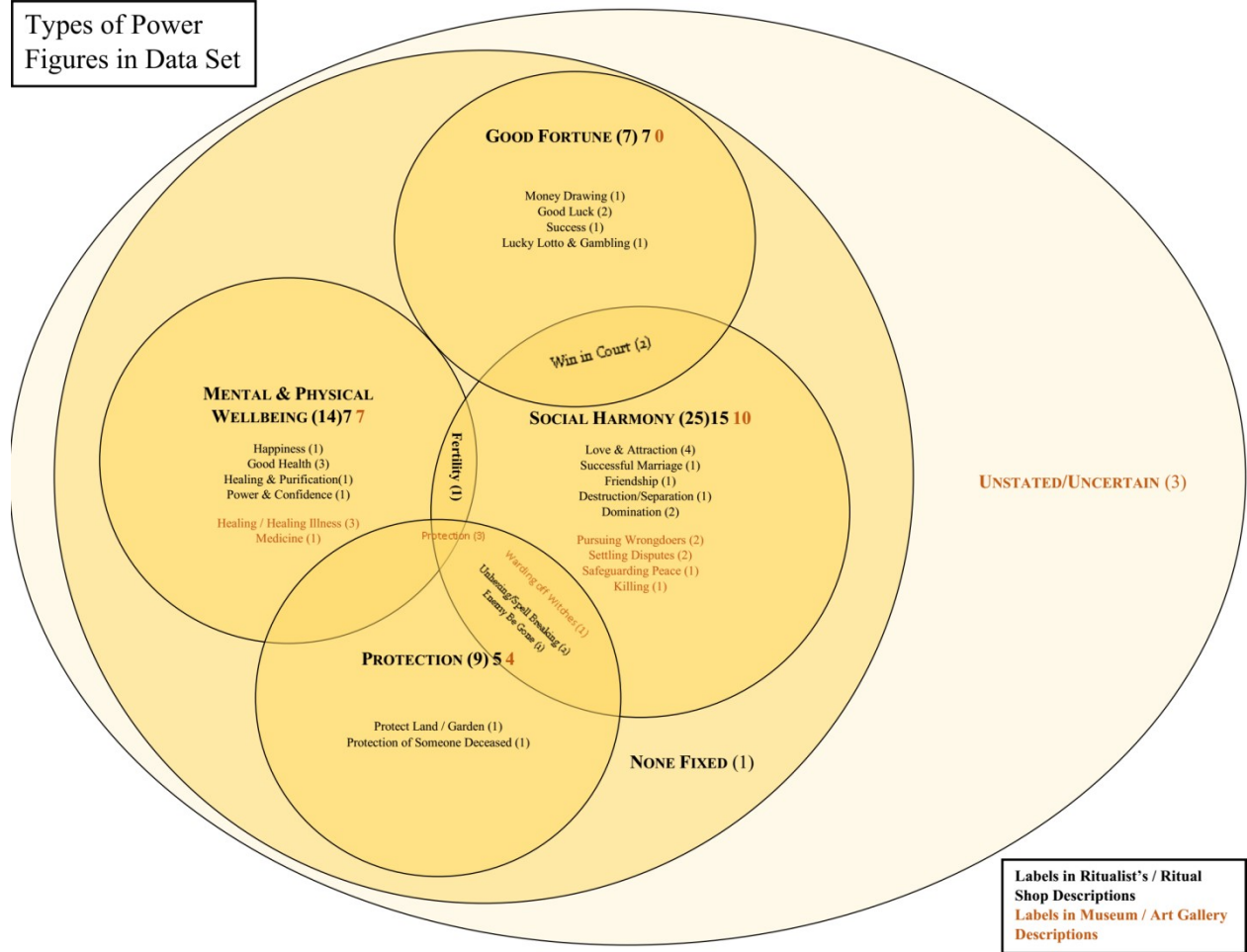


Figure 1: Recorded intents of power figures studied in this data set.

Across all of the power figures sampled, the largest grouping was that of figures designed to balance social harmony in some way. This included figures for love and marriage, friendship, dispelling an enemy or the hex an enemy placed upon you, separating people, dominating them, keeping peace and winning in-court disputes. This was by far the largest group of figures, showing that power figures are quite frequently employed to ameliorate relationships, whether by healing good ones or destroying harmful ones. This is fitting given that power figures originated in African cultures which have tended to place strong value in community as compared to the often more individualistic West.

It is also interesting that there were no etic records in this data set that mentioned power figures with command in the realm of good fortune, despite it being a common everyday use of these figures today. Power figures for luck and financial success are available at many ritual

shops and botánicas, including Original Products Botanica and Voodoo Authentica, and are sold by ritualists like Mama Ifawale on *Instagram*. Perhaps these represent more modern, mundane uses of power figures that escape the interest of museum records, or perhaps academic institutions prefer broader categories making these uses too specific to be mentioned. Ritual shops' views of these figures' abilities, however, are more nuanced. It is noteworthy that the range of types of power figures represented is far greater in ritual shops than it is in museums and galleries. Within ten ritual shop records of power figures, twenty different uses were mentioned, compared with only nine different uses mentioned in ten museum and art gallery records.

Grouping these figures proved problematic, evident in the chaotic Venn diagram that resulted. As you can see, the complex nature of these figures resists categorization. After all, is unhexing a matter of self-protection or social rectification? Is enemy-be-gone a social problem or a protection problem? And how about fertility: is it a matter of personal wellness or – particularly in societies that put strong emphasis on kin, relationships with ancestors, and community – is fertility a social matter? In many ways, the exercise to group these figures was fruitless, proving only that power figures continuously defy efforts to place them into categories. They are as purposeful, dynamic, and adaptable as the living beings they are said to be. In truth, the very fact that I tried to place them in groupings is perhaps a sign of the Western roots of my training, the ways I have been taught in the Western education system to interpret, analyze, and convey data. Therefore, to reflect their complex nature, I have placed power figures that fit into more than one group in overlapping sections in attempts to avoid limiting them to Western binaries and categories, instead working towards a more emic understanding of the multifaceted nature of their uses.

My findings in comparing practitioner-generated (emic) records by ritualists' shops and botánicas to academic-generated (etic) records in museums and art galleries also showed vastly different presumptions regarding the use of the figures being displayed and the purpose of the information provided in their description. For those records produced from within the tradition, the information given is intended to be used in the practice of the tradition. All of the power figures showcased by ritualists and ritual shops were displayed as currently powerful objects capable of being used to ameliorate your life today. The etic records, those generated from

outside the tradition, were intended to be used to teach outsiders about the tradition, but were not intended for practical use. Of the ten museum and art gallery records sampled in this study, only two indicated that power figures like this were still being used today. These came from items #A057 *Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè* and #A065 *Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe*, both from Duke University's *Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic* exhibit which, as we will see, was also the only academic display of power figures in my data set that featured the ritualists themselves prominently in the item descriptions, as both named creators of the objects and their interpreters (see Section 4.4.2).

All of the museum and art gallery records of power figures in my sample assumed little to no reader knowledge about the figures. They were written from an academic perspective, intent on informing the reader about the objects. This contributes to the implied exoticness of the items in museum displays because they are spoken of as foreign objects. This contrasted markedly with the records from botánicas and ritual shops. These records were all written to describe an object that the sellers intended to be bought and used, and their assumptions about reader knowledge were much more varied. The majority, 60% of ritual shops, like the museum and art gallery records, assumed minimal to no knowledge on the part of the buyer, instead providing detailed instructions for the item's use, either on the site or in instructions provided with the figure. The other 40% however assumed quite a high level of knowledge by the buyer, revealing very little about the use of the item in the online description and not mentioning whether instructions might be provided. The user of the object, then, was assumed to be nearly self-sufficient, or at the very least left to their own devices to ask for help if they were adrift. For a couple of records, all that was explained was where in your home to place the figure; how to communicate with the figure and how to use it to heal your problems was not disclosed. So, while museums and art galleries might assume that few people who are reading their records have any direct or day-to-day contact with power figures, many ritualists and ritual shops know different, and assume that the people seeking out these objects may indeed have had prior dealings with them.

If you were to take a power figure from the shelf in a ritualist's shop and place it inside a glass case in a museum, it would be, at its heart, the same power figure. But how its story will be told and what its future will hold will be very different. The power figure in the ritualists' shop will be described as a living thing, capable of changing your life in the here and now. It has a

purpose, a job, a task to fulfill, and it has power that must be handled properly and respected. Often a power figure in a museum is a ghost, a dead thing that once might have been great and powerful, but now is merely a pale spectre that tells stories of what it once was. No one is about to lift the figure out of its case in a museum and use it, the way one might lift a power figure from a ritualist's hands and put it to work. For the most part, power figures in museums *once were*. But power figures in botánicas *are*.

#### 4.4.2 Pockmarks in the Plexiglas

Two thousand years and two centuries ago, the Greek historian Polybius proposed the foundations for a political theory of acquisitions. Having lived as a political hostage in Rome during a 15-year time period, Polybius describes the dual pain that the conqueror inflicts on the conquered by not only depriving him of his cultural heritage, but then inviting him to partake in the humiliating spectacle of passing through the various cities where his home country's objects have now become the mere spoils of plundering. Polybius warns that such spectacles arouse as much anger as hatred by the victims, who plead to the future conquerors "not to create calamities of the other into the ornaments of their nation." (Sarr & Savoy 2018: 7)

According to a 2018 study by economist Felwine Sarr and historian Bénédicte Savoy, performed in collaboration with experts in France and in the French African nations of Benin, Cameroon, Mali and Senegal (2018: 4), "...over 90% of the material cultural legacy of sub-Saharan Africa remains preserved and housed outside of the African continent. Whereas many other regions of the world represented in Western Museum collections are still able to hold on to a significant portion of their own cultural and artistic heritage, this is not the case in sub-Saharan Africa which has been able to retain almost nothing" (Sarr & Savoy 2018: 3). Belgium's Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale alone hosts 180,000 of these items, the as yet unopened Berlin's Humboldt Forum has 75,000, the British Museum holds 69,000; meanwhile most African museums possess no more than 3,000 artefacts of considerably less significance than those coveted by Western institutions (Sarr & Savoy 2018: 15). Power figures have made striking displays in museums like New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Paris' Museum for Contemporary Art Fondation Cartier. Item #1979.206.127 *Power Figure: Male (Nkisi)*, currently on display at The MET Fifth Avenue (see Illus. 6), "has been a highlight of the Rockefeller



collection since its acquisition in 1952” (MMA n.d.: item 1979.206.127). Despite their popularity in Western exhibits, power figures are often misrepresented in these settings and there remain great discrepancies between how these objects are represented in Western academic institutions and how they are displayed and interpreted by ritualists.

For power figures in museums and galleries, there are several ways in which their depictions can be made more accurate, and present a truer picture to the world. One is to ensure their healing intents are recognized and the religions of which they are a part presented in their full complexity, rather than merely as sensationalized versions of stereotypes. Many museums, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art are already doing this, including detailed descriptions of the items online, with blog posts for more information (see Kingdon 2015; see also MMA n.d.: item 1979.206.127). Another responsibility if we are to produce accurate representations of these objects is to demonstrate power figures in dynamic context. This can include displaying the figure alongside images or videos of it being danced in ritual, audio clips of the songs used to activate the figure, and information linking the figure to current uses of these kinds and related ritual objects in Africa and in the Diaspora, so museum patrons can see that these traditions are ongoing and retain importance to people around the globe. With advances in technology, audiovisual components to exhibits are now more common. The Metropolitan Museum’s *Art and Oracle: African Art and Rituals of Divination* exhibit in 2011 had an accompanying website, and Duke University’s *Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic* is an ongoing fully online exhibit of its Afro-Atlantic Sacred Art Collection, that allows organizers to expand the exhibit beyond the confines of the local museum walls to include further contextual information in essays, images, and videos.

However, there is still much work to be done. On the main page of the website for Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain’s *Vodun, African Voodoo* exhibit, opened in the year 2011, *Vodou* is described as an “ancient religious cult” and *bocio* as “strange and uncanny sculptures [which] emanate qualities of tension and foreboding” (FCAC 2011a: para.5). Among the numerous mentions of collector Jacques Kerchache on the website and how he “recognized” the art in the figures (FCAC 2011a: para.4) – evoking flawed European ideas of allegedly discovering items that had been used by other people for centuries – is the assertion by André

Malraux that “For primitive arts and most notably for vodun, there is Jacques Kerchache and only him” (FCAC 2011a: para.2). The exhibition catalogue goes on to say,

A great connoisseur of African art, Jacques Kerchache traveled to Benin in the 1960s where he first discovered Vodun art, the source of Vodun itself. (FCAC 2011b: 9)

Jacques made it his mission to elevate Vodun art, to situate it among the greatest of human creations. He was determined not to let humanity’s deepest secrets remain in the dark. (FCAC 2011b: 9)

An intent of the exhibit is “to revive and share in the spirit of Vodun as Jacques Kerchache understood it” (FCAC 2011b: 9).

There are a number of problems with these statements, not the least of which is the overwhelming emphasis on the collector of the items rather than the creators of them. The notion that Kerchache discovered these items is preposterous given their use for centuries prior to his arrival. Furthermore, the idea that he wished to allegedly elevate the objects into the realm of art implies that 1) they were not art before he declared they were, 2) that he had the power to so deem them art, and 3) that the Western notion of art means anything at all. That *bocio* would “remain in the dark” had Kerchache not “discovered” them is also ludicrous. In fact, these items were probably more likely to see the light of day in the hands of a ritualist or staked in the ground outside a dwelling in West Africa than in Fondation Cartier’s exhibit.

*Bocio* are described by Gabin Djimassé in his article “Vodun and Fon Culture” in the exhibition catalogue as follows:

If, around the bend on a Fon path, you should suddenly come face to face with a long piece of wood planted deep in the ground, whose upper part, standing at human height, suggests a more or less subtly sculpted face, do not be afraid. It is almost certainly a *bocio*, the powerful guardian of that particular place, a sort of active and protective sentry. (Djimassé 2011: 201)

Yet, this protective quality of *bocio* is somewhat overshadowed in the description the *bocio* labelled *Chariot of Death*. This *bocio* takes the form of a human figure with two faces, which is attached by chains to two crocodile skulls. In addition to the protective description of *bocio* in general given by Djimassé, elsewhere in the catalogue Blier states that “crocodiles enable one not only to avoid water accidents and drowning, but also to shuck off smaller problems with alacrity. Linked to the god of royal birth, deformity, and springs (*tohosso*), crocodiles also are

assumed to use their knowledge and help solve complex problems” (2011a: 197). However, when the crocodile skulls in *Chariot of Death* are interpreted in its item description, this information is omitted.

The skull bones of the crocodiles are symbols of death because these creatures are no longer alive. It would be impossible to ask them to do something good. (Djimassé 2011: 209)

While it is possible this particular *bocio* could have a connection to death, to suffice it to say that crocodile skulls represent death merely because they are dead is overly simplistic. Blier explains earlier in the catalogue precisely what crocodiles meant to the creators of these objects, and death is not among those things. If all items that are dead merely represent death, than all of the plant and animal matter included in power figures worldwide would have no other purpose than to redundantly represent death. Furthermore, to say that due to their being dead “it would be impossible to ask them to do something good” runs counter to the plethora of African traditions that invoke the favor of ancestors – long deceased – often through using items associated with them, to assist and ameliorate their descendants lives.

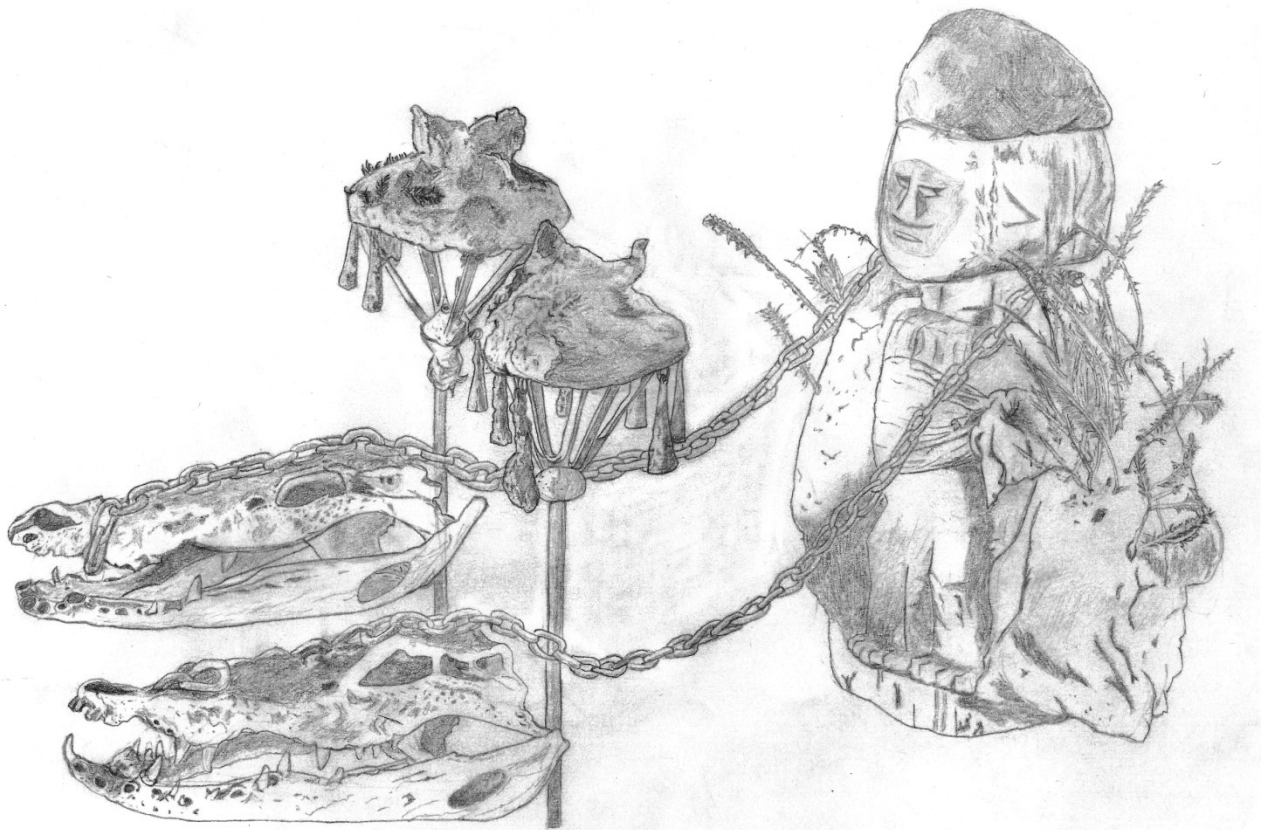


Illustration 19: Dubbed by Jacques Kerchache *Chariot of Death*, this *bocio* figure was created by the Fon people of Benin. Currently in the private collection of A. & J. Kerchache, it was displayed at Fondation Cartier in 2011. It is composed of wood, clay, metal, cloth, plant material, feathers, crocodile skulls, and sacrificial patina.

This is not the only time we see an overemphasis on the macabre in this exhibit. A large portion of the *bocio* figures displayed in *Vodun: African Voodoo* are showcased on pedestals in a darkened room with stark and menacing spotlights that shine down on the individual items from overhead, cutting them with deep shadows. The exhibition catalogue follows the same format: lone *bocio* figures adrift on spartan black pages. In an accompanying video tour of the exhibit, we are offered perspectives of *Vodun* in voiceovers that are at odds with the dark manner in which these *bocio* are displayed visually, perspectives that repeatedly express the importance of connections to nature for practitioners.

...for each compartment of life, there's a method, solutions, all while respecting nature. For everything in Vodun comes from the flora and fauna. That's Vodun.

Voodoo, like Hinduism, like other universal cultures, is both religion and culture. It's a way of looking at life. It's a way of accepting life through nature. (Duroy 2011: 1:58)

Yet, while these statements are being made, *bocio* figures are being shown in a darkened room, lit from above in a dramatic, menacing manner. There is no nature here, none of the flora and fauna so integral to *Vodun* that is being described by the speakers. We are left wondering whether the designer of the exhibit actually heard the speakers at all, or whether the exhibit was designed instead based on a pre-existing stereotype in the Western mind. (It is also worth noting that in the entire video, the only individual's name that is spoken is not the names of the speakers, nor the names of the creators, nor practitioners, but "Jacques" and "only him" (FCAC 2011a: para. 2). Thus, it is important for exhibit designers to note that how an item is displayed visually can be as just important as what is written in the description on a plaque in influencing viewer perceptions.

Decisions to display an item inaccurately can also be influenced by funds. Tuhiwai Smith describes in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012) how a Maori house, known as *Mataatua*, was actually displayed inside out by the British Empire Exhibition in Sydney in 1879 due to the higher cost of reconstructing and displaying it faithfully. Displaying the house in this manner saved the British Museum 535 pounds, but it cost them an accurate depiction of an important Maori cultural object (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 107-108).

Whether an item is deemed to belong in a museum or an art gallery, and the subcategories into which it is placed, can also be telling of Western biases. Items from both Yale

Peabody Museum of Natural History and Yale University Art Gallery were present in my sample. Item YPM ANT 250242 is a pair of dolls constructed of wood and covered in canvas which contains blood stains. They are held in Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. While they are not expressly stated as power figures, the museum’s records say that “Prince identifies [these] as ‘medicine dolls’ but no provenience [is] given” (YPMNH n.d.: item YPM ANT 250242). The quotations around “medicine dolls” might be indicative of a quote from Prince. But they could equally be quotations of disbelief (further discussed in Section 5.5), especially given the fact that, while they are described as medicine dolls in the item record they have been categorized under the function “toys & games,” effectively denying their potential as ritual objects.

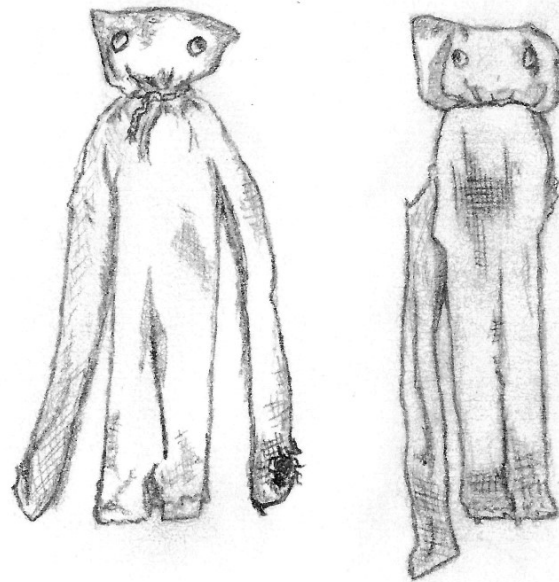


Illustration 20: “Medicine dolls,” bloodstained fabric over a stick armature, with cowrie shell eyes. These items (YPM ANT 250242) are categorized in Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History’s collections under “Toys and Games” despite indication of their medicinal significance.

Yale University Art Gallery’s *Unconsecrated Power Figure*, item 1954.28.19, is a carved wooden anthropomorphic statue. It is described as a creation of the Teke people, neighbours to the Kongo and possessed of related figures to *minkisi*. However, this power figure is acknowledged as incomplete. The item description reads, “This power figure is unconsecrated; it had its sacred material and potency removed, or it had not yet been consecrated before sold” (YUAG n.d.: item 1954.28.19). It is interesting that we should find it here in Yale’s art gallery when related items are housed in its natural history museum, some with rather unflattering descriptions. In addition to the medicine dolls which have been relegated to the “toys & games” category, a cast bronze statue of a man, item YPM ANT 249865, is described in Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History’s records as “Modern tourist ‘art’ of little ethnographic artistic or monetary value” (YPMNH n.d.: item YPM ANT 249865). No, this cast bronze statue is not a power figure. But what separates it from item 1954.28.19, *Unconsecrated Power Figure*? Both

are humanoid statues without medicines or powers. What makes one art and the other artefact? What makes one fit to grace the podium of Yale University Art Gallery while the other is relegated to natural museum collections, deemed art only in disbelieving quotes, and judged “of little... artistic... value”? Western assumptions about these figures and the categories and institutions they place them in can thus greatly distort how they are understood and valued by onlookers.

Duke University’s *Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic* exhibit is a refreshing change. Artifact A065 known as *Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe* is a power figure in the form of a blue and red ball-and-cone shaped *pakèt kongo*, adorned with ribbons and topped with feathers, sitting atop a bright yellow boat adorned with gold stars, its mast wrapped in red, green, and white ribbon like a candy cane. This *pakèt kongo* is intended as an embodiment and link for communication with the *Vodou* sea god Agwe (Duke University n.d.: item A065). One of the most significant factors about this item’s description is that the individual ritualist who made the item, Manmi Maude, is named. This does not occur in any other museum description in my data set.



Illustration 21: *Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe* (item A065) created by ritualist Manmi Maude (Marie Maude Evans). This figure is currently on display by Duke University in their online exhibit *Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic*.

The culture from which the item originated is often the closest most museum displays of power figures ever get to naming its creator. As we have seen with Fondation Cartier, we are far more likely to see the collector's name in the item's description than the person's who made it. The creators of these works are seldom seen as individuals by museums; far more often they are portrayed as faceless groups, an entire culture of people, rather than named individuals. Common characters in these narratives are instead the individual explorer or collector, typically European, since Europeans were assumed to be important individuals who had done significant things. In reality, all they had really done was travel the world collecting significant things made by other people and slapping their own names on them.

*Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic* breaks this mould, and it doesn't stop at simply naming the ritualist. The record for *Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe* also states that, "Manmi Maude made [this power figure] for Professor Matory and gifted it to him on 19 March 2015. She intended for it to help protect Professor Matory from jealousy and from the efforts of others to block his path." Not only

### **Erasing the Artist**

In 2020, on the beaches of Bloody Bay, Jamaica, I overheard a tourist speaking to her friends about a painting she had bought down at the shops, a line of small blue-tarped stands lining a section of the beach and forming a makeshift market. The tourist's friend admired the painting, complimenting how beautiful it was; unfortunately, the friend observed with disappointment, it didn't say "Jamaica" on it. The woman who had bought the painting replied that she didn't like that the artist had signed their name in the corner of the piece; when she got home, the woman declared, she was going to take some paint of her own and cover it up.

To intentionally erase the name of an artist from their work, in order to fabricate some faceless souvenir of a country, perhaps even replacing the artist's name with simply "Jamaica," a symbol of a caricature of a place but not its individual people, is akin to how many museums traditionally have exhibited non-Western art. *Minkisi* and other power figures in museums are rarely displayed alongside the name of their creator, an individual, but rather as a relic of an entire people, tribe, culture, or country. A power figure then is not described as made by the ritualist Datrefonyo, but rather as a figure of the Ga people of Ghana. This kind of distancing and anonymity exoticizes an object and lends to the idea of non-Western people as faceless groups rather than individuals. To display a painting by Leonardo da Vinci as by a nameless Italian would be scandalous. But these acts of erasure take place in non-Western art every day. Sometimes the names of artists are unknown, a failure of collectors and explorers historically that reverberates into today. But other times the act of erasure is willful. What that woman declared on the beach that day was perhaps even more despicable because, with the name in her hand, she sought deliberately to destroy it. For it marred the stereotypical caricature she held in her mind of Jamaica, ruined it with the faces of real people, a real artist with a life, and a paintbrush, and their own vision of the world.

is Manmi Maude named, so too is the person the power figure was created for, Professor J. Lorand Matory. The ritualist's intent for the figure, for protection, is also evident. Furthermore, the fact that the item is described as having been gifted to its recipient brings to light a feature of museum and gallery exhibits that so often gets swept under the rug: How did these items get here? A great many of them, after all, were not gifts.

Many artefacts in exhibits were forcibly taken from their owners, confiscated as part of religious conversions or alleged civilizing missions. While some museum records, like those for items 1935.001.006 and 1935.001.015 both named *Power Object, Nkisi* of Michael C. Carlos Museum, indicate their roots of acquisition as commissions, many other artefacts that grace museum display cases arrived there with far less benign origin stories (MCCM n.d.: items 1935.001.006 and 1935.001.015). In my data set, 60% (6/10) of the item records left the manner in which the object was acquired unstated, a deafening silence



Illustration 22: *Power Object, Nkisi* (item 1935.001.006) fashioned by the Songye people from a nut, currently in the possession of Michal C. Carlos Museum.

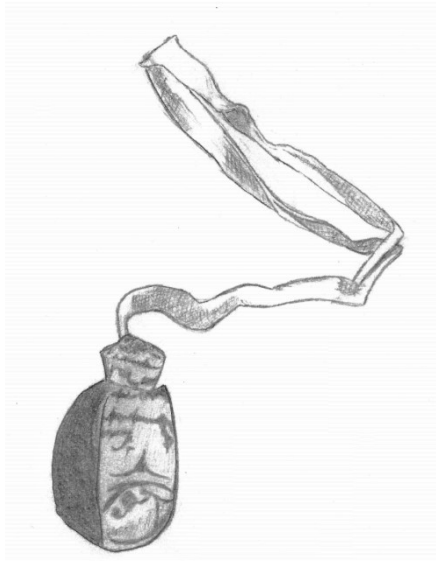


Illustration 23: Stolen from the neck of a chief, item YPM ANT 009815 is a pendant made from the body of a beetle and packed with medicines to banish witches. While not named by Yale Peabody Museum as a power figure, consider its similarities to the power figure in Illus. 22 and others throughout this volume.

regarding a significant part of those objects' histories. Three of the items were recorded as having been given willingly, either commissioned or given as a gift. The tenth record was from Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History; in its catalogue description of item YPM ANT 009815, a necklace with a pendant made from the body of a beetle and filled with medicines intended to ward off witches, Yale Peabody Museum admits that the item was "taken from the neck of an African Chief, near Zambezi River" (YPMNH n.d.: item YPM ANT 009815). This record speaks candidly and

blatantly about an often violent aspect of colonial collection that is so frequently left veiled, likely representing a great number of the cases in that silent 60%. All of these numbers are in stark contrast to my findings of records in ritual shops where 100% of the items being described were handmade or manufactured for sale and use. Power figures sold in ritual shops today were not forcibly confiscated for displays, but



are made by the shop owners themselves, other local ritualists, or mass-produced for sale by third-party companies.

To fully place these items in context, then, these facts cannot be glossed over. We need to depict, in writing or visually, power figures being confiscated and burned, others forcibly taken from their owners who had been using them to heal, only to be brought back to Europe as curiosities. Perhaps a useful exhibit would be one that took visitors' own prized possessions from them upon arrival, locked them away in glass cases, created cursory and often inaccurate labels of their origin and use, and allowed others to gawk at them. That might be the closest we could get to conveying accurate context for these figures.

By consequence of colonial confiscations, many of the historical power figures in museum collections are actually incomplete, intentionally deconsecrated by ritualists and practitioners who removed potent and powerful medicines to thwart their falling into the hands of European confiscators and collectors. As described in an article by World Museum Liverpool's Curator of African Collections, Zachary Kingdon, which is featured on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website, this includes many *Mangaaka* figures, a type of anthropomorphic *Nkisi Nkondi* figure used to maintain social order by hunting wrongdoers and sealing oaths (Kingdon 2015: para. 5; MacGaffey 2000: 113). There are many reasons ritualists might not have wanted this power to fall into the wrong hands. One is that its power to pursue and punish might have been turned against them. But it also could simply have been a measure in ensuring no innocent people were harmed. The effects of improper handling and misuse of *minkisi* were known to practitioners, with anthropologist J.M. Janzen even describing forms of "nkisi-related afflictions" known to the BaKongo people (Janzen 1978: 183).

Many cases of madness received by Nzoamambu [master nganga (ritualist)] were young men and women who had "played with charms" (*minkisi*) or "walked on a fetish" (*diata va nkisi*), meaning they had consulted or purchased magical devices and had either not observed the rules or had gotten involved with medicines too powerful for them and had "burned their fingers" as a consequence. (Janzen 1978: 182)

Deconsecrating power figures before their confiscation then would be wise not only because these power objects could be turned upon their old owners, but because they could turn upon their new ones, since many Europeans would not have understood how to properly use them. Ironically, deconsecrating the figures in this way, with a concern for their function,

undermined European aspirations to obtain complete pieces of art as archetypes of “primitive” religious objects in their knowledge-collection missions (Kingdon 2015: para. 8). This means that many power figures in museums lack the powerful medicines that are a crucial step in their composite construction, rendering these figures essentially dead (MacGaffey 1977: 173).

In effect, my *agbalegba* figure was deconsecrated within the very act of consecration. While many medicines were included, certain elements were left out – chanting, the hair or fingernails that would tie the curse to a specific victim; even herbs used to wash the body that were present in a colleague’s *agbalegba* figure but not in mine may have been left out deliberately for this reason. In addition, my *agbalegba* figure was not buried in a cemetery, the final act in its deployment. In this way, my figure was rendered impotent, and so safe to be made and given for demonstrative purposes only. This enforces how powerful this figure was considered to be by the ritualist who made it, and how seriously he took the act of making a power figure. *Minkisi* that were deconsecrated before they fell into European hands and my *agbalegba* figure, which to ensure it brought no unintended harm was never fully consecrated, show that, for ritualists, there is a difference between items intended for display as art or demonstration and those intended for use. The power of the object must be respected, and if it is not to be used by a competent practitioner who possesses it, then the figure must be deconsecrated to remove that power.

Duke University’s *Sacred Arts of The Black Atlantic* exhibit, on top of featuring items like *Paket Kongo and Boat for Agwe*, which were given freely by ritualists, also includes ritualists’ interpretations of objects. Item A057 *Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè* is a small plaster or polished stone coffin with protruding handles on the sides and a cross on the removable lid. The creator is not named, and, in fact, even the precise intended use of the figure is unknown. Instead, this object’s record includes the hypotheses of two different ritualists, Manbo Sylvanie and Manbo Maude, who speculate as to the potential uses of the figure. Manbo Maude, for example, found the object confusing, saying that it was too small for much more than “soaking a chain in empowering substances;” but Manbo Sylvanie said that it is of a type commonly used in secret societies, indicating the item’s continued employment today (Duke University n.d.: item A057).

In addition to the inherent value in featuring ritualists' own interpretations of these objects, including ritualists' discussions of different potential uses for an object also reveals the personal and dynamic nature of these traditions. Power figures are constructed and used in different ways by different people at different times. There is more than one combination of medicines that have been used to fill an *agbalegba* coffin. As such, ritualists can and do vary, and at times disagree, in the ways they carry about their work. For instance, Voodoo Authentica only works with ritualists who imbue their dolls with positive forces, while Conjure New Orleans will sell you a spiritually neutral doll baby which you can employ however you see fit (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e; Conjure New Orleans n.d.-b).

*Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè* is not identified specifically as a power figure in the item description. In fact, this particular coffin is empty. But one of the rituals in which it is speculated to be used, *sèkèy madoulè*, bears similarities to *agbalegba* and the use of miniature coffins filled with medicines in power figures in Trinidad (Connelly 2018) and Nigeria (Mama Ifawale 2018). In the *sèkèy madoulè* ceremony,

...a person afflicted with certain problems, which may or may not be health-related, is treated by placing him or her inside a life-sized coffin containing sacred or magical herbs and other items. During that ceremony, the person in the coffin is paraded around the *peristil*, or temple. Alternatively, a small coffin filled with herbs may be paraded around the *peristil*. The intention behind both versions of the procedure is to heal the supplicant by carrying away his or her burdens or problems. Alternatively, such a coffin might be used in magic intended to kill, in which case the coffin is used to carry substances that can kill a person if thrown on him or her. (Duke University n.d.: item A057)

While figure A057 *Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè* in its current state is not a composite power figure, with the right medicines and spirit, it might be. The descriptions of the *sèkèy madoulè* ceremony as well as its miniature version with a smaller coffin, recall Roberts' (2011) findings on miniature *agbalegba* coffins as subversions of larger Ga funerary rituals. Furthermore, the assertion that this coffin might be filled with dangerous substances and employed in magic to kill also conjures similarities with *agbalegba*. According to Manbo Sylvanie, the object is also of the type used by secret societies for treatments. The coffin would be filled with medicines, "heated up," and further empowered through the song and dance of priests (Duke University n.d.: item A057).

The record for *Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè* also indicates the contemporariness of power figures. It contains debate between ritualists about the potential uses of the figure in present tense including the statement by Manbo Sylvanie that it is a kind of figure used by secret societies. Even more explicit, contained within the record for *Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe* is that the date Manmi Maude gave it to Professor Matory as a gift, intending it to protect him. That date was 19 March 2015. This leaves readers in no doubt that this figure represents an ongoing practice, not a relic of a dead culture. Such an explicit mention of a contemporary date for a figure is a rare find amongst the museum and art gallery exhibits of power figures in this study. By failing to indicate the continued use of these objects and their continued relevance in many people's daily lives both in Africa and in the Diaspora, museums and art galleries contribute to the exoticizing of power figures in the West, not just in time but also in place. These figures and their variant cousins continue to be used worldwide in dealing with day-to-day problems. But uninformed museum patrons from outside the cultural groups that create and use power figures, people who often lack anything but the most mainstream, pop culture conceptualizations of those tools and many of whom have never set foot in a ritual shop, may fail to understand these figures' contemporariness when reading a description in a museum. As a result, power figures are assumed to be of the past and of far away, when really, they are of now and of here.

Yet, despite debates on accurate representation and providing context and continuity, the fact that even one museum could openly admit that an item was acquired in such a manner as having been "taken from the neck of an African chief" and still house it in their collection, illuminates that perhaps the biggest problem with Western exhibits is that these items remain in them at all. In 2016, France refused to return any items it held in its collections that originated from Benin to their homes, citing "the inalienability of public French art collections" (Sarr & Savoy 2018: 1). But in 2017, President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron rescinded this tradition, saying "Starting today, and within the next five years, I want to see the conditions put in place so as to allow for the temporary or definitive restitution of African cultural heritage to Africa" (Sarr & Savoy 2018: 1). This change represents a step in the right direction, towards the acknowledgment that decolonization requires repatriation. But there is still resistance. Some institutions worry they will lose their entire collections when the original owners of the items come knocking (Young 2019). The absurd notion that these collections were ever the property of

Western museums to begin with should be difficult to bolster. But the fact remains that countless Western museums still clench in their fists stacks of items stolen from African necks.

The benefits of repatriation are numerous. After generations of being taught to believe their cultures were primitive, heathen, and inferior, cultural pride can be bolstered by Africans, including African youth, having access to the artifacts of their own vibrant and multifaceted history (Sarr Savoy 2018: 4). On top of being beneficial to locals in educating them about their own cultures, so too is it beneficial when foreign visitors boost the tourism economy by coming to these countries to look at their artifacts. Making it possible to have impressive history museums in Africa and the Caribbean, places whose people have been looted and whose culturally rich artifacts instead now stock the most expensive museums in the West, would help to bring in much deserved revenue to oft impoverished regions.

Some worry about the bare walls and empty display cases that could result in Western museums, and that Westerners would lose knowledge of these traditions unless they are wealthy enough to travel to the places where the artifacts would now reside. Yet, Westerners have more expendable income than most people in the countries where these artifacts were taken from. Furthermore, thanks to the internet, one need not travel physically to see the objects but can instead travel virtually through online museum exhibits with nothing but an internet connection and a desire to learn. And there are loans. But, if artefacts are on loan, they should be on loan *to* Western museums *from* museums in their home countries, not the other way around. The power to decide where these objects go should reside in the hands of the cultures that made them.

In 2018, the Museum of Black Civilizations opened in Dakar, Senegal. It houses not just past artefacts but also art by contemporary African and Diasporic artists, blurring the lines between Western-beloved categories like Africa and Diaspora, past and present, artefact or art, and even art, science, and society. The exhibit includes human skeletal remains from Africa's "Cradle of Life," as well as displays exploring themes like the impact of religious movements on the African continent, globalization, black consciousness movements, and pan-Africanism. It showcases Africans' and descendants' contributions to medicine, architecture, mathematics, the important accomplishments of African and Diasporic women, and contemporary art created by black artists both on and off the continent (Kimeria 2019). Dakar's Museum of Black Civilizations addresses what Sarr and Savoy identify as a need for Africans to have places to

appreciate, learn from, marvel at and be affected by the creations and accomplishments of their own cultures, for both education and pride (2018: 4). To have so many of these items housed and displayed off the continent does a great disservice to the people who still live on it, and who are the legacy of the people who made the objects in the first place.

Another institution making significant headway in decolonization and repatriation is Haida Gwaii Museum and Haida Heritage Center in Skidegate, British Columbia. Constructed in consultation with the Haida community, the buildings were made to look like a village of longhouses, with six totem poles erected outside, its very construction what Sean Young, archaeologist and curator of collections at Haida Gwaii Museum, describes as an act of reconciliation (Young 2019). Exhibits are written in the Haida language first, English second, labels sent to community language speakers to be written in Haida and then sent back to the museum for display. Exhibits also begin with the Haida story first, with origin stories and mythical beings. Then, rather than fearing science or bowing to it, exhibition descriptions at Haida Gwaii Museum actively work to reconcile Haida oral tradition with modern science, with archaeology and geological chronologies, which Young says actually “tell the same stories in different ways” (Young 2019). Sometimes, items on display were brought in by community members, who interpreted them and told their stories, and asked them to be put on exhibit. There are approximately 1,000 Haida artefacts at Haida Gwaii, but there are 15,000 scattered around the world. Since the early 1990s, beginning with human remains, the museum and the community began actively working to bring Haida belongings back home. Since then, they have repatriated the bodies of more than 600 individuals. Now they are also working on retrieving cultural objects (Young 2019).

But even with their successes, there have been major hurdles to the decolonization of these items. Speaking of the Haida Gwaii Museum and its dealings with other museums and curators, Young admits that they have had their differences. He describes an artefact, a wooden chest carved with figures, which had been in the possession of another museum and referred to in publications as the *Mountain Goat Chest* because of a mountain goat figure carved upon it. The Haida people however knew that the mountain goat was a symbol that could be used by anyone. The moon on the chest, though, was much more significant. That symbol could only be used by the chief whose symbol it was, and so indicated that the chest was that of a chief. Their assertion

was met with contestation; but the Haida people persisted. As a result, the chest is now named *Chief Skedans chest* (Young 2019). This speaks to the importance of including emic perspectives in devising interpretations of items on display in museums. This is also why the inclusion of ritualists' perspectives and speculations by Duke University in the *Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic* exhibit is so significant.

But decolonization and repatriation are more than just giving the items back to museums in their country of origin. Young describes how the repatriated *Chief Skedans chest*, once it arrived back home with the Haida people, was featured in a two-day potlatch ceremony held by the community, which included telling the story of the chest and performing gift-giving out of it, requiring 400lbs of copper to be placed inside. To facilitate this, Young fashioned a custom-fit piece of foam to protect the artefact while it lived. These artifacts were “designed to use,” Young said. “They were never designed to sit in a Plexiglas box.” In this way, “It’s not a past story. It’s alive again, not a stagnant piece in storage” (Young 2019). Despite the nervousness this kind of practice might illicit in Western-trained curators, allowing these objects to come back to life like this sometimes honors them in a far greater sense than does elevating them on a podium. It also allows deeper understanding of the objects as they were intended. The Haida decision to *use* the chest to honor it, *use* the chest to learn about it, is far closer to the way a ritualist understands and experiences a power figure than does placing it under glass in a museum. The discrepancies this study has uncovered between how power figures are displayed by museums versus by ritualists themselves, and the emphasis on the importance of use among practitioners, is well mirrored in Young’s experiences.

There remain curators and others who would see this act as a desecration of history. During Young’s talk at Dalhousie University, one audience member accused him of not desiring to preserve the chest. Young replied that it is not about not caring about preserving the artefact. It’s “putting it back in its natural state” (Young 2019). He explained that the differences in perspective here are a difference in cultural worldview. The Western world values preservation. But the Haida people were “happy to have it home and be a part of it, and allow it to go back into its natural state” (Young 2019). This echoes a comment made by Hamady Boucoum, director at the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar. He maintains that, “The restitution of Africa’s stolen assets should not be dependent on us having space to display it. Those who stole our assets

cannot dictate what we do with them. For example, if a community wants to restore their assets to sacred forests from which they were taken, that is their right!” (Kimeria 2019: para. 7).

Young defers to the community on these matters, allowing them to decide whether or not an item should be displayed behind glass or used. If they want to use it, he supports that, “because that’s what it’s meant for.” This was the “first time [*Chief Skedans chest* had] come home in hundreds of years, and I would be a horrible human being to not let them touch it... If it cracks, I have crazy glue... It’s meant to be used” (Young 2019).

The same is true of power figures. As Manmi Maude explains of *Paket Kongo and Boat for Agwe*, it is a living thing, “like the telephone used for communication” with the god (Duke University n.d.: item A065). But it must be treated properly if it is to stay alive. As the item description reads, “To invoke, communicate with, and appeal to the god – and to keep the pakèt kongo alive and effective as an embodiment of and vehicle of communication with the god – one must periodically talk to it, make requests of it, and offer it rum, perfume, and a lit candle” (Duke University n.d.: item A065). Manmi Maude compares this to the cultivation of a friendship, which too will die if it is not properly tended (Duke University n.d.: item A065). She is not the only ritualist to discuss this.

The following passage concerns a common medicinal ingredient in *mojo* bags and is from the section “Empowering and Feeding High John the Conqueror Root” in the book *Conjuring Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman and the Spirits of the Underground Railroad* by Witchdoctor Utu:

There are several means and formulas to empower and feed a High John the Conqueror root. The method I share here is my favorite and, in fact, a combination of elements of southern, northern, and Appalachian conjure.

- Take your High John root in your hands, and commune with it. Hold it and ponder all that this spirit meant to his people kept in bondage.
- With your left pointer finger, tap the root three times, and whisper aloud: “Awake and remember your power.”
- Breathe upon the root, and say his name: “High John, I call you forth.”
- Pour a dribble of whiskey into a small container or shot glass, and place the root into this vessel so it can suck up the whiskey and gain its power. Let the root sit in the whiskey for about half an hour or so.
- When you take the root out of the whiskey, handle it for a while as it dries, breathe upon it again, and call on High John again: “High John, fed and full, I honor you.”



The root is now empowered, fed, and charged. It has been awoken and is ready for your needs, whether it will be placed in a mojo bag or used to infuse another concoction or simply carried on its own... (Utu, 2019: 97)

This root should be fed no less than every few moons (Utu 2019: 98). *Mojo* bags also need to be fed. According to Original Products Botanica:

Your mojo bag should be carried with you for the first week and you should sleep with it near you at night. It should also be fed each day for a total of seven days, at the same time it was originally fixed, if possible. After the first week, you may carry it on you during the day, or you may put it away in a private place. From that point forward, feed the mojo once a week for four weeks on the same day of the week that it was made. After that month, it should then be fed once a month when the moon is new. (Original Products Botanica 2017)

When power figures like these are trapped in conventional Western museums, none of this happens. Power figures there are never fed nor spoken to. This means that on top of having been stripped of their medicines and adornments, and set on shelves unable to perform the duties for which they are made, many power figures are also starving.

The path towards decolonization includes recognition of colonial misdeeds and ongoing mentalities that misrepresent power figures, how they got here, and what they mean today. It also means taking steps towards constructing truer displays of these figures, even if that means taking them out of their boxes sometimes and using them. We need to blur the lines between museums for old things and art galleries for new ones; between galleries for untouchable beauty we only look at, and ritual shops that meld form and function, where aesthetic beauty still has a job to do. Institutions like museums and art galleries can be the epitome of Western categorization, where the means of display are regimented toward strict and unilinear academic purposes. Or, they can take a lesson from ritual shops. They can break those molds, like the Haida Gwaii Museum and the Dakar Museum of Black Civilizations are doing, start replacing artefacts in the hands of their rightful owners, letting their people interpret them and decide if and how they are to be displayed. There is no greater way for power figures – misunderstood and mistreated for centuries by the West – to return to their “natural state” (Young 2019), to finally find their way home.

## Chapter Five: The Medicines

The nki'si is as it is, but if it lacks medicines it cannot do a thing. So the nkisi has medicines, they are its strength and its hands and feet and eyes; medicines are all these. For this reason, whatever nkisi lacks medicines is dead and has no life.

- Nsemi Isaki (reprinted in MacGaffey 1977: 173)

Medicines are a crucial part of the power figure, according to Nsemi Isaki, the most important. Recall in Chapter Four, that many figures in museums have been deconsecrated through the removal of their medicines, rendering these once-living figures, essentially dead. Living power figures contain a variety of medicinal inclusions, from floral to faunal to manmade, which are selected based on an underlying logic as to their power.

*Minkisi*, for example, contain both metaphoric and metonymic medicines; the former, those whose names or forms invoke the desired result (ex. including the claws from a mongoose so a figure can snatch its prey) and the latter, those medicines which establish a connection with a being (ex. including the hair of the victim, or adding kaolin clay that resides underwater with the dead) (MacGaffey 1991: 6). Metaphoric and metonymic medicines are also included in *agbalegba*, for instance, in the form of the squirrel's tail included in my figure to quicken the curse, and the common inclusion of the hair or fingernails of the victim one wishes to kill. Some ingredients, like the High John the Conqueror root added to many *mojo* bags to invoke the favor and characteristics of the African American folklore hero of the same name, are added for their cultural symbolism, an attachment to something or someone significant.<sup>2</sup> Fitting, since power figures are intended to invoke and communicate with spirits who are intelligent beings.

---

<sup>2</sup> High John the Conqueror root is named after an African American folklore hero. Legend has it that John was a Congolese king who was captured during the slave trade and brought to the New World. Known for his cleverness and unbreakable spirit despite his captivity, John also fell in love with the Devil's daughter and used his intelligence and cunning to escape with her back to Africa. It is said that John left his powers behind so as not to attract more attention from the Devil, instead leaving them in America in the root of the *Ipomoea jalap* or *purga* plant, shown to the slaves by the local indigenous peoples. Since then, High John the Conqueror root has become a keystone of *Hoodoo* folk magic. It can be placed inside a power figure like a *mojo* bag or can be carried on its own as a talisman, and can help High John's adherents with everything from depression to courage to winning in court (Original Products Botanica 2015a).

In addition to floral and faunal inclusions, manmade elements like amulets, nails, and pieces of paper with writing on them are also included in power figures. Recall the papers with gods' and ancestors' names written upon them that were placed inside my *agbalegba* coffin to invoke spiritual power and facilitate communication with the supernatural world.

Like materials for the construction of the physical figure discussed in Section 4.2, medicinal inclusions can also vary from ritualist to ritualist, tradition to tradition, and from region to region with local availability. This reality is, on the surface, seemingly at odds with the perspective of Isaki, who says:

The composition of nkisi – the ingredients and the songs – must follow the original model. If you put ingredients together helter-skelter you injure the nkisi and he will become angry over your failure to arrange the ingredients in the proper order. A nkisi's strength is rooted in how it was discovered originally. (MacGaffey 1977: 173)

But this does not mean that all power figures for a given intent will be clones of one another. As MacGaffey explains:

A charm with the same name and function did not always appear in the same form. The symbolic values of the 'medicinal' ingredients were not necessarily constant from one charm to another; they were determined by the traditional recipe for each particular charm. What remained constant was a relationship of metaphorical elements to elements metonymically representing the dead (usually earths) and possibly also representing the person to be affected by the charm (his hair, nails, or other exuviae). (MacGaffey 1977: 176)

MacGaffey maintains that there is also a difference between theory and practice, and what Isaki was discussing was the theory. Certainly the model or recipe for the nkisi formed a sort of framework and goal, but in practice, this was not always followed (MacGaffey, personal communication, 21 Nov. 2019). Roberts corroborates this regarding *agbalegba*, stating:

...each *agbalegba* ritual is an individualized ceremony and is subject to a high degree of personal interpretation by the ritual expert who conducts it. What the practitioner includes in the coffin can be idiosyncratic and varies on a case by case basis. (Roberts 2011: 224 n28)

This also provided an explanation when the outcome of using a figure was not as hoped; for one could always assert that the figure had not been constructed correctly and so was defective (MacGaffey, personal communication, 21 Nov. 2019).

One ritualist might make *agbalegba* with camphor and another ritualist (or the same ritualist on another day) without. Inclusions can vary by ritualist, by figure, and by location. Power figures are dynamic, adaptable, and living, their construction an art, not a science. But there remains an underlying logic. For a power figure to be a power figure, the three essential ingredients of a figure, medicines, and a spirit must be present. Though there is also room for the ritualist to add their unique flavour to the broth. This complies with Pablo F. Gómez's sentiment, "It is the transmutability of the material life in African rituals, their disposition to be substituted and yet empowered by the core African belief systems... as well as to draw energy from other rituals – European or American – that make them quintessentially African" (2014: 138). Substitution, adaptability, and reinvention, whether in Africa or across the Black Atlantic, are not threatening to power figures. Instead, this spontaneity flows in the very blood of who they are, and has indeed helped them to survive.

Buffeted with the tide of Western "modernity," the medicinal ingredients in power figures, like their physical containers, have had to continue to adapt to various challenges of availability, substitution, and syncretism as practitioners have spread around an ever-shifting globe. But discrepancies in traditional versus biomedical interpretations of these medicines, and the unequal value ascribed to them by biased biomedical practitioners have greatly impeded followers of African and Diasporic traditions from benefitting from public healthcare. In situations reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century crusades to rid Western worlds of non-Western religious traditions, deep-seated prejudices in Western medical ideologies have fuelled attempts to excise from biomedicine any phenomena not explicable by science – even if it produces effects measurable and observable to doctors and patients, and even if it helps patients heal.

## **5.1 A Selection of Medicinal Ingredients in Power Figures**

This study examined ten types of medicines used in various power figures and compared records of their traditional and biomedical uses in treating ailments. These medicines included those of plant, animal, and manmade origins. Sources for information regarding traditional medical uses of these items include ritual shops and their websites (ex. Original Products Botanica and Voodoo Authentica), anthropological sources by Wyatt MacGaffey, J.M. Janzen,

Britt Myren & Tinde van Anandel (Myren & van Anandel 2011), my own experiences in Ghana and New York, work on Ghanaian herbs by O.B. Dokosi (1998), as well as some ethnomedical and herbal medicinal articles (Alves & Alves 2011; Ajagun, Anyaku & Afolayan 2017; Kafoutchoni et al. 2018). Biomedical sources were largely the article abstracts generated from the results of searches for the item name (scientific and/or common) on PubMed.gov, a search engine for biomedical publications, operated by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, located in Maryland, U.S.A. Table 1 summarizes these records.



Illustration 24:  
Horseshoes and iron  
railroad nails for sale at  
Original Products  
Botanica in New York.

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
<b>Plant Matter</b>				
Camphor (English); <i>Cinnamomum camphora</i> (Scientific/Latin)	<i>Agbalegba</i> coffin for killing someone who has wronged you (Roberts 2011)	Used to cleanse body of deceased (Roberts 2011: 216); ward off evil spirits (Original Products Botanica n.d.-d); spiritual cleansing (Original Products Botanica n.d.-c)	Insecticide (Guo et al. 2016); antimicrobial, antiviral, anticoccidial, antinociceptive, anticancer, antitussive, enhances skin penetration, toxin (Chen, Vermaak & Viljoen 2013)	Stimulant, sedative, antiseptic, decongestant, antispasmodic, treats convulsions and nerve disorders, helps control Parkinson's, treats epileptic and nervous episodes, helps with circulatory, metabolic, digestive, excretory functions, cough, local anaesthetic, acts as an aphrodisiac, treats erectile dysfunction, antineuralgic, antirheumatic, treats gout, hysteria, and food poisoning (Patil 2018); pain relief, treats diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, colds, anti-inflammatory, relieves itching, helps eczema, skin irritation, burns, cracked heels, nail fungus, acne ("Benefits of Camphor and its Side Effects" n.d.)
High John the Conqueror Root (English); <i>Ipomoea jalapa</i>	<i>Mojo</i> Bags for luck, power over other	Helps to win court cases, combats depression, entices courage, combats spells and hexes, assists with success	Cytotoxin (cancer-fighting) (da Silva et al. 2016; Bautista, Fragoso-Serrano & Pereda-Miranda 2015); purgative	

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
(or <i>purga</i> ) (Scientific/Latin)	people, money drawing, and love (Original Products Botanica 2015a)	on dates and in meetings (Original Products Botanica 2015a)	(Pereda-Miranda et al. 2006)	
<i>Lemba-ntoko</i> (KiKongo); <i>Coleus</i> (English); <i>Solenostemon monostachyus</i> (Scientific/Latin)	<i>Nkisi Lulendo</i> – named after ritual to execute someone who has broken market rules (MacGaffey 1987: 342-343)	Sprinkled on items used in creation of <i>Nkisi Lulendo</i> to consecrate them (MacGaffey 1987: 342-343); treatment for <i>madikitila</i> (heart palpitations) (Janzen 1978); used in purification ceremonies, as a sedative, stomachic, induces labour, treats crawcraw, yaws, whitlow, sores, abscesses, cough, and in children treats slow growth, convulsion, headaches, and fever (Dokosi, 1998)	Anti-inflammatory, antinociceptive (Okokon, Davis & Nwidu 2016); treatment of sickle cell anemia (Afolabi et al. 2012); antipyretic, antimalarial (Okokon, Davis & Azare 2016)	Antibacterial (Ohwofasa & Okwena 2018)
<i>Nyanyara</i> (Ga); Bitter Melon (English); <i>Momordica</i>	<i>Agbalegba</i> coffin for killing someone	Used in Ga <i>Nmaa Dumo</i> planting ceremony; protection from evil spirits, protection from bullets, for	Combats obesity (Gong, Zhang & Xu 2017); protects liver (Deng et al. 2017); antidiabetic, anticancer,	

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
<i>charantia</i> (Scientific/Latin)	who has wronged you (Roberts 2011)	luck, protection for twins, health (Myren & van Andel 2011)	antimicrobial, antihyperlipidemic, hypotensive, antioxidant, immuno-modulatory, anti-inflammatory, anthelmintic, neuroprotective (Wang, Li, Yang, Ho & Li 2017)	
<i>Kitundibila</i> (KiKongo); <i>Aframomum alboviolaceum</i> (Scientific/Latin)	<i>Nkisi Kinzenzi</i> – aids childbirth (MacGaffey 1977)	Used as aphrodisiac (MacGaffey 1977: 173); treats hemorrhoids ( <i>kondun dia</i> ), scabies accompanied by itching ( <i>yamba di nzazi</i> ), joint pain ( <i>kintolula</i> ), dermatosis ( <i>nkulu, bisaku</i> ), burns ( <i>tiya</i> ), neck weakness in infants ( <i>nsingu</i> ), visions of spirits ( <i>ngimbi</i> ), threat of abortion, difference in body temperature with headache ( <i>wumba</i> ), shingles ( <i>tiya tu nzambi</i> ), rheumatism ( <i>ngala matisi</i> ), incurable rash with itching ( <i>yamba di nzazi</i> ), stop in menstruation without pregnancy ( <i>nkula</i> ), breast reduction, cough, heart disease, sexual impotence or erectile dysfunction	Cytotoxic to cancer cells (Kuate et al. 2014); antibacterial (Djeussi et al. 2013)	



Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
		<p>(<i>mbadi</i>), kidney damage                      (<i>miongeti</i>), nervousness                      approaching madness                      (<i>kimpi</i>), poliomyelitis                      (<i>kintolula</i>), difficulty learning to walk in children (Kembelo n.d.); treats malaria, fever, stomach ache, snake bite, yellow fever, jaundice, anemia (in children), painful menstruation, infertility (in women) and sexual weakness, itching, insect bites, hematuria (blood in urine), hip ache, intestinal worms, tuberculosis, tooth decay, swelling, edema (inflammation), miscarriage, vertigo, nausea (in pregnant women) stimulates milk production (in nursing women), fortifies infants and the body, strengthens bones, heals wounds, heals poultry disease, activates incantations (Kafoutchoni et al. 2018: 16-18)</p>		

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
<b>Animal Matter</b>				
<i>Iko Ode, Eye aiyekoto, Eye-ikoode</i> (Yoruba); <i>Pluma de Loro Africano</i> (Spanish); African Grey Parrot Feather (English); <i>Psittacus erithacus</i> (Scientific/Latin)	<i>Bocio</i> – for various forms of protection and other uses (Djimassé 2011: 201; Blier 2011b)	African parrot (general): helps with memory, communication, and exams (Blier 2011a: 197). African parrot red tail feathers: longevity and resistance (Blier 2011a: 197); emblem of Yoruba officials, attracts Olofin’s attention and favor (Santo Products 2014; Santo Products n.d.-b); inflammation, favour (Ajagun, Anyaku & Afolayan 2017)	No relevant results	
Rabbit’s Foot	<i>Mojo Bags</i> for luck, prosperity (Original Products Botanica n.d.-k)	Used for prosperity, good luck (Original Products Botanica n.d.-k)	Contact with this item may cause tularemia or “rabbit fever,” a bacterial illness (Ryan-Poirier, Whitehead & Leggiardro 1990)	
Crocodile and Alligator Skull/Parts	<i>Bocio</i> – for various forms of	Crocodile: Helps prevent drowning and other water accidents, helps in handling	Treatment for burns, speeds closure of wounds, anti-inflammatory, analgesic (Li	

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

<b>Medicinal Ingredient</b>	<b>Power Figure Included In</b>	<b>Select Traditional Uses</b>	<b>Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed</b>	<b>Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research</b>
(English); <i>Caiman crocodilus</i> , <i>Caiman latirostris</i> , <i>Caiman yacare</i> , <i>Melanosuchus niger</i> , <i>Paleosuchus palpebrosus</i> , <i>Paleosuchus trigonatus</i> , <i>Crocodylus moreletii</i> , <i>Crocodylus acutus</i> (Scientific/Latin)	protection and other uses (Djimassé 2011: 201; Blier 2011b)	smaller setbacks and complex problems (Blier 2011a: 197); treats asthma and bronchial diseases (Alves & Alves 2011). Alligator: protection, strength, longevity, luck (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-i); asthma, bronchitis, stroke, earache, backache, rheumatism, thrombosis, evil eye, snake bite, protection from snake bite, pain from snake bite, injuries from manta ray spines, sexual impotence, prostate issues, discharge, swelling, scratch, athlete's foot, sore throat, ophthalmological problems, hernia, infection, epilepsy, inflammation, irritation when teething in infants, edema, mycosis (Alves & Alves 2011)	et al. 2016); immunological regulation, cough relief, dispels phlegm (Xu et al. 2007); inhibits growth of leukemia cells (Chui et al. 2006)	
<b>Manmade Item</b>				
Amulets	<i>Mojo Bags</i> – various	Used to control evil spirits, for health, wellbeing,	Perceived efficacy of amulets may signal need for	

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
	uses (Original Products Botanica 2017, n.d.-e, n.d.-g, n.d.-i)	destroying or averting evil, for protection, luck (Original Products Botanica n.d.-e, n.d.-g, n.d.-i)	psychological/emotional support by health professionals (Lloreda-Garcia 2017)	
Nails: Horseshoe Nail (English), Coffin Nail (English), Railroad Nail (English); <i>Clavo de Linea</i> (Spanish)	Nail (general): <i>Nkisi Nkondi</i> – to punish wrongdoers, oath taking (MacGaffe y 2000). Horseshoe Nail: <i>Mojo Bags</i> for luck (Original Products Botanica n.d.-j). Coffin Nail: Coffin symbolism	Horseshoe Nail: luck (Original Products Botanica n.d.-j). Coffin Nail: hexing enemies, closure (Original Products Botanica n.d.-f). Railroad Nail: offering to/attract Ogun (Original Products Botanica n.d.-h)	No relevant results	

Table 1: Traditional and biomedical uses of medicines contained within power figures.

Medicinal Ingredient	Power Figure Included In	Select Traditional Uses	Supported Biomedical Uses in 3 Articles from PubMed	Other Scientifically-Recognized Physical Uses that Emerged during Research
	ties to <i>Agbalegba</i> coffin used to kill someone who has wronged you (Roberts 2011)			

## 5.2 Availability, Substitution, and Syncretism

As with materials for the construction of the physical figure, medicines used in power figures have also become available globally with international trade and internet marketplaces. Some shops store fresh herbs in refrigerators; and dried herbs are convenient when fresh is unavailable. Others shops, like Santo Products, have their own gardens and will ship whole sacred trees right to your doorstep. Santo Products also operates their own aviary, allowing them to provide authentic red tail feathers from African Parrots (*pluma de loro Africano*) – which are always only collected when they fall off naturally, as “the animal is an honor [sic] guest” (Santo Products, n.d.-b) – despite their location being an ocean away from Africa, in Naples, Florida. With the click of a button, from Original Products Botanica, I can order bottled camphor oil to drive out evil spirits or a fresh bundle of Abre Camino branches and leaves to unblock pathways to success. Again, we see here how modern inventions like the internet, far from dispelling magic, have actually contributed to its sustenance and spread. But sometimes, instead of shipping an item around the world, it is easier to use a local substitute.

Crocodile skulls appear in the *bocio* figure *Chariot of Death* (see Section 4.4.2 and Illus. 19). Crocodiles are found throughout much of Africa, and their products are believed by practitioners of *Vodun* to prevent drowning and other water accidents, and to help in surmounting problems (Blier 2011a: 197). However, it is mostly alligators that are found in Louisiana, U.S.A, the home of Voodoo Authentica’s ritual shop. Voodoo Authentica sells alligator heads, teeth, and claws as talismans for “strength, luck, longevity, and protection” (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-i). *Voodoo* is its own unique tradition; but it is a descendant of *Vodun*, and it seems both traditions view their local *Crocodylia* as beings of protection.

This kind of substitution is not uncommon, and strict fidelity to ingredients of particular locations is not required; in fact, such a limitation could have proved disastrous. The adaptability of these traditions helped them to survive upheavals like the transatlantic slave trade, which uprooted people and traditions and dispersed them about the globe. When discussing the construction of *Voodoo* dolls, Voodoo Authentica states,

A practitioner uses materials which are indigenous to their area and readily available. The materials used to construct the doll are as varied as the many regions in which dolls were and still are constructed. You'll see dolls of clay, cotton, mud, moss, straw, hair (animal & human), and combinations of these and many other materials, depending on where you are in the world. (Voodoo Authentica, n.d.-e)

Using alligator parts and products from species local to the area is a practical substitute for crocodile products, while still maintaining similar symbolism, like a connection with protection, whether from drowning or other misfortunes.

Syncretism is another factor which influences the variety of medicines available and sought after in the construction of power figures. Original Products Botanica explains on their blog that *mojo* bags for luck can be filled with diverse medicines from a variety of traditions all contributing their power to bring good fortune to the bearer. A lucky *mojo* bag, therefore, might enclose a rabbit's foot, the use of which has roots in European folk magic, its connection with luck tied to its representation of spring fertility and prosperity (Original Products Botanica 2019); lucky horseshoe nails, the horseshoe a common symbol of luck throughout the West; and High John the Conqueror root, named after and thought to invoke its namesake cultural hero of the African Diaspora (Original Products Botanica 2017).

Original Products Botanica also sells amulets that can be included in *mojo* bags, like the *Seal of Antiquelis Amulet* which uses symbolism from the sixth and seventh books of Moses, the *Circle of Protection Amulet* which features the Mohammedan magic circle, or the *Lucky 8 Amulet* which depicts eight different luck symbols from a variety of traditions, including a horseshoe, a four-leaf clover, and an elephant (Original Products Botanica n.d.-l, n.d.-e, n.d.-i). The inclusion of such religiously diverse symbolism in *mojo* bags also recalls the syncretic nature of *Hoodoo* itself which, you will recall from Chapter Three, is a tradition of conjuring and rootwork that fuses West African *Vodun* and other African-rooted practices with European folk magic, Christianity, Jewish mysticism, and Native American traditions, and its own particular flavour (Original Products Botanica 2016; Sen Moise 2018). Despite *mojo* bags being staple *Hoodoo* devices, they are also used in other traditions, like New Age religions and Shamanism. (Original Product Botanica 2017).

Syncretism, after all, isn't new. African traditions spread around the globe during the transatlantic slave trade, mixing with indigenous American, Christian, and Jewish traditions in the West; and within Africa, practitioners found new religious ideas and useful objects through contact with other African tribes, Muslim traders, and European explorers and colonists. (For syncretism of Islam and traditional African religion, for example the use of verses from the Qur'an along with local traditional spirits in African medicinal charms, see James 2014; for further evidence of syncretism in Africa, see Tuckey 1818 and FCAC 2011b, see also Section 4.2 of this volume; for evidence of syncretism in the New World, see Original Products Botanica 2016 and Sen Moise 2018.) Captain J. Tuckey's narrative from the Congo region in 1816 includes a sketch of an *nkisi* power figure that features a snake's head, a bird's bill, beads, seeds, and feathers, and also a European-made padlock (Tuckey 1818). Thus, these traditions were dynamically adapting to new encounters and influences long before today.

### 5.3 Traditional vs. Biomedical Interpretations

Santo Products offers elements of nature to support spiritual traditions of the spiritual realm. We cater to customs of the old days, where magic and medicine are one.

- Daniel Roman  
(Santo Products, n.d.-a)

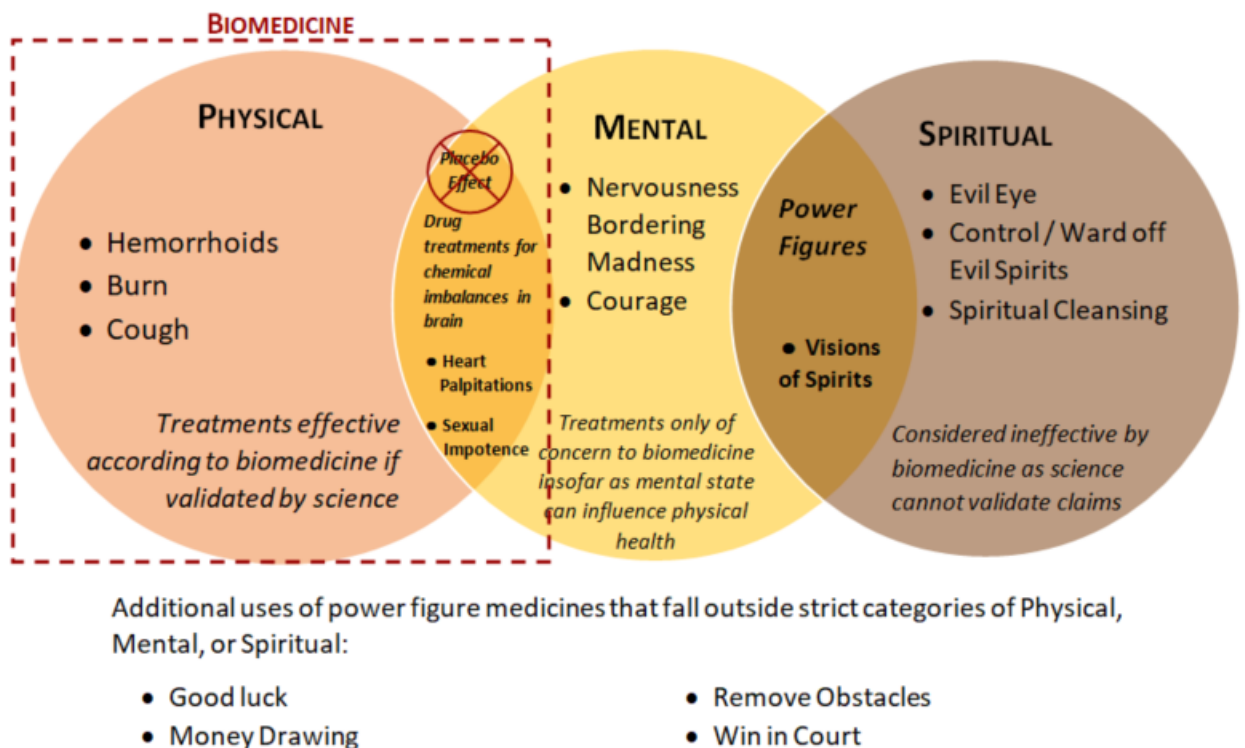
When plants, animals, and traditional objects are considered in a medical context by the West, there is often a qualifier attached to denote the uncomfortable bridging of categories. To the biologically-concerned and scientifically-reverent West, once traditional knowledge enters into the equation, what is being performed can no longer simply be called medicine. It becomes instead *ethnomedicine*, *phytomedicine*, *traditional medicine*, *herbal medicine*. But not Medicine. This is because traditional wisdom falls outside the category that has been specifically and meticulously carved for the Western idea of the medical discipline. For this reason, this study often uses the term *biomedicine* when referring to the traditions of Western medicine, taking Western medicine (what the West sees as the default, true medicine – Medicine – which can stand alone without a



qualifier) and instead describing it in the same manner as the West describes others. The term *biomedicine* reveals Western medicine's limited concern only with the biological and physical. In this way, it is labeled as but one type of medicine in a world of many, rather than being assumed the archetype. This study uncovered significant differences in how the medicinal substances used in power figures (ex. camphor, *nyanyara* or bitter melon, rabbits' feet, etc.) are discussed and employed in traditional medicine versus in biomedicine, two distinct and dissimilar worldviews. This data is illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Power figures' position and reach varies greatly depending on one's worldview, evident in contrasting the two diagrams.

For adherents and proponents of the biomedical vision of health, healing is compartmentalized. In the West, illnesses are typically classed as physical or mental and, while some overlap is acknowledged, the categories are generally well-defined. Physical

Figure 2: The biomedical view of healing. Bulleted entries are selected examples of illnesses treatable by medicines used in power figures. Note that, in the biomedical worldview, while the variety of illnesses power figures treat are split amongst the categories of physical, mental, and spiritual, power figures themselves occupy a liminal space somewhere between the mental and spiritual realms.



illnesses of the body are the realm of biomedicine and treated by medical doctors. Mental illnesses are dealt with by psychiatrists. Spiritual problems are allegedly outside the concern of medicine altogether and need be dealt with by religious counsel. Certainly, there are hospital chaplains and others who administer prayers and last rights to patients; but these are not performed by doctors themselves and are extraneous to biomedicine, merely included to offer patients comfort and consolation. Power figures, however, with their unbridled concerns, make a mockery of such categorization (recall Chapter Four). After all, is protection a physical or a spiritual thing? How about cleansing a dead body? Are we cleansing it of physical bacteria, of the influences of evil spirits, or perhaps both?

In the Western worldview, showcased in Figure 2, uses of medicines from power figures are categorized by whether they are said to cure physical, mental, or spiritual problems. (Others concerning social or life issues fall outside of the model entirely.) Biomedicine (its realm outlined in Figure 2 with a red dotted line) is concerned only with physical illness and occasionally with the interaction of physical and mental processes insofar as they produce measurable physical effects (for example, the ability of stress to impact physical conditions like sexual impotence or the use of drugs to mitigate physical chemical imbalances in the brain that contribute to behavioural changes and mental illness.) Beyond that, physical and mental illnesses are seen to diverge, the mind and body two very separate things, as per Cartesian dualism (see Section 1.2.2) and the domain of different professional disciplines. Even the placebo effect, as a mental process with physical results, has a tenuous relationship with biomedicine, the phenomenon of which will be discussed in Section 5.5.

Biomedical abstracts generated through PubMed searches generally offered little consideration of uses of the substances in this study beyond the physically quantifiable and scientifically-testable. In instances where other uses were included, their mention in abstracts were brief, unsubstantiated, and were generally included as an example of how the item was or is used traditionally, without qualifying the use as legitimate or not. For example, Kafoutchoni et al. (2018) did list *kitundibila* (*Aframomum alboviolaceum*) as a culturally important species in Benin, the full article explaining it has been used traditionally to treat a number of conditions including fever and malaria, as well as being

used by ritualists to activate incantations (Kafoutchoni et al. 2018:16-18). While this article was found through the PubMed search engine, this information was recorded as part of an ethnomedical assessment of the cultural importance, economic and ethnobotanical value, distribution, etc. of the plant in determining its candidacy for conservation. It was not a study meant to support or deny the traditional claims presented, but only to report the plant's importance to the people of the Sudano-Guinean zone of Benin. Kafoutchoni et al., in a table within the article, also separate physical "medical" and non-physical ceremonial or "magico-religious" uses into separate categories (Kafoutchoni et al. 2018:16-18).

Similarly, José María Lloreda-Garcia (2017) ensures to isolate amulets from biomedical efficacy in his study, discussing amulets instead in terms of *perceived* effectiveness, and noting that a belief in the efficacy of amulets among families of patients may signal need for psychological and/or emotional support by health professionals. The use of rabbits' feet as luck charms and amulets was acknowledged in a biomedical article by Ryan-Poirier, Whitehead, and Leggiadro (1990); but the focus of their article, far from substantiating the rabbit's foot's power, actually sought to warn against its use, claiming contact with a severed rabbit's foot, for example by hunters and their children keeping them as amulets, may lead to the contraction of tularemia, a bacterial disease also known as rabbit fever. PubMed results regarding rabbit's feet did not consider the foot as valuable in and of itself for its spiritual power. Rather, they considered it as part of the animal that may need physical treatment (Ruchti et al. 2018), part of the animal that can be experimented on to learn about physical treatments for humans (Liao et al. 2017), or part of an animal that carried bacteria that lead to physical illness in humans (Ryan-Poirier, Whitehead, and Leggiadro, 1990). In all cases the concern was physical. The association of rabbit feet with luck, when made, was only done so ironically and deprecatingly, and warned against.

Biomedicine, by its very nature as a defined and specified category of medicine, is concerned only with the physical, pre-excluding from the outset the kind of variety common in traditional uses of medicines. When biomedicine considers a traditional remedy, all spiritual associations are removed and the plant or animal product is generally

considered only for its physical effects on the human body. As the biomedical properties are extracted, the medicine becomes divorced from its associations; any knowledge about it is taken out of its worldview, losing its sacredness and the respect warranted to it and the environment from whence it came.

The traditional medical perspective, however, (shown in Figure 3) hails from within an entirely different worldview than the biomedical one. First, in the traditional medical model, the human remains undivided. We are not severed bodies and minds, but whole people. Traditional practitioners generally use the medicines contained within power figures to treat a greater variety of conditions, demonstrating a more multifaceted perception of each substance's efficacy. While biomedical records showed a focus on treating physical ailments, traditional medicine discussed treating mental, life, and spiritual afflictions together with physical ones. For example, *kitundibila* (*Aframomum alboviolaceum*) is used in Bas-Congo to treat hemorrhoids, burns, joint pain, and visions of spirits; and camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) is used to both cleanse a dead body and to ward off evil spirits (Kafoutchoni et al. 2018: 16-18; Roberts 2011; Original Products Botanica n.d.-d).

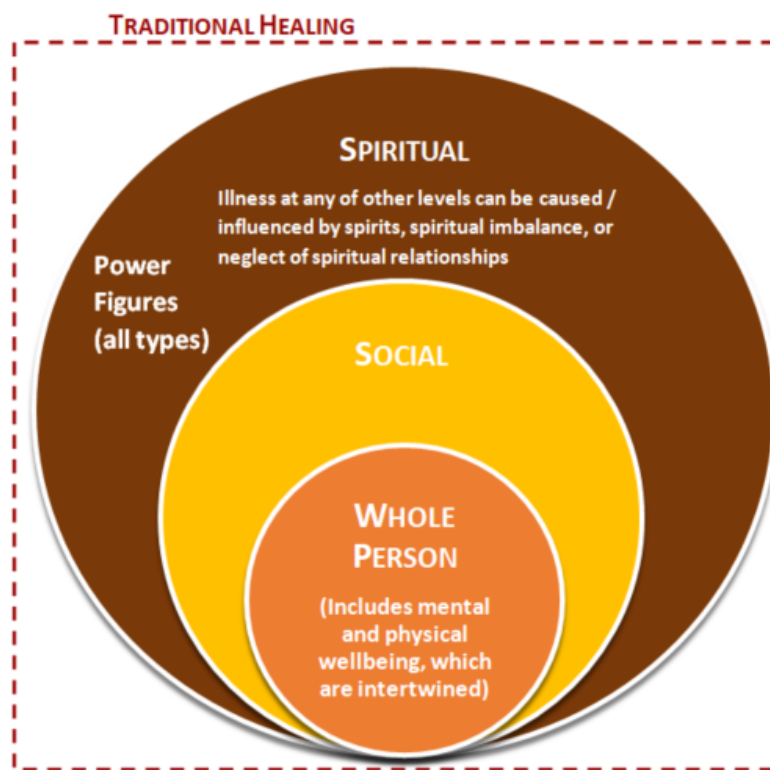


Figure 3: Healing within the worldview of traditional medicine. Power figures, as harnessers of spiritual power, can affect illness and issues at any level, not only within the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person, but also in relationships between humans, and between humans and spirits.

Furthermore, in traditional worldviews, the spirits and one's relationships with them, as well as one's relationships with other humans in society, can be the root cause of mental and physical illnesses. For example, a patient might be suffering from sickness due to another person using witchcraft on them (Roberts et al., in press), or using a power figure against them (Roberts 2011). If this is the case, a biomedical doctor might fail to heal a physical illness because the spiritual problem at the root has not yet been rectified.

Koenane identifies three different kinds of causes of illness in the African worldview. These are 1) "natural," those which would be identified as the cause by biomedicine, 2) "social" or "supra-normal," illnesses caused by relationships between individuals, including the use of witchcraft by one person to cause illness to another, and 3) "religious or supra-human," those illnesses caused by a greater-than-human being or power, like a god (2014: 366). This broader set of possible causes of illness, beyond the physical realm of biomedicine, is echoed in the multifaceted uses of power figures. Koenane paints this divergence as a difference between what he calls "our way," African medicine, and "their way," Western medicine. Western biomedicine, he critiques, is individualistic, expensive, paternalistic, passes the patient between specialists like "a relay baton," and creates an unequal power relationship in favor of the physician (Koenane 2014: 369-370).

Two noteworthy sources found outside the PubMed search offered interesting perspectives on the role of traditional medical knowledge in biomedicine and healthcare, both in regards to the use of animal matter in treatments, or zotherapy. According to Alves and Alves (2011) in their study of Latin America's "faunal drugstore," zotherapy "has often been neglected in comparison to medical plant research" (1). The authors critique the lack of recognition animal-based treatments get in biomedical health care, despite their lengthy and trusted use among traditional medical practitioners. Ajagun, Anyaku, and Afolayan (2017), who cite both medical (inflammation) and non-medical (favour [of a diety]) uses of the African Parrot feather in their survey of animal products used traditionally in Ogbomoso in Oyo State, Nigeria, call for the acceptance of medical and non-medical uses of such substances in the primary health care system, a rare example of an academic medical article mentioning the validity of non-physical effects of

medicines and advocating for their incorporation (Ajagun, Anyaku, and Afolayan 2017:30-31). Ajagun, Anyaku, and Afolayan highlight, however, “the need to conduct extensive ethnopharmacological surveys of all the regions of the country, to validate the therapeutic efficacy of these fauna-based preparations and also the standardization of therapeutic doses” (2017: 31). Whilst within a sentiment of inclusion, we still see the same deference to biomedicine as the final authority, undermining the experience of traditional practitioners (see Section 5.4).

However, the dosage standardization mentioned by Ajagun, Anyaku, and Afolayan is a concern echoed by Ghanaians in Ghana and in Toronto (Tabi et al. 2006; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008; Kpobi & Swartz 2018), and comprises one of several factors that influence individuals in choosing whether to turn to biomedicine, traditional medicine, or both (see Section 5.4). Standardization of dosages is not a bad thing, as regulation can increase safety. However, the penchant of biomedicine to covet authority on these matters is a slippery slope. Dialogue between traditional and biomedical practitioners could provide mutual benefit, whereby the wisdom of each discipline benefits the other. Biomedicine stands to gain knowledge from centuries of traditional treatments, and traditional medicine can improve practices by standardizing doses for safe and predictable outcomes of treatments, an act in the spirit of fair trade. But to impose standardization from outside without recognizing traditional medicine as an equally valid sister-discipline to biomedicine, one from which biomedicine has as much to learn, instead simply takes knowledge without giving, imposes restrictions, reinforces the authority of biomedicine, and treats traditional practitioners paternalistically.

#### **5.4 Local Conceptualizations of Disease, Disconnects, and Impact on Patients**

Healing is at the heart of the religions that African slaves bequeathed to their descendants, and Alourdes’s Vodou practice is no exception. She deals both with health problems and with a full range of love, work, and family difficulties. Like healers in related traditions found throughout the Caribbean and South America, Alourdes combines the skills of a medical doctor, a psychotherapist, a social worker, and a priest. (McCarthy Brown 2001: 4-5)

As we have seen in Chapter One, biomedicine itself emerged within the burgeoning Western idea of a modernity founded upon strict categories. This included the division of body and mind in medicine, with the body as the territory of biomedical doctors and the mind the territory of psychiatrists. This recalls industrialization and factory labor, where the completion of complex tasks in a fast and efficient manner that made the most money, meant carving up that task into bits. If a worker constructs an entire chair from start to finish, it will take more time and care than if one worker simply makes chair legs, another, seats, another, backs, and another assembles. The same carving has taken place with the human being, with one specialist responsible for the body, or even a specific part of the body – cardiologists, the heart; orthopedic surgeons, the bones; nephrologists, the kidneys – and another, the psychiatrist, responsible for the mind (Mol 2015). While this segmentation of Western biomedicine allows for a deeper knowledge of one's specific field, what can be lost is an appreciation for patients as a whole (Van Der Merwe 1995; Grønseth 2001; Oakley and Grønseth 2007; Koenane 2014).

There remains, too, an implicit and persistent hierarchy in Western culture as to the importance and validity of physical over mental health. It is only in the past few decades that mental health has even begun to be publicly acknowledged as worthy of medical concern in the West, and even now may only be considered a biomedical issue insofar as it can be explained by chemical imbalances, observed through externally measurable symptoms, and medicated into submission. Stress is becoming a more recognized threat to physical health; but, even still, as an emotion, its consideration from a biomedical standpoint is predicated upon the physical effects it produces.

Moreover, there remains stigma surrounding mental illnesses that is not accrued by physical ones (Brooks 2012). A physical illness is still often viewed in the West as a far more real and valid obstacle than a mental one, where common adages echo bootstrap ideologies that assume a person can simply adopt a different mental outlook and be cured; though few of those same critics would think to say to someone with a limp that if they simply walked differently they would be fine (Ahn, Flanagan, Marsh & Sanislow 2006; Luhrmann 2011; Koen 2013; Lebowitz & Appelbaum 2019). Advocacy

organizations often defer to the biological causes of mental illness in attempts to combat stigma, to show they are more akin to the kinds of acceptable physical ailments than people often realize, with biological and genetic causes (Brooks 2012; Lebowitz & Appelbaum 2019; Lyndon, et al. 2019: 255). But in doing this, the assumption that biomedical proof equates to validation and that only physical problems are real remains unchallenged. Ultimately, those with mental illness are more likely not to seek diagnosis, with two thirds opting not to enlist professional help (Lyndon, Crowe, et al. 2019: 255), the seeking of which might place them at risk of being labeled “crazy” by their peers and society at large.

If validated at all, mental and emotional issues are typically passed off to mental health professionals in fields like psychiatry. Sometimes issues are relegated to psychiatry simply because biomedicine cannot find an answer, something that leaves patients feeling dismissed and open to stigma. Often the implication remains that if biomedicine cannot detect a problem through the coveted scientific method, than perhaps the issue is simply in a patient’s head (read, “not real”). As Grøsenh (2001) said of her Tamil informants in Northern Norway,

When the doctor could not find anything wrong with the young man’s lungs or any other physical defect, he recommended the patient for psychiatric treatment. My informant felt completely misunderstood and explained to me, “I have a breathing problem, I am not crazy.” (494)

“At this point,” Grøsenh went on to say, “Tamils usually withdraw from medical treatment, not wanting to risk what they see as the stigma of being labelled crazy” (2001: 494). Rather than fault being found with biomedicine for being unable to adequately detect and treat an individual’s illness, instead, the credibility of the patient is questioned, their experiences of life within their body shunted aside for lack of scientific physical evidence to support it, despite first-hand witness testimony. We are left then with the question, why must something be validated by medicine in order to be real?

Young spoke on a similar topic in regards to reconciling oral tradition with science, with archaeology and geology, in Haida Gwaii’s exhibits. Instead of assuming traditional views need bow to science, he had found that the two actually “tell the same



stories in different ways” (2019). Science rather than disproving mythic creation stories instead provided geological timelines for them, and supplied climate data to support the tales of changes in the environment. To him, science wasn’t needed to prove the myth, but rather the reverse was true. “We validate science,” he said (Young 2019). While Young’s statement was made lightheartedly, in light of science’s history of tyranny over other ways of knowing and its penchant for seeking to prove – and only to believe – through the deified scientific method everything from the history of rocks to the behaviour of disease, it is an incredibly significant one. A frequent interaction of biomedicine with traditional medicine is for the former to try to validate the latter. But the reverse is equally defensible. Biomedicine is, after all, far younger and less experienced than traditional medicine. Young’s challenge to science and, by extension, biomedicine is a powerful reminder that while science may be the louder, it is also the newer, and so it would also do well to respect its elders.

This tendency of biomedicine to assume itself the authoritative voice emerged as a recurring theme in this study’s analysis of biomedical records of the ingredients in power figures. In cases where a substance was considered by biomedicine to have potentially useful physical effects, nearly 40% of the time that study sought to verify or validate a long history of traditional use of the substance by applying the scientific method to determine whether or not the substance truly did what traditional medicine had been using it for for centuries. Often couched in scientific jargon difficult to wade through for the uninitiated, these biomedical studies subjected plant and animal matter to chemical compound dissection and lab-controlled experiments to determine, despite much traditional evidence in support, whether science could qualify and endorse the substances’ power in treating physical ailments.

Despite biomedicine’s self-appointed authority, traditional medicine remains a viable option for many people worldwide. Anthropologists studying the use of traditional medicine in Ghana (Tabi et al. 2006; Kpobi & Swartz 2018), by Ghanaians in Toronto (Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008), in South Africa (Koenane 2014), and by Tamil refugees in Norway (Grønseth 2001) have identified several factors that influence an individual’s choice of whether to utilize traditional medicine, biomedicine, or a

combination of the two. These factors include: if a physical problem has social or spiritual roots, turning to traditional medicine because it alone can correct those imbalances (Tabi et al. 2006: 56; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 8; Kpobi & Swartz 2018: 3); turning to biomedicine first but then to traditional medicine when biomedicine fails (Tabi et al. 2006: 56); foregoing biomedicine because it is costly and often not easily accessible to people living in impoverished and rural areas (Tabi et al. 2006: 55; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 8; Koenane 2014: 371; Kpobi & Swartz 2018: 4); turning to biomedicine because of a lack of regulation in traditional medicine, including concerns about hygiene and safe standardization of treatment dosages (Tabi et al. 2006: 56; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 5); choosing and/or hiding treatment methods based on beliefs of family, employers, and community (Tabi et al. 2006: 55; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 8); and avoiding biomedicine due to the experience that these medical professionals do not take patients' concerns seriously, sometimes labeling experiences as psychosomatic, addressing only physical symptoms, and leaving patients feeling as though they have not been considered as whole persons (Grønseth 2001: 494; Koenane 2014: 370).

In the Western worldview, acknowledgment of mental and emotional issues is very much in its infancy and, if validated at all, is not the realm of biomedical doctors but of psychiatrists and mental health professionals. Social and spiritual health remains outside the concerns of biomedicine too, relegated instead to the realm of social workers and religious leaders. But traditional medicine, in addition to being a cost-effective and readily available option for many rural and impoverished people, also provides people with a kind of treatment they cannot get from biomedicine: a fusion of physical, mental, social, and spiritual healing from ritualists and healers who listen to their concerns on a variety of topics, devise a holistic solution, and leave their patients feeling whole and heard (Grønseth 2001: 494; Tabi et al. 2006: 55-56; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 8; Heaton 2013; Koenane 2014: 370-371; Kpobi & Swartz 2018: 3-4).

Failing to understand the meaning of disease in the worldview of a patient can be the downfall of the physician-patient relationship, damaging trust and leaving patients less likely to return for future treatment. If a doctor does not understand the world they

are working in, it will be all the more unlikely that they will be able to heal the people of that world (Grønseth 2001; Moran-Thomas 2013; Frazer & Prudon 2017; Graham et al. 2018). The problem is that science, and biomedicine by extension, often feel they can exist in a vacuum, in a sterile environment free of biases and contaminants, and that a single solution should work if done properly, no matter the patient or the doctor, no matter where it is administered in the world. Certainly a patient's body might present complex conditions that are hostile to a cure, but those too, biomedicine assumes, are explicable and even sometimes predictable. Treatments, like experiments, to be proven useful should be standardized, reliable and replicable. But herein lies the difference between theory and practice.

In Ghana, where guinea worm has been believed to be caused by a variety reasons from an ancestral message to witchcraft (Moran-Thomas 2013: 214), efforts of public health teams to eliminate infections by the parasite by providing manufactured screens through which to filter drinking water failed to catch on because organizers failed to take into account local social structures, ideologies of causation, and health priorities, and often failed to adequately explain their strategies to locals in terms that made sense to them (Moran-Thomas 2013). The 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone highlighted the need for medical professionals to take into account local funerary practices requiring close contact with infected bodies after death and implement culturally relevant strategies to reduce the spread of infection (Frazer & Prudon 2017). During the same outbreak, Graham et al. noted the distress to family members when their infected loved ones were taken away by medical teams. Through anthropological intervention, strategies were devised that were both biomedically safe and provided individuals with the opportunity to bury their dead a manner that honored local customs (Graham et al. 2018: 2; "How to conduct safe and dignified burial" 2017). Graham et al. also noted the usefulness of culturally relevant immunization strategies for Guinean Muslims, many of whom expressed being averse to receiving Ebola immunizations during Ramadan. Health initiatives in this case benefited from respecting and accommodating the local religious calendar (Graham et al. 2018: 2).

If the goal of medical professionals is, at its heart, to heal, then it should not be asking too much to consider how they might more effectively understand how their patients see disease. If a doctor cannot understand where a patient is coming from, it is all the more difficult to draw them a map to the clinic. Asking a patient to simply give up burying a loved one, which may be crucial to that loved one's peaceful passage into an afterlife or to successfully transitioning into ancestorhood, is not an effective treatment option, even if contact with a dead body spreads disease. Anthropologists are incredibly valuable in this regard, as the aforementioned scholars demonstrate, as they can use their knowledge of local customs to devise solutions that are both biomedically prudent and culturally fulfilling. If healing is the paramount goal, this should not be considered an extraneous task but a required one.

It also remains true, that differences in worldview are not merely hurdles to be surmounted by medical professionals. As Sol Tax said, "Treaties mean that two parties have something each to give the other" (Smith 2015: 447). Decolonization of medicine, reconciliation, and medical treaty should mean that both sides learn something from one another. Biomedical practitioners should not look at differing conceptualizations of health and illness as a barrier to providing treatment, but as a learning opportunity. There is more than one way to heal, and sometimes the practices of others can point out flaws in our own habits as well as new avenues to explore.

Andrew Solomon, writer and lecturer on psychology, art, and politics, spent time in Senegal and Rwanda, and recounted his experiences during his talk "Notes on an Exorcism." Here, Solomon described a ritual called *ndeup* that he underwent to cast out his depression while in Senegal. The ritual involved the sacrifice of a ram, the placation of jealous and harmful spirits, bathing in the blood of a ram, a community gathering outside with drumming and dance, and a feast of ram meat. Afterwards, Solomon described that, despite not himself believing in the spiritual principals underlying the ritual, he did in fact feel better. The entire experience, he acknowledged, was incredibly uplifting and exhilarating (Solomon 2008). Five years later, when Solomon was in Rwanda, he spoke with a man who lent clarity to his experience of *ndeup* and to notions of healing in general. While first acknowledging the vast differences between West and

East African traditions, the Rwandan man noted some similarities between traditional healing practices in Rwanda and the *ndeup* ritual Solomon had described. Both, he explained, also differ greatly from Western methods to the point that it caused problems in the past when Western health professionals came to Rwanda. Solomon relays the encounter thus:

[The Rwandan man] said, “You know, we had a lot of trouble with Western mental health workers who came here immediately after the genocide and we had to ask some of them to leave.” And I said, “What? What was the problem?” And he said, “Okay. They came and their practice did not involve being outside in the sun like what you’re describing, which is after all where you begin to feel better. There was no music or drumming to get your blood flowing again when you’re depressed and you’re low and you need to have your blood flowing.” He said, “There was no sense that everyone had taken the day off so that the entire community could come together to try to lift you up and bring you back to joy.” He said, “There was no acknowledgment of the depression as something invasive and external that could actually be cast out of you again.” He said, “Instead, they would take people one at a time into these dingy little rooms and have them sit around for an hour or so and talk about bad things that had happened to them.” He said, “We had to get them to leave the country.” (Solomon 2008: 14:56)

Voodoo Authentica sells *Voodoo* dolls as “focusing tools” to help their patients combat negative feelings like depression and manifest more positive conditions in their lives (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f). Their *Voodoo* doll *No Mo’ Blues Man* is “A happy little guy who brings the jazzy Spirit of New Orleans wherever he goes. [He] acts as a focusing tool to help you chase the blues away” (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-d: para. 3). This power figure echoes the ideas discussed by Solomon, including the healing power of music – the blues being an important part of New Orleans’ culture (see Chapter Six) – and the notion of sadness as something that can be “cast out of you” (Solomon 2008: 15:32) or “chase[d]... away” (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-d: para 3). Power figures, as well as rituals like *ndeup*, have long been entrusted with the healing of African-rooted communities. As tools to help patients focus on and manifest health, happiness, and prosperity in their lives, power figures advocate that patients can influence their own healing by believing in it and by believing in the spirits who can help them. Yet despite their long history of use, power figures, with their non-scientific methods, are still not employed today by biomedical doctors.

## 5.5 “Voodoo’ Death” & The Placebo Taboo

Along with factors like treatment accessibility, cost, and whether a patient felt understood, the beliefs of a patient’s family, friends, coworkers, and community also contributed to whether a patient turned to traditional or biomedical healing when in need, and whether they felt their decision should be hidden from the people around them (Tabi et al. 2006: 55; Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008: 8). As we have seen, the history of stigmatization of practices deemed magical or superstitious – from those practicing *Vodou*, *Obeah*, and other African-rooted traditions to Western fishermen observing taboos – has resulted in many practitioners not wanting to disclose the truth about what they believe for fear of backlash, whether social or legal.

Kyrah Malika Daniels, practitioner of Haitian *Vodou* and professor of African and African Diaspora Studies, Art History, and Theology at Boston College, participated in a video talk called “Intro to Haitian Vodou and Dominican Vudú/21 Divisiones” hosted by In Cultured Company on *Facebook*. She spoke about her experiences with *Vodou* and its crucial medical role in people’s lives, despite sometimes their reluctance to admit belief in it. To her, how a person behaves and who they turn to in a medical crisis, regardless of what they say under normal circumstances, can be a strong indicator of their true faith. Daniels said:

I said a healing traditions [sic] because I think that it’s such a wonderful way to gain access to what people really feel at the end of the day. Because you might say you’re Catholic. You might say you’re Seventh-day Adventist... [or] Evangelist. And then when you get sick, when your mama gets sick, when your child becomes ill, all of a sudden, you gonna knock on the *manbo*’s door. You gonna knock on the *houngan*’s door. Because you know at the end of the day, if this Western medicine isn’t working, then you need to find a solution, and you’ll do whatever it takes. And so I think that actually healing is a huge way that you see people still saying, “Well, I don’t believe in the spirits. I don’t believe in *lwa*. I don’t do that stuff.” But when it comes down to it, if their baby is sick, if their mother is ill, if they themselves are ill, that’s an avenue that people will often explore and pursue. (Daniels 2019: 1:01:00)

The fact that practitioners are reluctant to admit their belief in these traditions, that we even must resort to seeing what they turn to in dire situations to determine the true nature of their belief, raises the same kinds of issues about stigma that we explored in Chapter One. That practitioners of any belief system feel the need to veil their beliefs

to others gives evidence as to the effect of stigma on how people communicate in society. In Chapter One, we explored how both traditional religion and traditional medicine have been met with resistance and stigma in the West. With the perceived need by biomedicine to excise any semblance of magical belief from healing, to disprove and explain away the spirits that so many believe can heal, it is no wonder that many practitioners remain discrete.

“‘Voodoo’ Death” was a concept explored medically by Walter B. Cannon in 1942. Cannon was interested in anthropological records that seemed to indicate the reality of death by curse. Documented in cultures from South America to the Caribbean, Africa to Australia, anthropologists held that, following a supernatural encounter believed by the victim to cause death, individuals actually did drop dead, despite having been seemingly healthy before the encounter and there being no discernible empirical reason for their death afterwards. The accounts Cannon studied included one of a young Congolese man in the 1600s who died after discovering that he had been tricked into eating the meat of a tabooed hen, as well as the story of an Aboriginal man in North Queensland, Australia who nearly died after a ritualist pointed a bone at him. The ritualist in this case was then threatened by a missionary with consequences of being denied food and chased from the Mission should the man die. The ritualist visited the victim and told him it had all been a joke, that a bone had not been pointed at him, whereupon the man recovered swiftly and was back at work that same evening (Cannon 1942: 170-171).

Cannon was intrigued by the accounts of two presumably reliable yet seemingly conflicting sources: Western anthropologists and Western medical professionals. What anthropologists were observing did not match what was known medically at that time. Cannon sought to understand how the phenomenon might be scientifically possible, and came up with a solution he published in the article “‘Voodoo’ Death.” Cannon used the term “Voodoo,” despite the fact that the records on which he based his study came from a variety of different cultures, as a catchall term for supernatural, magic, or otherwise seemingly empirically inexplicable phenomena. His use of this term does not reflect a specific connection to *Voodoo* itself. This shows that by 1942 when the article was written, the term “Voodoo” already had come into popular use in the West, divorced from

any accurate connection with the *Voodoo* religion. The term was also placed in quotation marks, establishing distance. Cannon wished readers to know that he did not actually believe supernatural forces had caused the deaths in question, only that they *appeared* to have. Similar quotations of disbelief are still found in written sources where the author wishes to distance themselves from the beliefs in the text so as not to appear to be a believer (see Section 6.3).

Cannon determined that due to the patient's true belief in the supernatural forces and taboos being levied against them and in the reality of their then impending death, the physiological changes in their body generated by their biological fear response – like increased heart rate, the release of adrenaline, and the release of sugar in preparation for a physical struggle (1942: 176) – combined with the patient's behavioural reaction – for example, refusing food and water as they await inevitable death (179) – could indeed produce a physical state that, if prolonged, could prove fatal. Cannon (1942) further contended,

...a persistent and profound emotional state may induce a disastrous fall of blood pressure, ending in death. Lack of food and drink would collaborate with the damaging emotional effects, to induce the fatal outcome. These are the conditions which, as we have seen, are prevalent in persons who have been reported as dying as a consequence of sorcery. They go without food or water as they, in their isolation, wait in fear for their impending death. In these circumstances they might well die from a true state of shock, in the surgical sense – a shock induced by prolonged and tense emotion. (179)

What Cannon has done here bears strong resemblance to the theme of testing tradition that emerged in this study, showing how biomedicine still treats the medicines contained within power figures. Cannon sought to excise the magic from a phenomenon experienced by traditional practitioners by finding physical evidence to explain it scientifically. Just as Cannon did in 1942, Western biochemists, medical professionals and other scientists are still finding phenomena among traditional customs, like the use of a plant that appears to heal, and trying to break down scientifically how that might be occurring before they believe it (Chui et al. 2006; Pereda-Miranda et al. 2006; Da Silva et al. 2016; Guo et al. 2016; Li et al. 2016; Okokon, Davis & Azare 2016; Okokon, Davis & Nwido 2016; Deng et al. 2017). It is not enough for a traditional healer to say that the plant works. It is not enough for that healer to have a lifetime of experience with that



plant's healing properties, nor a community a lifetime of experience being healed by it. A supernatural explanation for the plant's power, a myth, an origin story, a taboo, simply will not suffice. The plant must instead be experimented upon, broken part, its chemical compounds isolated so a lab might determine which active components have which effects on the human body and which pieces are extraneous and without value. Without this, the plant's power, despite its lengthy reputation and mythical origins, is meaningless. Its story must be told in the language of science, or not be heard at all.

Subsequent years' discoveries and growing understanding among medical professionals of the effects of cortisol and the hormonal stress response have only strengthened Cannon's proposal (Sternberg 2002: 1565). Thus, biomedicine now recognizes, in a fashion, that it is possible for a person to die after being cursed or breaking a taboo, not as a direct result of it, but as an after effect of the stress caused to their physical bodily systems by believing in it. One can, science agrees, kill oneself with their mind (Cannon 1942; Sternberg 2002). What is more, the opposite is also true.

Harvard Medical School's online Medical Dictionary of Health Terms defines placebo effect as "A change or improvement in symptoms that is due to a dummy medication or treatment (placebo) rather than a real drug or treatment" ("Medical Dictionary of Health Terms: J-P" 2011). A placebo, it persists, is "[a] false or inactive medication or treatment that may still offer relief despite being ineffective. In clinical trials, the effectiveness of a new drug is often tested against a placebo" ("Medical Dictionary of Health Terms: J-P" 2011). In spite of these definitions, placebos have been proven effective in a wide variety of illnesses, including 35% of cases of the common cold, cough, headaches, pain, seasickness, and drug-related mood changes, and in 70% of cases of patients suffering from bronchial asthma, angina pectoris, duodenal ulcer, and herpes simplex (Benson & Friedman 1996: 196; see also Peper & Harvey 2017).

The language of Harvard's definitions reveals a great deal about what biomedicine thinks about a patient's individual power to heal the self with belief. Several terms with strong negative connotations are used to describe placebos. They are deemed "dummy medication" implying a lack of intelligence and usefulness, not a "real drug or treatment" as if only scientifically designed and proven treatments can be said to be real,

robbing others of validity. Placebos are called “false” and “inactive,” slandering them as fakes and implying they do not do anything, despite the fact that their effects include “a change or improvement in symptoms.” Placebos, Harvard claims, “may still offer relief *despite being ineffective* [emphasis added].” Is relief and improvement in symptoms not effectiveness? If we are to follow this definition, apparently not. Apparently, only a narrow understanding of scientific validation can allot effectiveness, not the actual lived experience of the patient who is healing.

It is worth noting that there is more than one way to induce the placebo effect (Welch 2003; Green 2006). The dispensation of a placebo pill deliberately fraudulently deemed to be a biomedically effective one by a medical professional is not required (Benson & Friedman 1996: 194). This is important because false information, deceit and untrustworthiness are detrimental to the doctor-patient relationship (Benson & Friedman 1996: 198). As Benson and Friedman show, the only elements required to induce the placebo effect are a good relationship between the patient and the medical professional, and that they both hold positive beliefs in the treatment, whatever it is, that is being undergone (1996: 195). This is the same kind of relationship many traditional healers have with their patients when they administer a power figure to cure the patient’s ills.

The assertion that new scientifically-sanctioned medications are indeed “tested against a placebo” to determine the drug’s effectiveness (one of the few times we hear placebos talked about in medical discussions in the West) also reveals biomedicine’s crusade to rule out the effects of the mind, excising from the equation patients own mental power to heal themselves. To call this power “dummy,” “false,” and “ineffective,” despite empirical evidence that it works, is a play for power by biomedicine, an assertion of its authority in sanctioning treatments and controlling the distribution of healing. Benson and Friedman (1996) call for a renaming of the placebo effect, instead advocating for the use of the term “remembered wellness,” to tap into patients’ own healing capabilities without invoking the term placebo and all its negative connotations. They state:

The very words placebo effect have heavily negative connotations because beliefs and psychologic factors have little importance in a medical environment that emphasizes pharmacologic and surgical interventions as the primary, if not

the only, valid forms of treatment. To better describe its power, the term placebo effect should be replaced by “remembered wellness” (1, 18), a term chosen because ultimately the evocation of the placebo effect depends on central nervous system events that result in feelings of well-being. Remembered wellness has always been one of the physician’s most potent therapeutic assets and its remarkable potency should not be ridiculed or disregarded. (Benson & Friedman 198)

However, simply changing the name to throw off the stigma of the old one does nothing to challenge the underlying problem, the prejudices that have caused the word “placebo” to become stigmatized in the first place and which continue to result in its slander today. What we need is exposure of why and how this word has accrued negative connotations, and we need the emergence of strategies to actively change these ways of thinking. Simply replacing the word with a new one will not change the fact that non-physical, non-pharmaceutical and non-surgical solutions are invalid to biomedicine because of a preconceived hierarchy of treatment options (Moreno 1995; Ross 2010). Decolonizing the placebo effect will require more than a clandestine alias. Benson and Friedman published their data and recommendations in 1996, supporting the effectiveness of placebo; yet, in 2019, Harvard’s medical definitions still bear the same negative stigma against placebo that Benson and Friedman had sought to evade. “Remembered wellness” is nowhere among Harvard’s glossary.

Prior to the mid-1800s, the ability of a patient to influence their symptoms with their mind was recognized and utilized by medical practitioners, including those at Harvard; for instance, bread pills were administered and water was used in injections (Benson & Friedman, 194). But in the 1860s and decades following, Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch showed that particular diseases were caused by particular bacteria, and from then to around 1950 there was a silence on the subject of the healing power of the mind, with no mention of the placebo effect in the *Index Medicus* (an index of biomedical and life science articles and other information) during that time (Benson & Friedman 1996: 194). The trend was instead toward using specific treatments like antibiotics and insulin, informed by the bacterial cause of the disease, rather than using non-specific placebo remedies, despite a history of effectiveness (Benson & Friedman 1996: 194).

...in the 1930s, the *Index* did not list a single article that discussed the effect of mental state on physiology. This was not due to a change in classification but rather to a rejection of the notion that the mind could affect the body. By the 1950s, the existence of the placebo effect was gradually reacknowledged... Placebos were utilized in randomized drug efficacy investigations to control for nonspecific effects. The placebo effect was recognized, however, only in so far as it became necessary to screen it out. The placebo effect was a problem to be eliminated rather than an important aspect of clinical care. (Benson & Friedman 1996: 194)

As Benson and Friedman (1996) demonstrate, when discussion of the placebo effect resurfaced, it was as a hurdle to overcome on the way to determining the effectiveness of allegedly “real” biomedical medicines, something to rule out on the way to determining if a pharmaceutical remedy should be prescribed and sold. This is part of the exclusive ideology of healing that we see in biomedicine today that values only physical, surgical and pharmaceutical remedies to illness. But it also has commercial benefits (Brezis 2008; Peper & Harvey 2017). It allows for a monopoly on sanctioned treatment options and medications, whereby those created in the approved model are backed and sold for profit, while others are mocked and discredited. The effectiveness of placebos thus needs to be slandered or it stands to undermine the commercial success of this model. After all, if you can heal with your mind, how can they sell you a cure?

That it should be presented as a negative thing that a patient can heal themselves with the power of belief is contemptible. The power of placebo has been proven countless times and yet its consideration in medical studies is still generally for removal; eliminating the effects of this power is regularly incorporated into biomedical studies on a mass scale. That this should be true to the extent that the term placebo now bears negative connotation and academics are calling for its renaming is disgraceful. It also mirrors Western religion’s attempts to slander traditional religion, defaming it “magic” and “superstition,” despite simply being a different perspective on religion. In the same vein, Western medicine opposes the placebo effect because it undermines the omnipotence of biomedicine, which seeks to rule alone. The implications of this Placebo Taboo in biomedicine are far-reaching and have allowed Western ideology to paint anything unscientific and unbiomedical as synonymous with unreliable, ineffective, and dummy, thereby affording itself with the power and authority to sanction some remedies

and slander others. Thus stigmatization is a powerful antagonist to power figures not simply in the realm of religion and belief, but also in medical care. (For its use as a political and legal tool, see Chapter Six.)

Despite biomedical assumptions that biomedical medicines are the superior form of treatment, studies into what is known as the “healthy immigrant effect” show that African immigrants to the United States (Venters & Gany 2011: 333) and Canada (Barimah & van Teijlingen 2008) are actually healthier than American- and Canadian-born citizens. However, as these individuals stay in the new country, their health comes to match more that of the local population. With patient health a goal of any medical system, the greater health of African immigrants as compared to the U.S. and Canadian populations would suggest that biomedicine might have much to learn from Africa. However, in Chester et al.’s psychological study of self-injury, even using a virtual *Voodoo* doll as a stand-in for patients to indicate their desired level of self-harm was deemed a “strange-looking approach,” and that without attributing the doll any power whatsoever (Chester 2019: para. 14). We can only imagine what would be said if a biomedical practitioner began prescribing power figures instead of pills – perhaps an exercise worth exploring in future research.

The phenomena of “‘Voodoo’ Death” and the placebo effect boil down to this: You can kill yourself and you can heal yourself with belief. That makes narratives that teach people it is dumb, false, outdated, and ineffective to believe, all the more corrupt. For, despite being equipped with scientific proof that non-biomedical initiatives using the power of belief actually produce physical effects, for good and for ill, rather than helping patients use this power to heal themselves, biomedicine seeks instead to expunge it.

## Chapter Six: The Spirit

The spirit portion of this study analyzed Western perceptions of the spirits within power figures and the traditions of which they are a part by compiling ten examples of power figures, their spirits, and their traditions in popular culture, the media, and the legal system – all publically accessible and influential forms of knowledge – and considering the manner in which they are portrayed. For each example, I noted whether the portrayal was positive, neutral, or negative, what kinds of vocabulary were used to refer to and describe these practices, and what evidence of stigmatization was present. Items studied included the following:

- Watchover Voodoo’s “Collectable String Dolls,” a line of keepsake *Voodoo* dolls made in South Yorkshire, England, mostly designed to improve self-confidence, but also with dolls for revenge
- “All Parents Fight” by Harry Bliss, a cartoon, published in *The New Yorker*, depicting a caricature of a *Voodoo* doll in use by a man, observed by his daughter.
- “A New Way to Measure Self-Harm” by Dr. David S. Chester, an article from the website of popular magazine Psychology Today, concerning a study that used a virtual *Voodoo* doll to signify participants’ tendency toward self-harm.
- “Stabbing a Voodoo Doll of Your Boss Can Reduce Work Stress, Study Finds,” an article posted by CBC radio in 2018.
- “Paper Voodoo,” a notepad by novelty stationary company Knock Knock, depicting images of a *Voodoo* doll caricature with elements left blank to be filled out as desired.
- “Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume,” a Halloween costume available through the Minnesota-based online company HalloweenCostumes.com.
- “Burlesque Temptations Vol. 2 – The Sleazy Sound of Striptease Music,” a burlesque-themed record that references *Voodoo* and blues music in its back cover description, found by the author in a local record store.
- The film *Crossroads* (1985), depicting a tale of a young musician and his blues mentor set against the backdrop of the Robert Johnson legend. The film includes a

depiction of the religious figure Papa Legba as well as the use of a *mojo* bag power figure.

- The Obeah Act, describing current laws against *Obeah* in Jamaica and their accompanying punishments; and the Bahamas International Religious Freedom Reports from 2015 and 2018, describing religious laws and reported realities in the Bahamas.
- The 2012 appeals of Jahmar Welsh, Ruben Pinnock, and Evol Robinson, who were convicted in 2008 following a Canadian police investigation involving the impersonation of an *Obeah* man by Canadian law enforcement, a ruse used in attempts to trick appellants into making confessions.

Findings show that stigmatized Western interpretations concerning the spirits, intent, and spiritual worlds of power figures, including consecrating elements like music, have led to disproportionately negative portrayals of these figures in Western media and public discourse. These biased metanarratives have served to legitimize laws against African-rooted religious traditions in the Caribbean and even contribute to the robbing of the rights and freedoms of believers in countries like Canada where their practice is legal.

## **6.1 The *Voodoo* Doll & Assumptions of Evil**

Power figures and their traditions were portrayed with negative connotations in 80% (8 out of 10) of the depictions in the sample studied. Only 20% of the portrayals, (those by Watchover Voodoo and Knock Knock) were neutral, depicting both positive and negative aspects of the figures and describing them in positive or neutral language. Overwhelmingly, media portrayals seemed to be based on Western stereotypes of *Voodoo* dolls and African-rooted traditions rather than accurate knowledge of actual worldviews.

Watchover Voodoo provided the most positive Western depiction of a power figure's likeness in popular culture encountered in this study. Watchover Voodoo dolls, however, are not actual power figures but keepsake dolls. They do not promise life-changing results nor do they claim the dolls are made by ritualists. They do however

acknowledge the potential positive effects of their figures as fun dolls intended “to give you a confidence boost.” (“Collectable String Dolls” n.d.: para. 1). In the UK collection of Watchover Voodoo Dolls, 92 out of 96 dolls were for positive uses, the most frequent themes being for success (in a variety of particular pursuits), protection, calming, and confidence. The four dolls with negative or neutral powers included three – *Original Voodoo*, *The Equalizer*, and *Ultimate Devil* – all for revenge, and one – *The King of Darkness* – that was for power, fortune and fame, but also included the power to weaken your enemies (“UK collection” n.d.). Packaging for *The Equalizer* figure, however, states “I will help you get even when all else fails – happiness is the best revenge” (“UK Collection” n.d.). This recalls Voodoo Authentica’s penchant to handle even problems of revenge in a positive manner (see below and Section 6.3). While revenge could be considered a negative intent, it may also be neutralized by suggesting positive ways in which to achieve it, reinforcing the social harmony at its heart. The kinds of intents reflected by Watchover Voodoo figures and the range of their powers thus share similarities with those of actual power figures.

Interestingly, packaging for the dolls includes a warning that “This is not a toy.” Some advertisements for power figures made by ritualists like Babalawo Orisha and Mama Ifawale are advertised on *Instagram* with 18+ age restrictions. In the same vein, Watchover Voodoo also features an age restriction of 14+ years. This would be too high to be a choking warning, as thirteen year olds are not exactly notorious for swallowing bells and other small objects, and so can either be seen as a joke or as an accommodation for the potentiality of these objects’ power.



Illustration 25: Watchover Voodoo’s *Voodoo Pirate* doll, a keepsake with the positive intent to protect its bearer on journeys.



While Watchover Voodoo was the most positive of all popular depictions of power figures and their traditions sampled in this study, largely highlighting positive uses of power figures and linking them with beneficial improvement in peoples' lives, its portrayal still retains some pitfalls. Representing these powerful figures in effigy as mere keepsakes could still be offensive to adherents. While the intents listed are largely positive and some bear resemblance to authentic uses of actual *Voodoo* dolls, for example in drawing love, luck, and prosperity, these figures are ultimately not religious figures and are not intended for ritual use. Watchover Voodoo dolls are not constructed by ritualists in a traditional manner, and while they may be anthropomorphic figures with adornments, Watchover Voodoo dolls contain no indication of contained medicines, spirit, or consecrating ritual. The use of vocabulary like "Devil" is also problematic and will be discussed later in this section.

*Voodoo* dolls were also featured in two articles in the sample. One used a virtual *Voodoo* doll to measure patients' tendency toward self-harm (Chester 2019), and another employed a online *Voodoo* doll as a means of giving employees an outlet to virtually vent their frustrations against their boss ("Stabbing a Voodoo doll of your boss" 2018). In both instances, the popular Western idea of *Voodoo* dolls as outlets for torture and surrogates for those we wish to harm or on whom we seek revenge is taken for granted. These depictions lack the depth and complexity of actual *Voodoo* dolls, which are not only used for a variety of purposes but which are quite often used to heal rather than harm. Furthermore, as Voodoo Authentica shows, enacting revenge and ridding your life of a negative person need not mean you wish to harm them.

Enemy Be Gone items are intended to assist you with removing negative people/energy from your space in ways which serve the higher good of all involved. So if, for example, your coworker was being a bully, you could use the Enemy Be Gone to get him an amazing job that he absolutely loves - and one that takes him far away from you. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e: para. 15)

Harry Bliss' cartoon "All Parents Fight" also operates under Western assumptions and presumes a negative interpretation of the doll by its audience. Within the single-panel comic, a man is seen holding a doll with shoulder-length hair in one hand and a pin, which he holds over the doll's head, in the other. A young girl looks on from the side

with a furrowed brow. The only text within the cartoon as it would have been printed in *The New Yorker* is “All parents fight” (“All Parents Fight Drawing by Harry Bliss,” 2018). There are no words within the cartoon itself to label the doll a *Voodoo* doll, but the description of the cartoon on Fine Art America’s website reads, “A man pushes pins into a voodoo doll while his daughter watches” (“All Parents Fight Drawing by Harry Bliss,” 2018). Bliss’ depiction is not inherently vindictive, nor is it the only occasion in which a religious belief system appeared in his artwork. (In another cartoon posted on Bliss’s website, Jesus is described as a “trust-fund baby” (Bliss 2010a) and in another, a six-pointed starfish is labelled Jewish (Bliss 2010b).) But in “All parents fight,” only negative, harmful aspects of *Voodoo* dolls are depicted, representing a selective, incomplete, and flawed interpretation of the dolls, focusing only on negative imagery and associations. A *Voodoo* doll’s appearance in this way, without even needing to be named, in a major media outlet like *The New Yorker*, demonstrates the existence of the *Voodoo* doll caricature in public knowledge to the point that a conceptualization of it is activatable in Western minds simply by depicting a doll with pins and a hostile caption like “All parents fight.”

Vengeful uses of *Voodoo* dolls are also highlighted on the product page for Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume by HalloweenCostumes.com. While advertisers do not claim the costume can “physically [harm] anyone,” they do support revenge by frightening your enemies, causing unease, and using this “form of black magic that will bring us some justice” (“Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume” n.d.). Their selection of negative vocabulary here is significant.

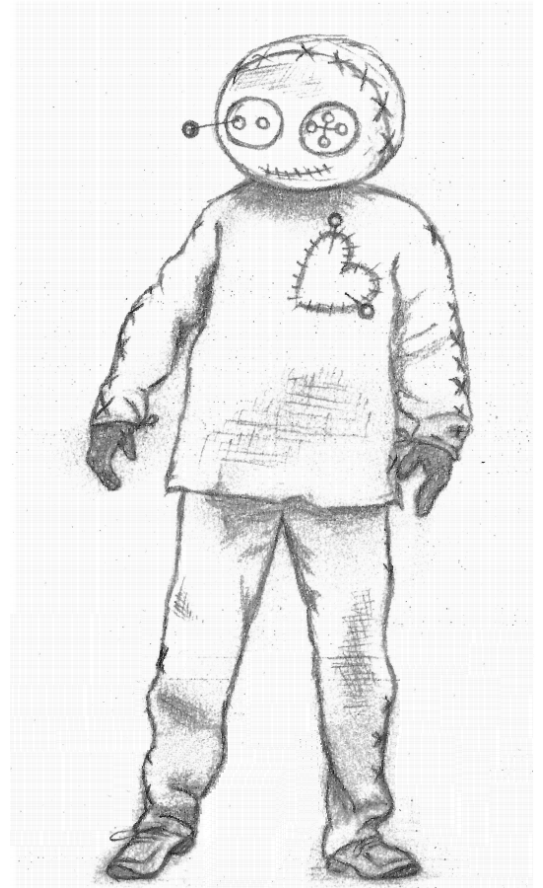


Illustration 26: *Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume*, sold on HalloweenCostumes.com

A particularly noteworthy finding from this study was the nature of the negative, value-laden vocabulary popularly used to describe power figures, their spirits, and traditions in the various forms of media analyzed. Frequently, power figures were described using negative language laden with anti-Christian, deviantly sexual, primitive, and violent overtones. Table 2 shows the negative terms used to describe power figures, associated spirits and traditions in my sample and the underlying themes these derogatory descriptors tap into.

<b>Anti-Christian (5)</b>	<b>Deviant/Uncivilized Sexuality (3)</b>	<b>Primitive (5)</b>	<b>Violent (16)</b>	<b>Other terms employed with negative connotations (6)</b>
Devil (3)	Basic Instincts (1)	Basic Instincts (1)	Fight (1)	Trance inducing (1)
Black Magic (1)	Orgy (1)		Stabbing (1)	Hypnotic (1)
Superstition (1)	Unsuppressable Urge to Undress (1)	Primal (1) Wildest (1) Primitive (2)	Retaliate (1) Harm (2) Burning (1) Pinching (1) Revenge (2) Torture (1) Frighten (1) Stick (1) Sharp Pins (1) Vengeance (1) Weaken Enemies (1) Payback (1)	Creepy (1) Uneasy (1) Strange (1) Strange-looking (1)

Table 2: Value-laden and derogatory terms used to describe power figures, associated spirits and traditions encountered by this study, organized according to theme.

These kinds of value-laden and derogatory words that are used to describe power figures and their traditions harken back to the anti-Christian allegations of devil worship, primitivism, violence and evil that were a feature of Christianizing missions throughout their history (see Chapter One). This reveals that the same rhetoric historically used to slander African religions and traditions as anti-Christian, uncivilized, anti-modern and unWestern is still alive today, even in the descriptions of Halloween costumes and toys. These terms are insidious vehicles of stigma that contribute to widespread assumptions many Westerners do not even realize they have, or, if they do, *why* they have them. The images these words conjure are part of an enduring smear campaign to paint anything foreign as evil, primitive, violent or perversely sexual, contrasted by a West that was Christian (now scientific) and civilized, shining and pure.

It is unlikely that the makers of toys and costumes, psychological studies and comics actively sought to slander an African religion with historically persecuting terms. But the fact remains that the reason these terms and the images they conjure are so readily at hand for Westerners is a relic of colonialist mentalities about African traditions. Regardless of the sometimes ignorant use of them today, these negative terms belong to movements for which slander, persecution, and eradication were very much their goal, and the images they paint were composed with the goal of mass-polluting Western psyches against African religions and traditions. Today stigma carries on this mission in a more covert way than in the blatant civilizing missions of olde. Though quieter, stigma is just as dangerous as crusade, if not more so for its insidiousness.

## **6.2 The Devil's Music**

Music is at the heart of West African traditions. The importance of musical instruments and song in religion, including in the creation of ritual objects like power figures, is no exception. When *Nkisi Lulendo* is constructed, the process includes the singing of a particular song. The lyrics say:

*Who asks me, Who owns the country?  
He, father Mazinga, eh...  
(MacGaffey 1987: 343)*

An *nsiba* is a whistle-like instrument carved from the horn of a duiker antelope and was used by the BaKongo people while hunting and during *nkisi* rituals (MacGaffey 1993: 58). *Power Figure: Male (Nkisi), 19<sup>th</sup> – mid-20<sup>th</sup> century*, item 1979.206.127, on display at the MET Museum on Fifth Avenue, includes, among other adornments, an anthropomorphic cross, signifying the crossroads where the land of living and the land of the dead meet, and a miniature gong, which along with “other musical instruments of this type [is] believed to sound in the land of the dead and [is] therefore used to call the spirit of the ‘nkisi’” (MMA n.d.: item 1979.206.127: para. 2). When *Vodou* priestess Mama Lola hosts parties for the *lwa* or spirits, music is a crucial element, like this song sung at a birthday party for the spirit Azaka. This song is actually to Papa Legba, who guards doorways and crossroads. He is greeted before all other *lwa*.

*Papa Legba, ouvri baryè-a.  
Ouvri baryè Atibon,  
Pou nou pase la.*

*Papa Legba, open the gate.  
Open the gate Atibon,  
To let us come in.  
(McCarthy Brown 2001: 54)*

But, as you may recall from Chapter One, despite the importance of music to *Vodou* ceremonies, Mama Lola often avoids bringing drummers into her Brooklyn home for fear of the stigma should she alert her neighbours to her practices.

Given the intricacy with which African music and religion are woven together, it is perhaps unsurprising that African musical traditions have also accrued negative connotations and stigma. On a visit to a local record shop in Halifax, Nova Scotia, I was surprised to find a reference to *Voodoo*, an African Diaspora religion, on a vinyl record titled, *Burlesque Temptations Vol. 2 – The Sleazy Sound of Striptease Music*. The back cover of the album reads:

This trance inducing selection will make your primitive soul dance and move in a primal way. With its roots in early, pre-war blues, this music is said to be “of the Devil”... and the Devil has A LOT to share here!

These songs are the perfect soundtrack for a voodoo ritual, sending you back to your basic instincts. The bluesy sounds are mixed here with early jazz and hypnotic, tribal rhythms concocted by the arrangements of grand orchestras.

You are sure to lose your cool to this orgy of sounds and feel an unsurpressable urge to undress and fantasise about these sexual, primal dances performed by the Burlesque stars of your dreams. So just sit back, relax, arouse your fiery fantasy and let your wildest dreams come true! (Casella 2014)

The album includes tracks like “Pattern of Evil” by Mundell Lowe and “Sing You Sinners” by Susan Hayward. The equation here of blues, a genre created and dominated by African Americans, to devil music is one echoed in the legend of famous blues musician Robert Johnson (discussed later in this section), and evokes the longstanding history we have seen of African traditions being linked with devil worship and evil. Also referenced here is another black-dominated musical style – jazz – as well as unspecific “tribal rhythms.” This description not only denigrates the musical influences of the album as devilish, but as “trance inducing,” “primitive,” and “primal,” with “hypnotic, tribal rhythms” evoking “your basic instincts.” Because of this, the album is allegedly perfect not only for a sinful striptease but also “these songs are the perfect soundtrack for a voodoo ritual.” The jump here to *Voodoo* is tenuous to say the least. It seems to matter not that this is a burlesque compilation and has nothing whatsoever to do with the *Voodoo* religion. The link being made is intended to arouse not the authentic religion of *Voodoo*, but rather the popular Western idea of *Voodoo* (sometimes bracketed off from real *Voodoo* by spelling it with a lowercase “v”). Considered by the West to be devilish, wild, and primitive, the evocation of *Voodoo* here attempts to create an aura of this record as primally and sinfully sexual. Even the inclusion of the word “concocted” instead of “arranged” or “composed” to describe the fusion of blues, jazz, and “tribal rhythms” featured on the album seems deliberate, an attempt to conjure images of spellcasting, potion- and charm-making, rather than of a practiced, intellectual assembly of fine musical art.

Robert Johnson, an African American man who lived in Mississippi in the 1910s through the 30s, was a famous blues musician, considered one of the greats. His musical influences are said to have paved the way for rock and roll, and musicians like Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, Eric Clapton, and Keith Richards all claim a debt to the incredible musician that was Robert Johnson. But how was Robert Johnson so good? Legend has it, he sold his soul to the Devil (Lipman & Oakes 2019).

In the early 1930s, Robert Johnson was just a novice guitar player, performing on street corners around the Mississippi Delta. He hung out in juke joints watching professionals like Willie Brown and Son House play, and when they took breaks he played around with their guitars. One time, with the crowd unimpressed and the musicians afraid the young Johnson would break something, he was told to leave. Johnson disappeared for a while after that and nobody saw him. A little over a year later, he walked up on stage with a seventh string on his guitar and his fingers played that guitar like two men. Not even his mentors could have done it. People began to wonder, how could Johnson have gotten so good, so fast? How could he have learned to do all that in such a short amount of time? People gradually came to the conclusion that he had made a deal with the Devil. Met him at the crossroads. The Devil had tuned Johnson's guitar and when he gave it back, the young musician could play it like the best in the world. But it came at a price. In return, they said, the Devil got his soul (Palmer 1981; Conforth 2008; Lipman & Oakes 2019).

Johnson created unforgettable music in his lifetime, music that when rediscovered in the 1950s would change the face of music and to which all of rock and roll would owe a debt. But his talent was short lived. At the hands of a bottle of poisoned whiskey, Robert Johnson died in 1938, at the young age of twenty-seven (Palmer 1981; Lipman & Oakes 2019).

Professor of Religion at Swarthmore College Yvonne Chireau, theorizes that the notion of Johnson selling his soul to the Devil may have its roots in ideas from *Hoodoo*. Chireau says, "...*Hoodoo* has these stories of people going down to a crossroad and meeting up with an entity who offers some sort of insight or knowledge to learn all kinds of things" (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 22:20). This is similar too to a situation described by

Bruce Conforth, musician and founding curator of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum: "Ike [Zimmerman, Johnson's mentor] always said that the only way to learn how to play the blues was to sit on a gravestone at midnight in a cemetery and then the haints, which is a southern word for ghosts or spirits, would come out and they would teach you how to play the blues" (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 27:23; see also Conforth 2008).

Both crossroads and graveyards could be considered bridges or meeting places for the living and the dead. But in West African-rooted spiritual traditions, these are not negative notions. Maintaining a positive and powerful connection with the spirits and our ancestors that came before us is extremely important. Meeting the spirit of someone deceased in a graveyard or meeting a spiritual entity like Papa Legba at the crossroads and learning something from them need not be synonymous with devil worship. All spirits are not the Devil.

If we recall Chapter One, however, there was a wide net in the Western archive (Tuhiwai Smith 2012) for catching anything supernatural and non-Christian and labelling it devilish. African religions were frequently seen by the West as traditions of the Devil, dark and to be avoided. At the time of Robert Johnson, blues was already being called devil music by Christian preachers angry their church congregations were dwindling on Sunday mornings due to nights out to juke joints the night before (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 12:45). The association of black music like the blues with the Devil could also be a reference to the connection shared between African traditional religion and music, and the importance of music to African rituals. This represents another iteration of the vilification of African belief systems, this time by stigmatizing their music as primitive and synonymous with devil worship. At the crossroads of an African American spiritual folk practice and a black musical genre, Hoodoo and the blues, we find a myth that borderlines stigma.

Why must a black American musician have sold his soul to the Devil to be good? Entire books have been written on Robert Johnson and the legend surrounding him, and our focus here is more on the Hollywood film *Crossroads* which draws from the legend. But it is significant to note the legend itself as another iteration of devil imagery being associated with black traditions (Palmer 1981). Was it impossible that a black man



simply worked hard and was talented, and left an imprint on music forever? Why must the Devil have had a hand in it? Certainly Robert Johnson wrote songs like “Hellhound on my Trail” and “Me and the Devil Blues,” and some might suggest that with lyrics like “Me and the Devil, Walking side by side” Robert might have himself contributed to rumors of association with the Devil. But these kinds of songs may be just as much the result of stigma as the cause for it. After all, Karlos Hill, Professor of African American Studies at the University of Oklahoma theorizes that “Hellhound on my Trail” might actually be about fleeing a lynch mob (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 12:45). Musician Jimmy “Duck” Holmes says, “Now Robert, he wanted to be identified with the Devil. He wanted you to think he was a devilish person... He wore that title. Man of Hell. Man of the Devil” (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 34:00; see also Palmer 1981; Conforth 2008). But wearing stigma is sometimes a way of deflecting it.

Ghanaian ritualist Kwaku Bonsam is well known for his mission to show that practicing African traditional religion is not at odds with what it means to be a modern African. He has spread his message from Ghana to New York and online through platforms like *YouTube* and *Facebook* (Lipinski 2013: para. 11-12). But he has faced much backlash. As Birgit Meyer states, “In Africa, traditional religion has always been considered extremely local, while Christianity was seen as a way of joining the larger world” (Lipinski 2013: para. 12). Beyond allegations that traditional religion is unmodern, Bonsam’s rituals have also been denigrated as devil worship (Lipinski 2013: para. 10). He admits that he took on the name Bonsam, or “devil” in the Twi language, as a way of taking ownership over what many Pentecostal churches and pastors in Ghana and in the media were already calling him (Lipinski 2013: para. 4 & para. 33).

In the same vein, Robert Johnson might have adopted these associations with the Devil that had surrounded him and his songs, as a way of invited them in, rather than being invaded by them, and taking power back from the people who sought to slander him. With references to *Hoodoo* in Johnson’s and many other blues artists’ songs from the region (ex. Johnson’s “Come on in my Kitchen” which contains references to a *mojo* bag or “nation sac,” and Muddy Waters’ “Got my Mojo Working”), being interpreted from within the West’s long held fear of beliefs and customs different from their own, it

is unfortunately unsurprising that blues didn't make it out of the Mississippi Delta without first accruing a thick layer of stigma.

In 1986, Columbia Pictures released a film called *Crossroads*, about a young man, Eugene "Lightning Boy" Martone, studying guitar at Julliard, who tracks down legendary blues musician Willie "Blind Dog" Brown, incarcerated at Eastwick Security Rest Home. Brown is known to have influenced Robert Johnson, even appearing in the lyrics of one of Johnson's songs, "Cross Road Blues" (Carliner & Hill 1986). Martone helps Brown escape and the two set out on a road trip to the Mississippi Delta where Martone hopes to find Robert Johnson's lost song, and Willie hopes to break off a deal he himself made at the crossroads long ago. At the crossroads, Eugene and Willie meet "Legba," an imposing figure in a black suit and hat, with an unsettlingly large smile. Legba has the contract, the one on which Brown signed away his soul at seventeen; and Legba won't break the deal unless Martone wins a guitar battle, risking his own soul in the process. Papa Legba, the *Vodou* guardian of the crossroads, is here the one with whom souls are being swapped for talent, synonymous with the Devil of the Robert Johnson myth. This direct equation of a *Vodou lwa* with the Christian Devil, believed to be the lord of Hell and all evil, is at odds with the real figure of Papa Legba who is known for guarding doorways, crossroads and barriers, and has in fact been equated with the Catholic Saint Peter (McCarthy Brown 2001: 404 & 272). This negative association of Papa Legba as tantamount to Satan is grossly inaccurate and encourages the equating of all *Vodou* spirits with evil.

A power figure also makes its way into the *Crossroads* film, though its representation is far more accurate than Papa Legba's. A red *mojo* bag is given by Brown to Martone for luck before the performance that would decide whether they both forfeited their souls to the DeviLegba. "You know what I got here?" Brown asks. "This is the *mojo* hand, a Louisiana *Voodoo* charm, the winning boy's magic. You see there's only one last true *mojo* left in the world. Take it, Lightnin'. Take it and go up there and do your stuff. I've given you all the magic I got" (Carliner & Hill 1986). This depiction is faithful to a true function of *mojo* bags as luck charms, among other uses.

Power figures are still used by musicians today. In 2019, *The Star* in Jamaica reported the sometimes discrete use of guard rings by Jamaican musical artists like AceGawd and Slyngaz. Guard rings are available for sale at Jam-Haitian Candle Shop and include medicines packed into a tiny hole behind the ring's stone. Guard rings are used for success, protection (ex. against the actions of the "bad mind people" success can attract), and warding off evil spirits (Gardner 2019: para. 15). While their use is kept "hushed" by some, a testament to the stigma against these kinds of practices in Jamaica where *Obeah* itself is illegal, the use of guard rings is "confess[ed]" to and "s[u]ng about" by others, stated openly in the lyrics of AceGawd's song "MarkX & Axxio" and in the title of Slyngaz's "Gun and Guard Ring" (Gardner 2019: para. 1). Dr. Love, musician and blogger, says,

"It looks like a regular ring, but it protects you. It is filled with a lot of things like blessings, and keeps you out of court, keeps you away from police, murder..." (Gardner 2019: para. 5)

"It helps you stay inna [sic] the industry and stay above things, so you can start travelling, get your house and car, and have your songs running the place without bowing to the payola system [having to buy radio air time for your songs]." (Gardner 2019: para. 6)

"The ring is filled with ingredients, it is prayed over and goes through a process involving liquids. Sometimes a goat or fowl is sacrificed, and the spirit that comes out of that will be your protection." (Gardner 2019: para. 11)

Guard rings, however, are controversial. *The Star*'s article met with heavy criticism by Christians in the comments. User Anthony McG quotes Matthew 16:26, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" going on to say, "They need to realize that their soul has the greatest value of all things, and if they are willing to sell it for some worldly goods, fleeting fame and fortune that will not be recognized anywhere in the 'great beyond'..." (Anthony McG 2019). User Randy\_Jam: quotes 2 Chronicles 33:6, saying, "He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritualists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger" (Randy\_Jam 2019). User Shaniah says, "These guard rings are demonic... What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?" (Shaniah 2019). Here, we see

revisitation of the same theme of trading the soul for musical prowess witnessed in the Robert Johnson legend, and the likening of traditional practices to evil. This kind of backlash for and suspicion of musical success when coupled with traditional African religious practices, and assumptions that such is an indicator of selling one's soul to the Devil, is still taking place in 2019.

### **6.3 Ritualists' Responses**

In this study, evidence of stigmatization in Western sources was measured by the presence of one or more of the following indicators, many of which we have already come across:

- Persecution of and/or laws against the practice; inequality in legal rights
- Seizure/destruction of objects
- Incomplete, flawed, and/or biased interpretations
- Derogatory/value-laden imagery/associations
- Judging practices against/favoring Western categories/practices (ex. biomedicine, Christianity, etc.); assumed hierarchy
- Derogatory/value-laden vocabulary/labels used to describe the practice
- Usurpation of power from practitioners

That this stigma has had an effect on practitioners was evident by two different kinds of responses: rebuttal and discretion. Whether ritualists openly fight back through public rebuttals, or go into hiding and carry on their rituals discretely, both are forms of resistance because the traditional practices still continue despite the overwhelming stigma against them.

For those who openly refute claims against their practices, providing rebuttals to biased Western perspectives, their approach is to prove the allegations wrong, provide more accurate information and set the record straight. Voodoo Authentica, for example,

uses the platform of their website to call out the flawed Western interpretations of the *Voodoo* religion that abound in Western media:

...So many people are ready to call today's New Orleans Voodoo a "watered down version of the original." Actually, New Orleans Voodoo has been misrepresented by Hollywood, the media and so many other uninformed sources for such a long time, that few people actually get to see its pure practice in motion. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-b: para. 5)

Voodoo Authentica also specifically discusses the misconceptions people hold about *Voodoo* dolls, one of the most inaccurately popularized facets of *Voodoo*. Voodoo Authentica draws distinction between the kinds of ritualists who invoke harming powers and those who only seek to do positive work. Invoking dark powers, or "black magick," and will control, like turning people into zombies or creating *Voodoo* dolls that inflict pain on others, is, according to Voodoo Authentica, the realm of the *bokor* or *bocor*, and referred to as working "with both hands" (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-h: para. 6-8). Creating zombies is "in fact frowned upon by both honorable Mambo & Houngan alike" and Voodoo Authentica does not source its objects from people who perform such acts (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-h: para. 6).

Different ritualists and ritual shops have varying positions on this. Recall that Conjure New Orleans will provide clients with neutrally charged power figures like the *Conjure Moss Doll Baby* which can be used however the client sees fit, for good or for ill. Voodoo Authentica makes their stance on this issue very clear:

None of the Voodoo Authentica Dolls or other items should be feared. Only 'good energy' is put into the dolls as they are being made and we can be sure of this, because we know all of the local New Orleans Artists, Spiritualists, Healers, and/or Voodoo Practitioners, who make them personally. They are all close and trusted friends who we respect and who definitely are 'people of light'. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-f: para .7)

Our items are Blessed by extremely Spiritually responsible Practitioners who disagree wholeheartedly with the idea of will control. We consider will control to be a form of serious harm. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e: para. 10)

Any harm done with our items would come solely from the ill intent of a misguided practitioner who happened to get their hands on our tools, not from any negativity inherent in the tools themselves. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e: para. 10)

Our products are blessed for peaceful and positive resolution, so they definitely are not empowered to do any physical, emotional, or spiritual harm. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e: para. 14)

As we saw in Section 6.1, even Voodoo Authentica's *Enemy Be Gone* power figures, empowered to remove a negative person from your life, need not be harmful. The shop's commitment to "peaceful and positive resolution" means they seek to rid clients of negative people by, for instance, getting the negative person a new job or opportunity they enjoy, away from the client they are afflicting, rather than by striking the offender ill or getting them fired (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-e: para. 14-15).

Like Mama Lola's decision not to hire drummers for her rituals for fear of attracting neighbours' attention and some Jamaican musicians choosing to keep quiet about their guard rings, Original Products Botanica and Jam-Haitian Candle Shop also opt for the discrete approach. Original Products Botanica in New York assures "We ship all of our orders in discrete unmarked boxes to ensure your utmost privacy" (Original Products Botanica n.d.-m). This practice by the shop respects and protects customers' potential desire to not have their beliefs and habits exposed to everyone who comes in contact with their parcel. In Jamaica, this discretion is even more paramount since the use of these objects for the practice of *Obeah* is illegal.

Jam-Haitian Candle Shop in Kingston, Jamaica has risen to this challenge by launching a discrete delivery service island-wide. This shows the shop has the same respect for the privacy of its customers as does Original Products Botanica. The owner is also on *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and *Facebook*, and hopes his work will "change the perception that many Jamaicans have of the practice of Obeah" ("Obeah Package on the Way" 2018: para. 3). He posts regularly about the products and services he offers, shares videos of spells he is performing, and provides information on *Obeah*, *Voodoo*, and *Hoodoo*. An article published in 2018 in *Loop News* called "Obeah Package on the Way: 'Healer' launches discrete delivery service" explains,

The topic of obeah or just the mention of the terms the 'dark arts' or 'spiritual healing' are things that remains [sic] taboo in Jamaica. Persons who dare to talk about the subject matter generally do so in low or hushed tones for fear of aggressive negative reactions from their peers. (2018: para. 1-2)

...[The] business is interestingly labelled ‘Jah [sic] Haitian Candle Shop’, and [the owner] said his service is so flexible that he does not have to place markings on his packages when they are being delivered, so that persons who may be looking on will not detect what the customers are collecting.” (2018: para. 9)

This article, however, also reveals the disapproving sentiments of its unnamed author regarding the authenticity of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop’s owner. The inclusion of quotations of disbelief around the word “healer” in the title of the article represents another example of the distancing we saw in Section 5.5 on “‘Voodoo’ Death.” In doing this, the author casts doubt on whether he believes the owner of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop is actually a healer. He also refers to the owner as a “self-proclaimed healer” elsewhere in the article. In addition, in the second statement above, the author inaccurately reports the name of the shop, correctly spelled *Jam-Haitian Candle Shop* on the owner’s *Facebook* page, and claims it is “interestingly labelled [sic].” The author might quip about the shop name, but to use a relatively non-descript company name, one that does not disclose that anything more than candles are for sale, makes strategic sense given the illegality of the owner’s work and his mission of discretion. The owner also declined to have his own name printed in the article.

“What I find in Jamaica is that people fear what they do not understand, and many times they want to benefit from the service of the spiritual healer (obeah man), but they do not want anyone to see them coming into the (obeah) shop,” said the self-proclaimed healer who declined to share his his [sic] real name. (“Obeah Package on the Way” 2018: para. 7)

With *Obeah* still illegal in Jamaica and the overwhelming majority, 74%, of respondents to a 2019 poll on Jamaica’s *Loop News* responding “No” to whether or not anti-*Obeah* legislation should be repealed, it is unsurprising that many of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop’s customers feel uncomfortable walking into an *Obeah* shop (“Obeah law could be repealed soon” 2019). Bolstered by technology that fosters discrete communication through text applications like *WhatsApp*, and *Facebook* business pages where owners can remain anonymous, Jam-Haitian Candle Shop demonstrates the prowess of an underground market for religious implements, ingredients, and other supplies in a country where practice of *Obeah* is illegal. It also shows need for shop owners who understand how to duck the stigma and keep on resisting.

But what does this constant resistance, this need to fight or to hide, do to practitioners of these traditions and users of power figures? Koenane (2014) discusses the identity crisis that can result from the internal damage stigma can inflict on Africans. He says:

Usually this is where conflict arises between one following her adopted religious belief system, ones' adopted western style of living and completely regard the African way of life as old fashion, backward and most often as superstitious. This is what we also refer to as 'identity crisis' in this paper. 'Identity crisis' in this paper refers to a failure to know oneself in clear cut ways which do not bring about doubt or conflict within oneself. (365)

Koenane is speaking specifically here about stigmatization against the African way of healing and medicine, which is interwoven with ideas of religion, the spirit world and, as we have seen, power figures and even music. Koenane also discusses the stigmatization of traditional medicine by Pentecostal churches, something with which Ghanaian ritualist Kwaku Bonsam is all too familiar (see Section 6.2). This kind of religious persecution emerges again in the comments section of the news article about Jam-Haitian Candle Shop; and the owner does not escape hecklers even on his business *Facebook* page. Whether in Africa or the Diaspora, for practitioners of the traditional medical and religious systems that are *Voodoo*, *Obeah*, and other non-Western faiths, identity crisis is a very real risk, a potential consequence of believing in the face of this ever-present and relentless stigmatization of the way they see the world.

#### **6.4 The Spirit of the Law: *Obeah* on Trial**

On October 8th 2018, a small black coffin, a chicken skull bound to it with a red ribbon tied into a bow, was found outside a courthouse in Trinidad. It made the news and prompted discussion about *Obeah*. This particular object is used for luck in court cases, hence its placement outside the Port of Spain Magistrates Court. But despite the object's rather benign intent, the news article cited a number of local opinions that considered figures like these and their traditions to be "bizarre," "unusual," "black magic," that prompt "disdain" and "fear" (Connelly 2018: para. 2, 10, 13).



In 2015, in Antigua, three men were arrested and subsequently deported for practicing *Obeah* and having in their possession ritual objects in defiance of the 1904 Obeah Act (Connelly 2018). In an article in the *Times Caribbean Online* concerning the incident, police took the opportunity to “remind members of the general public that it is an offence, for anyone to be engaged in any form of Obeah or any form of Supernatural Practices, or even act as a consultant in such matters; in accordance to the Obeah Act, Cap 298 of the Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. Under Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 the Obeah Act, it clearly states that: Every person practicing, or in any way concerned in the practice of obeah, or using any subtle craft, means or device by obeah or otherwise shall be liable to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding 5 years or 12 months as the case may be” (“Antiguan Police Arrest Three for Practicing Obeah” 2015: para. 4-5).

This study encountered frequent intersection between power figures, their traditions, and the legal system (Skinner 2005; Paton 2009 & 2019; Ramsey 2011; *R. v. Welsh* 2013; Boaz 2014 & 2018; “The Obeah Act” 2016; Connelly 2018; “Obeah law could be repealed soon” 2019). This emerged in several ways including the historical persecution of these traditions and the forming of laws against them, the continued illegality of these traditions in some countries today, the abuse and misrepresentation of these traditions within trials (see Section 6.4.2), and the prevalence of *Win In Court* power figures for dealing with court cases that are readily available in ritual shops and botánicas. It is likely the availability of *Win In Court* power figures is connected to the over-representation of black and immigrant populations within the prison system. The intersection of power figures and the law, therefore, is two-fold. It is the prosecution of traditions and at the same time the very use of those traditions to attempt to avoid prosecution. With the incarceration rate of African Americans over five times that of white Americans (“Criminal Justice Fact Sheet” n.d.), and the highest incarceration rates among illegal immigrants in the U.S. belonging to immigrants from Latin America and Africa (Landgrave & Nowrasteh, 2018: para: 15), it is understandable that ritual shops and botánicas from New York to New Orleans see a customer base for *Win In Court* *Voodoo* dolls and *mojo* bags. As Yvonne Chireau said of the use of African American folk magic in the Mississippi Delta at the time of Robert Johnson, “...*Hoodoo* was seen as a way of gaining control in a world that was suffused by violence and limited options.

*Hoodoo* gave people other possibilities for living in that world” (Lipman & Oakes 2019: 22:20).

#### 6.4.1 Laws Against *Obeah*

During the period from 1895 to 1901, [Arnold Ridyard] collected works specifically from Central Africa, including the Chiloango River region, where Mangaaka power figures were then in use...

Although Ridyard’s collecting in Central Africa was restricted to a roughly six-year period, it yielded an important collection of *minkisi* figures at a crucial time when colonial regimes, intent on consolidating their hold on the region, had embarked on a campaign to eradicate *minkisi* on the grounds that they represented an alternate system of governance. (Kingdon 2015: para. 10)

Historically, Western narratives described traditional practices and power figures as primitive or superstitious, witchcraft or devil worship, requiring destruction because they were an affront to God or an impasse to civilization (Tylor 1861, 1865, 1871/1891 & 1881; MacGaffey 1993; Ramsey 2011; Josephson-Storm 2017; see also Chapter One). But there was another reason colonial regimes wanted to destroy power figures. They feared them; feared *minkisi* as part of a rival political system (MacGaffey 1993; Kingdon 2015); feared *Vodou* because of its ability to unite its followers (Ramsey 2011). Despite all their bluster, it wasn’t that the West thought power figures unpowerful. If they did, they wouldn’t have fought so hard to destroy them.

During the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), *Vodou* played a significant role in uniting the Haitian people in an uprising that would eventually lead to the creation of the only independent black republic at the time. Ritualists are prominent and powerful people in their communities, something that also generates political influence. In Africa, ritualists of rival political affiliations were sometimes sold into slavery, as was the case when the Sakpata priests of Mahi were sold into slavery by Dahomean King Agaja (Ogundiran & Saunders 2014: 15). This also occurred in the New World. As W.E.B. Du Bois describes, ritual experts were seen by their people as “the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of

the wrong” (quoted in Ogundiran & Saunders 2014: 15). Even while enslaved, ritualists retained great power among their people, often representing an opposing force to slave masters, and playing major roles in rebellions (Ogundiran & Saunders 2014: 15). Power figures, as material “instruments of Obeah” and other Black Atlantic religions, were seen as powerful weapons and outlawed (Boaz 2014: 143). *Obeah* remains illegal in fourteen Anglophone Caribbean countries as of 2017 (Boaz 2017), including Jamaica (“The Obeah Act” 2016) and The Bahamas (Bahamas International Religious Freedom Report 2018).

The Obeah Act currently in effect in Jamaica orders up to twelve months imprisonment, potentially with hard labour, for practicing *Obeah*. Consulting a person who practices *Obeah* for the use of their powers carries a fine of up to one hundred dollars or up to twelve months in prison, again with the possibility of hard labour. To knowingly approach an *Obeah* man for fraudulent purposes carries a smaller sentence, up to six months prison time (“The Obeah Act” 2016: 3-4, s. 3-5). An “instrument of obeah,” as defined by The Obeah Act, is “anything used, or intended to be used by a person, and pretended by such person to be possessed of any occult or supernatural power” (“The Obeah Act” 2016: 3, s. 2). If a law enforcement officer has reasonable cause to suspect possession, that officer has the right to search for and seize those items which fall under the definition of “instruments of obeah.” This includes power figures. Being found with an object of *Obeah* automatically deems the suspect a practitioner of *Obeah* until proven otherwise (“The Obeah Act” 2016: 4, s. 6 & 7).

Legislation against *Obeah* and its objects in Jamaica was sparked by an uprising in 1760, led by Tacky, an enslaved man. Tacky employed ritualists who gave his followers charms to protect them from bullets. Colonizers blamed the revolt on *Obeah*, and that year, laws were put in place that made it illegal for a slave to possess any such charms, or to “pretend” to possess any supernatural powers at all (Boaz 2017: 428; see also Bilby & Handler 2004; Handler 2011; James, Carpenter, Peltzer & Weaver 2014).

McCarthy Brown states that following the Haitian Revolution, in which Haitian slaves seized their independence from colonial rule, the country remained isolated for almost a hundred years, minimizing its outside influences and preserving a form of

*Vodou* that some say is “closer to its African roots” than other African Diaspora religions (2001: 5). The reason for this isolation is explained by Kate Ramsey (2011). Haiti was a powerful example of a successful uprising bolstered by the unification of the people through *Vodou*, resulting in an independent black nation, the first the world had ever seen. Seeing this, the United States and Europe feared that Haiti’s success would inspire similar uprisings in their countries, and so Haiti was ostracized. Influenced by this banishment from the world stage, the Haitian government declared *Vodou* illegal from 1835 to 1987 (see Section 1.3).

The trend we see here is of government and colonial officials blaming traditional religion for uprisings, rather than blaming the political oppression that forced the people to fight for their freedom. By making *Vodou* illegal, the Haitian government alleged that *Vodou* was to blame for the country’s political ostracism and the resulting drying up of the economy that left Haiti to languish in poverty; when in reality, this was the fallout of Western fears of what might happen if the black people of the world were free. Instead of traditional religion being remembered for its role in uniting and empowering subjugated people, it was made the villain, the reason for the ills of the country. This is a narrative that is still alive today.

In two different articles on Jamaica’s *Loop News* website, both concerning *Obeah*, users statements in the comments sections echo this same misremembered history. The comments also show how stigma can be used to justify and legitimize laws against these religious practices by making them appear frightening, detrimental, and threatening to the public. Beneath the article “Obeah law could be repealed soon,” Singh Sings comments,

Legalizing obeah would be destroying Jamaica just like Haiti. The devil is lose. Do u [sic] want to give him more freedom? Huh think twice... I say. I rebuke it in Jeseus’ [sic] name. Send it back to the pit of hell!!! (Singh Sings 2019)

User Speak up asserts,

...Jamaica need prayer not Obeah. Look at neighboring countries that embrace this practice, they are poor and full of trouble, anybody calling for this practice to be law, need great prayer because they calling down distraction [sic, destruction] on themself and the island... (Speak up 2019)

Similarly, in the comments section of “Obeah Package on the Way: ‘Healer’ launches city delivery service,” a user who identifies himself as “george” said the following:

I hope Jamaican don't be fooled with this BS. Just the name “Jah Haitian Candle Shop” if this was any good. Haiti would not be in any problem today. People keep your money and stay strong and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ. This man [the owner of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop] will put his pot on fire and have a great meal, while you got broke on these candles. On the lighter side, Bobby Montaque [Robert “Bobby” Montague, Jamaican politician] couldnt controlled the crime in Jamaica, so believe keep your money buy some food and feed your children. (George 2018)

Ramsey (2011) challenges assertions that “Vodou is not just unmodern (and thus, in the logic of modernist development, destined to decline), but actively anti-modern, obstructing the linear course of progress in Haiti,” claims that are heavily reminiscent of the flawed evolutionary schemas of nineteenth-century scholars like Edward Burnett Tylor (22; see Section 1.2.1). Assumptions like these, Ramsey says, obscure the impact of geological factors like the devastating earthquake of 2010 and pardon political actions like American and European ostracism of Haiti following the Revolution, the likes of which are the real culprits in Haiti’s impoverishment, thereby absolving them of blame and responsibility in the aftermath (2011: 22). The narrative whereby Haiti’s financial hardships are blamed, not on its ostracism from the U.S. and Europe or on crippling earthquakes, but instead on their belief in *Vodou* and practice of magic, is a result of deep-rooted Western prejudices against African ways of life. The answer, Ramsey asserts, is that these flawed and detrimental images of popular religion in Haiti need to be abolished. Otherwise, dangerous leaps in logic will continue to be made. As Ramsey (2011) recounts,

If the Haitian majority are held responsible for the country’s low standing in human development indexes on account of (at least in part) their deficient or actively pernicious religious culture, then clearly they cannot be entrusted with setting the terms of development agendas in their own communities, much less with helping to shape the vision of a new Haiti. (22)

Blaming traditional religion as the reason why Haiti is impoverished and thus why the country is supposedly incapable of civil agency and self-determination is an argument often employed by critics of Haiti. The paternalistic line of thought Ramsey is

highlighting and combatting here is eerily similar to another one, employed against the Irish in the 1890s.

There is much folklore of faeries in Ireland, and although legends told of a departure of faeries with the rise in agriculture, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many people still believed they existed. In 1895, a woman by the name of Bridget Cleary disappeared. Her husband insisted she had been abducted by faeries and would soon be returned. But when her burned body was found soon after, her husband was charged with her murder, though he insisted the body wasn't really his wife but that of a changeling. He was eventually convicted, but not before the case made headlines. Outsiders from countries without such a strong tradition of faeries began to see the belief as a marker of some sort of deficiency in Irish intelligence and capability. If the Irish people actually believed faeries existed, they speculated, was Ireland even capable of governing itself? (Josephson-Storm 2017: 125; see also Shanklin 1994 and Magubane 1996). The implications of this line of thought are as unsettling as those levied against Haiti; for if believing in fairies disqualifies one from being capable of self-determination, then those who don't believe in magic are the only ones fit to rule. Thus if one happens upon a group of people who do believe in fairies – or *Vodou* – it follows that someone who does not believe in fairies should be brought in to rule them.

Herein lies the power of narratives against magic, as they corrupt sensibilities and convince the world that power is only safe in the hands of Western rationalism. In this way, perhaps the West no longer needs laws, imprisonment, and fines to criminalize these religions, when stigma is so fine a tool of social control. Outright laws against traditional religions might be the old way; abolishing them makes us look like we are accepting of diversity. But the stigma remains; and stigma is far more insidious, less vividly obvious in its persecution but equally poisonous in its result. Once the only free black nation, Haiti is now the most impoverished nation in the Western hemisphere, a punishment meted out by the West while, through sleight of hand, the world was made to believe that the Haitians with their wicked gods had brought it on themselves.

#### 6.4.2 The *Obeah* Man Trial

On the night of October 9, 2004, Youhan Oraha was shot 29 times by what appeared to be four shooters in a Brampton, Ontario parking lot. The killing was thought to be retaliation for the murder of Shemaul Cunningham; Oraha, drug trafficker and known member of the No Love Vice Lord Bloods street gang, was suspect in the Cunningham murder. Three of the four shooters were unidentified. But the fourth was pegged as Jahmar Welsh by the girlfriend of the deceased and was placed at the scene by other sources. Welsh's younger brother, Evol Robinson, and family friend Ruben Pinnock were believed to have assisted in the execution of Oraha, Robinson by delivering the murder weapon and acting as lookout and getaway driver, and Pinnock by helping to plan the murder and acting as another lookout. The suspects, Jahmar Welsh, Evol Robinson, and Ruben Pinnock, all have Jamaican heritage (*R. v. Welsh* 2013).

Shemaul Cunningham, who had been murdered approximately one month prior, had been Welsh's best friend and had had a close relationship with Welsh's mother, Colette Robinson. Since then, Colette had been visited by Cunningham's ghost. When police discovered Colette's belief in this ghost, Officer Andrew Cooper, who was from a Jamaican community in London, England, went undercover to Colette Robinson, calling himself "Leon" and posing as an *Obeah* man, a ritualist of *Obeah*.<sup>3</sup> Cooper told the suspect's mother that he perceived two spirits in conflict with one another. One was good, that of Cunningham. The other was the evil spirit of Oraha, who Cooper called "the white boy" (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 15, s. 35). The evil spirit of Oraha, the false *Obeah* man claimed, sought revenge on Colette Robinson's family for his murder. Cooper told Colette that he had the powers to protect her family from the "Babylon system" (the justice system) and the beastman (the police) (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 9, s. 21), but claimed he needed information from her to do so (*R. v. Welsh* 2013).

---

<sup>3</sup> While Officer Andrew Cooper may have grown up in a Jamaican community in London, and perhaps had familiarity with the tradition of *Obeah*, it does not mean he was a believer. As we have seen, many Jamaicans see the practice as anti-Christian, potentially destructive to the country, and are against the repealing of the law that makes its practice illegal in Jamaica (see Section 6.3).

Cooper, posing as “Leon,” had several surreptitiously taped phone calls and meetings in hotel rooms with Colette, her son Evol Robinson, and family friend Ruben Pinnock. “Leon” was adamant that if he were to be able to protect them from the bad spirit of Orahā, he needed to know everything that happened in the incident that had created it. With the assistance of other police officers, the fake *Obeah* man also fabricated rituals in order to gain the suspects’ trust. He placed a dead crow (a symbol of John Crow and discriminatory laws in the justice system) on Colette Robinson’s doorstep, gave her a handkerchief allegedly empowered with the ability to protect her from the police and then had officers fake illness when near it, and had the Robinsons bring him to the murder scene, where he contrived a ritual involving the breaking of an egg inside of which he had inserted blood-like red dye. During the course of their meetings with “Leon” and in efforts to satisfy the *Obeah* man’s requirements for protection, both suspects, Evol Robinson and Ruben Pinnock, implicated themselves and Jahmal Welsh in the murder of Youhan Orahā. All three men were convicted. They later filed an appeal but it was dismissed (*R. v. Welsh* 2013).

During the 2008 trial and the subsequent appeal in 2012, it became a point of controversy that what became dubbed as The Obeah Statements, those made by the suspects to the false *Obeah* man, were admissible in court. Defence argued that these statements, which the suspects made to a religious advisor and would naturally have assumed confidential, should be inadmissible under Canada’s dirty tricks doctrine. According to the dirty tricks doctrine, which originated in 1981 during the *Rothman v. The Queen* trial, police should not use such deceptive means to elicit confessions as would be so morally reprehensible as to shock the community in their heinousness. Statements elicited in this manner should be considered inadmissible.

There is some grey area as to what a dirty trick entails. Police work at times involves undercover operations whereby officers, for example, may pretend to be drug addicts to catch dealers. Pretending to be a drug addict is not considered to be a deception that would shock the community. However, there are lines even the police should not cross. An oft quoted passage used as a benchmark in this matter from Lamer submitted during the 1981 *Rothman v. The Queen* trial, reads:



The judge, in determining whether under the circumstances the use of the statement in the proceedings would bring the administration of justice into disrepute, should consider all of the circumstances of the proceedings, the manner in which the statement was obtained, the degree to which there was a breach of social values, the seriousness of the charge, the effect the exclusion would have on the result of the proceedings. It must also be borne in mind that the investigation of crime and the detection of criminals is not a game to be governed by the Marquess of Queensbury rules. The authorities, in dealing with shrewd and often sophisticated criminals, must sometimes of necessity resort to tricks or other forms of deceit and should not through the rule be hampered in their work. What should be repressed vigorously is conduct on their part that shocks the community. *That a police officer pretend to be a lock-up chaplain and hear a suspect's confession is conduct that shocks the community*; so is pretending to be the duty legal-aid lawyer eliciting in that way incriminating statements from suspects or accused; injecting Pentothal into a diabetic suspect pretending it is his daily shot of insulin and using his statement in evidence would also shock the community; but generally speaking, pretending to be a hard drug addict to break a drug ring would not shock the community; nor would, as in this case, pretending to be a truck driver to secure the conviction of a trafficker; in fact, what would shock the community would be preventing the police from resorting to such a trick. [Emphasis added.] (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 37, s. 93)

While the appellants in *R. v. Welsh* felt that using statements confessed to an imposter-*Obeah* man should merit designation as a dirty trick, the Crown ultimately disagreed. Several considerations were taken into account, the most relevant of which to our discussion are as follows.

First, it had to be determined whether or not *Obeah* was indeed to be recognized as a religion. For Detective Sergeant Jarvis, who devised the *Obeah* operation, it was not. To him, *Obeah* was “not a religion but a form of witchcraft or voodoo” (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 31, s. 77). Court documents say that Jarvis went on to admit that “he would not use a similar operation for an established religion” (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 31, s. 77). (Readers need not be reminded that *Voodoo* is very much an established religion.) The Court, however, and experts for the defense, disagreed with Jarvis, deciding that *Obeah* was to be considered a religion.

The owner of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop, however, says that to him, in contrast to *Voodoo* which he says is “considered a religion,” *Obeah* is “mainly hoodoo which practices the use of lots of herb/bush/spices” (Jam-Haitian Candle Shop 2019). *Voodoo Authentica* agrees, saying

New Orleans Voodoo is a religion, with one God, a pantheon of Spirit Forces (Lwa/Orisha) similar to the Catholic Saints, as well as certain rituals, steps of initiation, etc., which must be adhered to. Hoodoo is a collection of Southern spiritual traditions, magick & folklore without a theology attached to it. (Voodoo Authentica n.d.-b: para. 1)

Whether or not *Obeah* is to be defined as a religion or folk magic (and we already know the biased history inherent in the creation of these opposing categories, see Chapter One), is not really the issue here. Definition, as in the case of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop and Voodoo Authentica, is one thing. But in the Western archive (Tuhiwai Smith 2012), definition carries with it something else. What is at issue is that this definition matters at all.

In the West and to Detective Sergeant Jarvis, a different level of power is ascribed to religions, a different level of respect and different legal rights. To be defined as a religion carries with it a designated place within a Western-contrived hierarchy. That hierarchy benefits those defined as religions because, historically, Western traditions were the religions, those sanctioned by authority, respected, and granted rights. Other traditions, given the label of magic or superstition, were treated very differently. To even enter into the legal argument of whether or not *Obeah* is a religion and so worthy of respect in the legal process and eligible to be considered under the dirty tricks doctrine – as if to blaspheme a religion is reprehensible but another tradition merely a clever police tactic – is to stand in the shoes of our forefathers who argued volumes over whether Africans were demonic or merely barbaric, and whether believers in magic might be better off conquered.

To knowingly exploit Colette Robinson's belief that a spirit sought to harm her family and to elicit a confession under the stress of perpetuating that reality falsely is a dirty trick and should constitute one under the same moral grounds that allowing an individual to confess to a priest in lockup is also morally reprehensible. Reprehensible, not simply because Christianity is a religion, but because to do so exploits a person's belief in an established and community-held spiritual world and the confidentiality assumed in seeking counsel in a spiritual advisor. Detective Sergeant Jarvis would not have run this operation with an officer posing as a priest. That alone should expose it as

morally wrong. Christianity should be granted no more respect or legal privilege than any other established belief system, fall they under Western definitions of religion or magic. This is especially true bearing in mind the long history of the West in using its political and legal power to persecute those who believe and practice differently than it does, by categorizing others beliefs under a different heading its own and thereby deserving of different rights.

With Jarvis' claim that *Obeah* is not a religion thwarted, the court also considered the notion of exploiting persons seeking religious counsel. The court ruled that The Obeah Statements could not be thrown out under the dirty tricks doctrine because, according to the court, the suspects did not confide in the *Obeah* man for spiritual guidance but to rid themselves of an evil spirit and evade police capture (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 41-42, s. 104). This ruling, however, is predicated on the assumption that religious counsel looks the same in all religions. Christianity might have it that you can absolve your evils simply by confessing them to a priest and saying ten Hail Marys. But *Obeah* does not work like that. Practitioners of *Obeah* seek more hands on, practical resolutions to healing spiritual and social problems. Luck in court, daily life, and circumventing evil forces and spirits are all common pursuits for which help is sought from spiritual advisors in *Obeah*. As we have seen, the domain of religious pursuits is broader in African and Diasporic religions, encompassing not just what is defined by the West as spiritual, but physical, emotional, mental, and social issues as well. The Crown's assertion that this was not an interaction of religious counsel is based on a Western idea of what religion constitutes and what realms it touches, and so what counts as a religious consultation. But what legally constitutes religious counsel cannot be based solely on the framework of one, white, dominant religion.

Furthermore, let us not forget that Officer Cooper, posing as "Leon" the *Obeah* man, came to Colette Robinson as a spiritual advisor and told her what he required to protect her from evil, both the spirit and the "beastman" police system. How can the court say the function of the suspects' interactions with the imposter *Obeah* man was not religious in nature when the entire ruse was contrived to play upon Colette Robinson's religious beliefs, from the outset. It is not as though the suspects went to the *Obeah* man irrespective of his religious position and asked for fake passports to get them out of the

country (*R. v. Welsh* 2013: 40, s. 99-100 & 41-42, s. 104). Therefore, it is impossible for the Crown to state on the one hand that the suspects did not approach Cooper for a religious purpose, and on the other hand openly admit that Copper impersonated a religious figure and overtly offered religious services in order to dupe the suspects into a confession.

The Crown may not have felt that such actions by the police would shock the community. But that might depend on the community they are speaking to. The African Canadian Legal Clinic as well as The Canadian Civil Liberties Association both took issue with the police tactics used in this case, the latter saying that permitting police officers to fraudulently impersonate religious advisers to elicit confessions, “shocks the conscience of Canadians... People in Canada have a right to spiritual guidance and a right to a relationship with a religious adviser free from police interference” (Small 2012: para. 9-10; excerpt reprinted in White 2013: para. 10-11). According to Peter Small with *The Star*, The African Legal Clinic argued “the ruse preyed on the Robinson family’s deep-seated mistrust of police and the criminal justice system. Police treated the Robinsons’ ethnicity-base belief in Obeah as a tool to extract information, assuming those beliefs are not worth of equal respect, thus breaching their equality rights...” (2012: para. 14-15).

Legitimate *Obeah* man Ebenezer White also took up issue with the police officers’ conduct and the ruling of the Court on his blog *Obeah Spells: The Spiritual Mystery of the Caribbean*:

Do Canadian authorities believe it is fine to use magicians [sic] tricks and deception to manipulate a criminal suspect in the name of an African religious Spirit – say, Eshu – but it would not be appropriate for them to use the same tactics claiming to be from a Christian Angel or from Jesus Christ. (White 2013: para. 18)

Referring to Officer Cooper’s use of information from police wiretaps in order to feign prophetic abilities, White continues,

“Can an undercover police officer in Canada pretend to be a Minister of Christ, using wiretapped information to convince a suspect that they are communicating with Jesus?” (White 2013: para. 18)

Given the Crown’s contention that the actions of these officers would not shock the community, it begs the question, which community did they ask?

A further and significant allegation might have been levied against the police during the trial. But unfortunately it appears to have been overlooked. At the time of the trial, a section remained on the books in the Canadian Criminal Code that made fraudulently pretending to have supernatural powers an illegal act. Section 365 was repealed in December 2018. But it was law at the time of Oraha’s murder, throughout the police investigation that included the undercover *Obeah* operation, during the time of the initial trial, conviction, imprisonment, and even the appeal. Section 365 read:

Pretending to practise witchcraft, etc.  
365 Every one who fraudulently  
    (a) pretends to exercise or to use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or  
        conjuraton,  
    (b) undertakes, for a consideration, to tell fortunes, or  
    (c) pretends from his skill in or knowledge of an occult or crafty science to discover  
        where or in what manner anything that is supposed to have been stolen or lost may be  
        found,  
is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.” (*Criminal Code* 1985)

Based on this statute against witchcraft that was on the books at the time of the trial and at the time of the appeal, and certainly at the time of the undercover operation, when Officer Cooper went to Colette Robinson and her family, knowingly and falsely proclaimed himself an *Obeah* man and feigned powers in order to dupe his victims and obtain the sought-after confession, it was actually illegal to do so.

Ultimately, it was not merely the impersonation of a religious figure to elicit a confession, which on its own should be grounds for inadmissibility, that makes this act by Canadian police morally reprehensible. The true dirtiness of this act on the part of the police is the prolonged elaborate deception of fraudulently portraying multiple religious acts and rituals, even employing fake spiritually-empowered objects like the protective handkerchief,<sup>4</sup> involving the participation of several officers. This repeated and overt

---

<sup>4</sup> While not a composite power figure, the empowered protective handkerchief, as a false ritual object, would likely fall alongside power figures under the category of “instruments of obeah” under The Obeah Act of Jamaican law.

fraudulent representation of the supernatural powers central to a non-Western faith with the intent to dupe the appellants into self-incrimination, should constitute not only a violation of the dirty tricks doctrine but a violation of the then-standing law Section 365. Police in this investigation therefore committed not only a dirty trick but an illegal one.

Just as the physical containers and medicines of these figures have been continuously misrepresented and stigmatized, so too have the spirits and traditions that infuse them. From the idea of the *Voodoo* doll as a one-dimensional caricature of revenge to blues as the Devil's music, Papa Legba as harvesting souls, and debates as to whether or not an *Obeah* man and his counsel merits the same respect as a Christian priest, the world of power figures is fraught with prejudice from the outside. African-rooted religious practices have not only been persecuted historically, they remain illegal in some countries. Even in places like Canada where their practice is legal, the rights of their practitioners are still debated in court. In April 2013, with the rejection of the appeals of Jahmar Welsh, Ruben Pinnock, and Evol Robinson, judges M. Rosenberg, Robert J. Sharpe and J. MacFarland therefore condoned the impersonation of a non-Western religious advisor by police, an action that were it done of a lockup priest would be considered a heinous act that would shock the Canadian community. African-rooted religions must be afforded the same respect and rights as their Western counterparts; and Western institutions need to stop using Christianity as their benchmark for what religion looks like, just because it is the devil they know. Religious persecution is neither a thing of the past, nor a thing of other lands. It happens in Canada and it is happening now.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

### 7.1 *Manbos, Motherboards, and “Modernity”*

Despite the predictions of Max Webber and other scholars of the early 20th century, it is clear that Western modernity was not characterized by an exorcism of magic, not even in the West, where fishermen still observe taboos, power figures are buried next to banks, and ritual shops proliferate, even in busy Western epicenters like New York City. Quite the contrary, modernity and the technologies it bore actually shepherded in new realms for magic entirely. According to scholar Wande Abimbola, even deities themselves have continued to adapt their circles of influence with the times.

Ogou... works with iron. So all the people who work with iron, even those young men who work in the big oil fields, they follow Ogou, too. Ogou is important to us because he teaches us how to handle the modern world – arms, machines, trucks, all that. Without Ogou, we could forget that the things man creates can turn on him, even destroy him. In Nigeria, in my country, Ogou is very important to the people. (Quoted in McCarthy Brown 2001: 103)

Just as practitioners and their gods adapted to slavery and the New World, so too did they adapt to later shifts – industrialization, shifts in the availability of materials, new modes of distribution, even the internet – showing incredible resilience by harnessing even the technology meant to be their antithesis. And they will meet whatever comes next. Ghana’s “sakawa boys,” use local juju magic to augment their success at internet money scams (Stelley 2011); and Mama Ifawale in Nigeria sells power figures created specifically to bring financial success to owners of internet businesses (Mama Ifawale 2019). Discrete and defensive underground marketplaces have sprung up worldwide as ritualists from Africa to the Caribbean to the United States have opened online shops to sell their products and services internationally. There is even a field of study on the materiality of occult economies and the ritualization of mass produced objects. In “Beyond Occult Economies: Akan spirits, New York idols, and Detroit automobiles,” Jane Parish discusses a Ghanaian immigrant and shrine priest in New York named Sonny who, with his passion for American cars and regret that they have been unable to compete

with more streamlined Japanese models, takes it upon himself to infuse them with ritual power.

In an attempt to repair this broken industry, Sonny pulls apart the automobile piece by piece and then infuses a small talisman (*suman*) made from a fender, gas pedal, or hood pad he has picked up in a scrap yard with intangible *sunsum* [the spirit of a god],<sup>5</sup> amid a complex cluster of images and concepts. Sonny told a client, in my presence, that he had spoken to the spirits of the dead men who had worked on the car assembly lines in Detroit. Likewise, AJ, a twenty-eight-year-old priest in Brooklyn, described to me how it was important not to see just the product of the car, but the souls and hearts of the workers... (Parish 2015: 111)

As such not even the capitalism so fundamental to the modern Western economy is immune to magical infusion and ritualization.

Technology, far from stamping out magic, has actually provided avenues for novel solutions to the stigmas and illegalities laden upon these traditions. Discrete packaging and delivery services for products ordered from the comfort and confidentiality of your own home show technology being used to fight and undermine the totalitarian Western image of modernity. Now an immigrant 5000 miles from home can contact a ritualist in her home country and have a spell performed for her, recorded on an *iPhone* and relayed over *WhatsApp*, or have a power figure shipped to her door, fully consecrated and ready to bind to an individual with a lock of their hair to enact a cure. It is ironic that, using the internet, a tool emblematic of Western modernity, practitioners are able to circumvent stigma and practice their traditional religions in the discretion of their own homes, whilst connected across the world to a globalized community. Modernity didn't stop magic. It facilitated the largest underground network heretofore possible.

---

<sup>5</sup> The spirit of the god may have been found in a stone or leaf in the Ghanaian bush, but “in New York, the spirit (*sunsum*) of the god has called out to priests from various objects such as a clock, a walking stick, a pair of jeans in a department store, a candy wrapper, or even the inner tube of an old bicycle.” (Parish 2015: 104)



## 7.2 Navigational Difficulties

During fieldwork at Nae We Shrine in Accra, Ghana from 2012-2013, my colleagues and I noticed a significant detail in the recording of witchcraft and curse trials. Entries for these trials were handwritten in court dockets, piled upon the shelves of the office in the open air shrine. But there were no separate books for charges of witchcraft. They appeared flanking charges of assault, petty thievery, monetary fraud, slander and other such everyday, secular disputes. For the followers of Nae, witchcraft is an everyday issue. My colleagues and I observed that supernatural and mundane charges are all heard at the court indiscriminately. Whether a market woman wants to charge a fisherman with breaking an egg outside her home and laying upon her a curse, or whether she wants to accuse him of theft of her wares, the charge will be heard and adjudicated by the Nae We Shrine Tribunal.

This might seem odd to Western audiences, but the consideration of witchcraft alongside secular crimes at Nae We shows the practice of law within a holistic worldview. It is difficult for Westerners to study this. By fault of the West's heavily segmented canons of research and the biases of the Western "archive" of knowledge" (Tuhivai Smith 2012: 93), many researchers today don't know how to interpret something so exotic as a whole. In many ways, the West lacks the tools to study within a holistic world because we have spent so long carving our own into sharp and particular little pieces. As Roberts et al. say, "Unfortunately, the syncretic type of justice offered at Nae We also makes it difficult to analyze using the current academic literature, which, starting with Evans-Pritchard over 80 years ago, has tended to treat witchcraft in Africa as a subject worthy of study unto itself (Evans-Pritchard 1937, Geschiere 2013, Ashforth 2005, Adinkrah 2017)" (Roberts et al. in press: 5-6). Western literature tends to want to isolate phenomena into tight little boxes divorcing it from its connections and rendering an incomplete and inadequate facsimile that is unfaithful to the world it is describing as experienced by the people within it. In short, our short-sightedness makes it hard to use Western models to understand non-Western worlds.

In law, in art, and in medicine, this is true. Canadian courts did not know what to think about a religious advisor giving practical tools and advice for dealing with haunting, whether by spirits or police, because that's not what Western religious counsel typically looks like. Museums do not know how to display a living power figure, do not even notice that it is naked or starving or dead, because art in the West is simply a pretty, not a practical, thing. Hospitals wouldn't know where to employ a power figure if they had one, because biomedicine is fragmented, not whole; and unless the figure was passed from surgeons to nurses to psychiatrists in the run of a day, it would never touch all of the aspects of a patient where it had work to do and where it was so sorely needed. Situations like these will continue to be problematic to navigate, so long as our compasses fail to lead us anywhere but West.

### **7.3 Power Figures: United in the Face of Stigma**

Power figures, the *Nae We Shrine Tribunal*, African and Diasporic traditional medicine and art, all share the same holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of physical, social, mental, and supernatural spheres. Physical symptoms can have supernatural causes, and supernatural imbalance can have social consequences. Healing is therefore an intricate thing, a climbing vine with many tendrils, not one of dissection and deduction.

Power figures are not just physical containers, or medicines, or spirits. They are composite entities. Their names apply to their whole beings, not just one part. You cannot disassemble an *nkisi*, or a *mojo* bag, or a *pakèt kongo*, and still call it by its name. No more than you can disassemble a person. A piece of camphor bark is not *agbalegba*. A small empty coffin is not *agbalegba*. A spirit who has died a violent death is not *agbalegba*. But all of those things combined with others, might be.

The West, instead, has a tendency to dissect everything, pull it apart, see what does what, and pluck out only the portions it sees as valuable. The problem is, you cannot dissect something without killing it. Once you pull it apart, it isn't a whole living being anymore; it is merely parts. And the whole is far more than their sum.

Power figures, then, can teach us something. There need be more composite approaches, more composite solutions, in museums, in hospitals, in courts of law. For it is only in considering wholes that we can come close to understanding the complexities of lived realities whose illnesses and cures (whether physical, social, or spiritual) always require mixed methods, many hands, diverse perspectives, and a full understanding of the human experience. Not segmented, not reduced, not dismissed. In this we can take strides toward decolonization by freeing our minds of the shackles of the Western “‘archive’ of knowledge” (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 93) that mould what we see into its predetermined metanarrative.

Yet we must contend with the reality that stigma remains pervasive in every aspect of these figures. It is in their theft as religious confiscations and the misrepresentation of their physical bodies in museums. It is in the invalidation and slander of their empowering medicines and healing effects as ineffective dummy treatments in hospitals. It is the vilification of their spirits and belief systems in popular culture and Western representations of African-rooted music, and the unequal rights they are afforded in current laws. Words are extremely powerful, and they can shape what we see. The kinds of words used to describe these types of practices in the West today – magic, superstition, placebo, dummy, false, primitive – and an all too frequent tendency to equate African-derived deities with the Devil, show that the same narratives remain alive in the West as were rampant throughout history. They have just been reformed.

As science became the new Western religion, African traditions were no longer evil, but merely viewed as unintelligent, unscientific instead of ungodly. Instead of Christian missionaries burning figurines or plantation owners banning gatherings and songs, persecution in the West has gotten quieter: the whispers of neighbors, dismissal by a doctor, the knowledge that knowing where to find a *Win In Court* charm might be a good idea in your neighborhood. The details change. But the story is the same; its goal is the same; and if we aren't careful, it will end the same too. Stigma as the modern, insidious agent of colonization is able to keep people subjugated and disempowered without the need for crusades or wars. It is social control policed with a mere whisper. It

is felt in the bones rather than shouted from the rooftops. But it is there. And people still feel it.

As this study has uncovered, there exists a variety of concrete evidence of the fallout of these narratives, proof that they continue to negatively and pervasively impact practitioners today. Consider the outright rebuttals published online by ritualists at Voodoo Authentica, the discrete delivery service of Jam-Haitian Candle Shop, and Kyrak Malika Daniels' assertion that despite turning to ritualists when their family members are sick many people outwardly maintain, "...I don't believe in the spirits. I don't believe in *lwa*. I don't do that stuff" (Daniels 2019: 1:01:49). The law too remains prominent in so many aspects of power figures, from the persecution of the figures and their traditions in Antigua, Jamaica, The Bahamas, and elsewhere in the Caribbean, to the need to create *Win In Court* power figures that protect their people from the seemingly ever-stalking beast of the police. As recently as June 2019, discussions of combating some of these laws and potentially putting an end to the illegality of *Obeah* in Jamaica was voted down by 74% of *Loop News* poll respondents and met with a volley of Christian-based criticism online ("Obeah law could be repealed soon" 2019). Stigma and fear of being labelled "crazy" or sent to psychiatrists prevents Tamil refugees from expressing their true concerns to healthcare practitioners (Grønseth 2001: 494); such judgement can alienate followers of traditional medicine from public healthcare, making seeking its help seem like less and less of a desirable option.

Koenane demonstrates the effects of stigma inside the mind, and reveals the struggle it has caused Africans, culminating in an "identity crisis," whereby Africans are induced to question, sometimes even become ashamed of, their African roots and traditions, which for so long have been described as backwards and barbaric. For many Africans, participating in the many spheres of prejudiced Western "modernity" requires constantly grappling with fidelity to one's culture and traditions in the face of persistent narratives that tell them these things are, in a multitude of ways, wrong (see Section 6.3; see Koenane 2014). Koenane's laying bare of the African identity crisis shows the vital need to end these narratives if we are to have a hope of healing from colonialism and allow not just African bodies and traditions to be decolonized, but also African minds.

“Through their tendencies to undermine Africans and their way of life as well as to judge everything African as irrational and backward [some Christian denominations] miss the opportunity to learn and thus contextualise their religion to meet the needs of the people they convert. Most Christian churches of western religion; especially Pentecostal and mainline churches at times have negative consequences for Africans. For this reason, some who belong to these western religions live a double life – by day they confess western faith which alienates them from their authentic identity by condemning anything that has to do with ancestors or living invisible beings; but Nicodemously they consult with *Sangomas* [a type of traditional healer]. Now the educated and converted African is practically alienated his community and more from himself. In order to be comfortable and not be in odds with his/her new religion, he/she must deny his/her African-ness; (there is evidence of Africans we are ashamed of their African-ness). Mr XYZ is in conflict with himself. Both the western tendency with its forceful power to poison the mind of an African by undermining Africa approach to healing, cure and wellness; and the western religions with their rigidity and condemnation of everything African. He is not sure that it is right or wrong to consult *Sangomas*... (Koenane 2014: 370)

It is this stigma, designed to rot everything it touches, to colonize our very thoughts and minds, that needs to be abolished for decolonization to happen.

Decolonization of power figures is a monumental task, because it requires the decolonization of all the spheres they touch – art, medicine, law, music, mental health, the environment, the world. What they show us is that decolonization of power figures, like people, will not and cannot be complete until it is whole. And we still have a long way to go. The first step is realizing and exposing the pervasiveness and insidiousness of stigma against African-rooted worldviews, the many facets of life it touches and how it has endured unchecked for so long.

For museums, repatriation is a step towards decolonization, but so too is involving current practicing ritualists in the display and interpretation of their own creations, blurring the lines between museums and art galleries. In many ways, museums are simply galleries of stolen art, interpreted from a standpoint of otherness and exoticism, with credit given to the thieves instead of the artists. Decolonization means showcasing these items on their own terms, and telling their stories of themselves, including the part that their traditions remain alive today. It also requires accepting the fact that art can also be functional, something to use, not just look at. Something that, for believers, holds great power and needs to be respected, but that sometimes needs to live to truly be appreciated (Young 2019; Duke University n.d.: item A065). Museums, as a line of communication from the academy to the general public (Kreps 2019), can play a significant role in

combating the stigma that hinders decolonization, simply by ensuring that the stories of objects in their care are told in ways truer to the object's culture than to the curator's.

Power figures inclusion in art galleries and museums in the West is far safer than their inclusion in hospitals. Distancing of belief is easier in museums which can include a figure and cite its healing abilities as simply the beliefs of another culture, and easier still in art galleries where it is possible to value only the face of a thing and not its abilities. But it is far more dangerous to include a power figure in a hospital, because here simple acknowledgment of someone else's belief in efficacy is not enough. To include a power figure in a hospital requires actually conceding to the potential efficacy of power figures as treatments. It means conceding to the validity of another culture's worldview, not just making the charade of it. It is here the West finds difficulty. For the cornerstone of the Western biomedical model is a monotheistic worship of science as the one and only authority. It does not allow for the opinions of other gods or the allowance that belief might sometimes be stronger than a pill. Such would undermine its very foundations. Power figures, who teach us that believing can be healing, might seem threatening to the biomedical model. But herein lies the problem. For this reveals that the boundaries of our categories are not only defining; they barricade us from exploring other paths, ones along which we might learn something about how to care for people and not just their organs.

Power figures as "medico-religious" instruments (Boaz, 2014: 144), both religious and medicinal, and as composite figures, at once a container, medicines, and a spirit consecrated in ritual, provide a powerful metaphor for holism in healthcare. Figures that at once remain rooted to physical aesthetic, nature, metaphor, relationships, spirituality, and overall wellbeing are the antithesis of Western categories of medicine and modernity. And yet they exist, with millions of followers who turn to them for help in curing their problems and helping them to feel better. Power figures, as composites themselves, are emblematic of their approach – *composite medicine* – which considers all aspects of a person rather than segmenting them into disjointed parts. This approach needs to be added to Western healthcare models if they are to reach many non-Western patients.

Decolonization, including the shedding of the flawed and biased Western metanarratives that have come to inform everything from pop culture to law, requires the increased involvement of practitioners in the presentation of their traditions so we can begin to propagate truer portrayals. This is possible when academics collaborate with practitioners, like Young with the Haida people, or Duke University with ritual experts like Manbo Maude and Manbo Sylvanie, when academics listen to believers' own perspectives on their traditions, creations, and experiences. We also need more practitioner-scholars in academia (Daniels 2019), like professor of African and African Diaspora Studies, Art History, and Theology, and practitioner of Haitian *Vodou*, Kyrah Malika Daniels. Belief and scholarly activity are not mutually exclusive. Belief does not equal anti-science, nor anti-logic, something Young emphasized when he said that Haida oral tradition often confirms science (Young 2019). Belief does not make a scholar unbelievable or any more biased than any other human scholar who cannot help but see the world, at least sometimes, through their own eyes. And belief does not equal anti-modern; for, as this study shows, belief is as much a fabric of what it means to be human in modernity as it meant to be human in ancient times. The spirits remain. It was once just more acceptable to believe in them. It needs to be again.

McCarthy Brown's approach is another example of what the acceptance of belief can look like in academia. She does not feel the need to use quotations of disbelief or any other means of distancing herself from the beliefs she is describing in her ethnography *Mama Lola*. When *Vodou* priestess Alourdes Margaux is possessed or "ridden" (McCarthy Brown 2001: 56) by one of the *lwa*, and that *lwa* speaks, McCarthy Brown lets them. She doesn't convey the information as "Alourdes, as the *lwa* Azaka, says such-and-such." She says that Azaka said it. Alourdes, after all, was only the vehicle for Azaka's words; you would not say the telephone said someone said something, for it is merely the vehicle of communication, the conduit. McCarthy Brown, from within a world, treats the beliefs of that world as truth. She says not that the people *believe* such-and-such is happening. Instead, when she is with them, in their world, it *is*. With approaches like McCarthy Brown's and Young's, and the perspectives of Manbo Maude and Kyrah Malika Daniels, we can begin to abolish the stigma of belief in academia and beyond – so scholars don't have to wait to retire, like Felicitas Goodman, before

admitting to their beliefs in spirits for fear they will no longer be respected or taken seriously. If any discipline should be equipped to do this, it should be anthropology, a field in which our focus should be the understanding, respect, and equal valuation of a multiplicity of worldviews.

Power figures defy staunch categories in their very completeness and laugh in the face of Western “modernity.” Because of the pervasiveness of power figures in peoples’ lives and their proclivity for considering the wholeness of a person, following these figures and finding stigma at every turn reveals something. These figures still diagnose today the lives of their adherents, and if we listen they will tell us of the disease of stigma infecting everything from art to medicine, from music to religion, media to law. The problem is, too few people are listening. After all, these figures are not held by hospitals – the ruling class of healers today. And even if they were, Western doctors are trained to deal only with the body, and of that usually only pieces. But if we look to power figures as a model of holism, and a tool to pursue and detect what ails us, we might learn something. If we let them, power figures can help us to diagnose not only what is wrong with our physical bodies, but what is wrong with our society, maybe even with our spirits.



## References

- “About Our Store.” (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/about-our-store/>
- Adinkrah, M. (2015) *Witchcraft, witches, and violence in Ghana*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Afolabi, I.S., Osikoya, I.O., Fajimi, O.D., Usoro, P.I., Ogunleye, D.O., Bisi-Adeniyi, T., Adeyemi, A.O. & Adekeye, B.T. (2012) Solenostemon monostachyus, Ipomoea involucre and Carica papaya Seed Oil Versus Gluthione, or Vernonia amygdalina: Methanolic Extracts of Novel Plants for the Management of Sickle Cell Anemia Disease. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 12 (262). doi: 10.1186/1472-6882-12-262
- Ahn, W., Flanagan, E., Marsh, J., & Sanislow, C. (2006). Beliefs About Essences and the Reality of Mental Disorders. *Psychological Science*, 17(9), 759-766.
- Ajagun, E.J., Anyaku, C.E. & Afolayan, M.P. (2017) A survey of the Traditional Medical and Non-medical Uses of Animals Species and Parts of the Indigenous people of Ogbomoso, Oyo State. *International Journal of Herbal Medicine*, 5(3), 26-32.
- “All Parents Fight Drawing by Harry Bliss” (2018) *Fine Art America*. Retrieved from <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/all-parents-fight-harry-bliss.html>
- Alves, R.R.N. & Alves, H.N. (2011) The faunal drugstore: Animal-based remedies used in traditional medicines in Latin America. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 7(9), 1-43.
- Anthony McG (2019, May 21). Re: Artistes turn to ‘guard rings’ for success and protection [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <http://jamaicastar.com/article/entertainment/20190521/artistes-turn-%E2%80%99guard-rings%E2%80%99-success-and-protection#comment-4471580730>

- “Antiguan police arrest three for practicing Obeah.” (2015) *Times Caribbean*, Retrieved from <http://www.timescaribbeanonline.com/antiguan-police-arrest-three-for-practicing-obeah/>
- Arnold, D. (1993). *Colonizing the body: State medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Babalawo Orisha (2018, October 8) “Bottle Spell.” Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/BoqpWr\\_g9VK/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BoqpWr_g9VK/)
- Barimah, K., & Van Teijlingen, E. (2008). The use of traditional medicine by Ghanaians in Canada. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 8(1), 30.
- Bautista, E., Fragoso-Serrano, M. & Pereda-Miranda, R. (2015) Jalapinoside, A Macrocyclic Bidesmoside from the Resin Glycosides of *Ipomea purga*, as a Modulator of Multidrug Resistance in Human Cancer Cells. *Journal of Natural Products*, 78(1),168-72. doi: 10.1021/np500762w
- “Benefits of Camphor and its Side Effects.” (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.lybrate.com/topic/benefits-of-camphor-oil-and-its-side-effects>
- Benson, H. & Friedman, R. (1996) Harnessing the Power of the Placebo Effect and Renaming It “Remembered Wellness.” *Annual Review of Medicine*, 47, 193-199.
- Bernard, H. (2011). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira.
- Bernard, H.R. (2017). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (6th ed.). Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bernard, H. (2018). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bernard, H., Wutich, A. & Ryan, G. (2017). *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Bilby, K.M. & Handler, J.S. (2004) Obeah: Healing and Protection in West Indian Slave Life. *The Journal of Caribbean History* 38(2), 153-183.
- Blier, S. (1995). *African Vodun: Art, psychology, and power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blier, S. (2011a) Brutal Arts: Potent Aesthetics of *Bocio* || Vodun Arts in Coastal Benin and Togo. In Fondation Cartier, *Vaudou || Vodun: African Voodoo* (190-199). München, Germany: Hirmer Publishers.
- Blier, S. (2011b). The art of Voodoo. *Apollo-The International Magazine For Collectors*, 173(587), 32-37.
- Bliss, H. (2010a, April 20) Jesus was a trust-fund baby. *The Bliss Collection*. Trident Media Services, Inc. Retrieved from [www.harrybliss.com/store](http://www.harrybliss.com/store)
- Bliss, H. (2010b, June 7) Jewish Starfish. *The Bliss Collection*. Trident Media Services, Inc. Retrieved from [www.harrybliss.com/store](http://www.harrybliss.com/store)
- Boaz, D. (2014) "Instruments of Obeah": The significance of ritual objects in the Jamaican legal system, 1760 to the present. In Ogundiran, A., & Saunders, Paula V. (Eds.), *Materialities of ritual in the Black Atlantic* (pp. 143-158). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Boaz, D. (2017) Obeah, Vagrancy, and the Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Analyzing the Proscription of “Pretending to Possess Supernatural Powers” in the Anglophone Caribbean. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 32(3), 423–448. doi:10.1017/jlr.2017.44
- Boshier, R. (1999). Superstition as an impediment to the education of commercial fishermen: A psychocultural investigation using video. *Adult Education Research Conference*. New Prairie Press. Retrieved from <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/1999/papers/8>.

- Brendler, T., & Association for African Medicinal Plants Standards. (2010). *African herbal pharmacopoeia*. Mauritius: Association for African Medicinal Plants Standards.
- Brezis, M. (2008). Big Pharma and Health Care: Unsolvable Conflict of Interests between Private Enterprise and Public Health. *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*, 45(2), 83-94.
- Brooks, A. (2012). Terminology shift signals a new age in mental illness thinking. *Advances in Mental Health*, 10(2), 204-205. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/1021381036?accountid=10406>
- “Burlap Voodoo Doll Adult Costume” (n.d.) *HalloweenCostumes.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.halloweencostumes.com/adult-burlap-voodoo-doll-costume.html>
- “Camphor Oil.” (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/camphor-oil/>
- Cannon, W.B. (1942) "Voodoo" Death. *American Anthropologist*, 44(2), 169-181.
- Carliner, M. (Producer) & Hill, W. (Director) (1986) *Crossroads* [Motion picture]. California: Columbia Pictures.
- Casella, A. (2014) *Burlesque Temptations Vol. 2: The Sleazy Sound of Striptease Music* [Various Artists Compiled by A. Casella]. [Vinyl, LP]. Italy: Alessandro Casella Records.
- Chen, W., Vermaak, I. & Viljoen, A. (2013) Camphor – A Fumigant During the Black Death and a Coveted Fragrant Wood in Ancient Egypt and Babylon – A Review. *Molecules*, 18(5), 5434-54.
- Chester, D.S. (2019) A New Way to Measure Self- Harm. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-harm-done/201906/new-way-measure-self-harm>

- Chui, C.H., Wong, R.S., Cheng, G.Y., Lau, F.Y., Kok, S.H., Cheung, F., Tang, W.K., Teo, I.T., Chan, A.S. & Tang, J.C. (2006) Antiproliferative Ability of a Combination Regimen of Crocodile Egg Extract, Wild Radix Ginseng and Natural *Ganoderma lucidum* on Acute Myelogenous Leukemia. *Oncology Reports*, 16(6), 1313-6
- Conforth, B. (2008). Ike Zimmerman: The X in Robert Johnson's Crossroads. *Living Blues*, 194, 68-73.
- “Collectable String Dolls” (n.d.) *Watchover Voodoo*. Retrieved from <https://www.watchovervoodoo.com/>
- Conjure New Orleans (n.d.-a) “Big Mama Dollie.” Retrieved from <https://www.conjureneworleans.com/product-page/big-mama-dollie>
- Conjure New Orleans (n.d.-b) “Conjure Moss Doll Baby.” Retrieved from <https://www.conjureneworleans.com/product-page/conjure-moss-doll-baby>.
- Connelly, C. (2018) Obeah, they wukking obeah!: Experts explore the myths of traditional African beliefs. *Newsday: Trinidad and Tobago*, Retrieved from <https://newsday.co.tt/2018/10/14/obeah-they-wukking-obeah/>
- Cooksey, S., Polynor, R. & Vanhee, H. (2013) *Kongo Across the Waters*. Florida: University Press of Florida.
- Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c. 46, s. 365
- “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet” (n.d.) *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*. Retrieved from <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>
- Daniels, K.M. (2013). The undressing of two sacred healing bundles: Curative arts of the Black Atlantic in Haiti and ancient Kongo. *Journal of Africana Religions*, 1(3), 416-429.

- Daniels, K.M. (2019) "Intro to Haitian Vodou and Dominican Vodú/21 Divisiones." In *Cultured Company. Facebook*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/329957130847030/videos/2147656131979265>
- Da Silva, T.B., Costa, C.O., Galvão, A.F., Bomfim, L.M., Rodrigues, A.C., Mota, M.C., Dantas, A.A., Dos Santos, T.R., Soares, M.B., Bezerra, D.P. (2016) Cytotoxic Potential of Selected Medicinal Plants in Northeast Brazil. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 16(199). doi: 10.1186/s12906-016-1166-1
- Davison, J. (2012) *Minkisi: Stewards of the Kongo*. Unpublished manuscript, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- Dein, S. (2016) The anthropology of uncertainty: Magic, witchcraft and risk and forensic implications. *Journal of Forensic Anthropology*, 1(1), 1–7.
- Deng, Y., Tang, Q., Zhang, Y., Zhang, R., Wei, Z., Tang, X. & Zhang, M. (2017) Protective Effect of *Momordica charantia* Water Extract Against Liver Injury in Restraint-Stressed Mice and the Underlying Mechanism. *Food and Nutrition Research*, 61(1):1348864. doi: 10.1080/16546628.2017.1348864
- Dirks, N. (1997) The Policing of Tradition: Colonialism and Anthropology in Southern India. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 39(1), 182-212.
- Djeussi, D.E., Noumedem, J.A., Seukep, J.A., Fankam, A.G., Voukeng, I.K., Tankeo, S.B., Nkuete, A.H. & Kuete, V. (2013) Antibacterial Activities of Selected Edible Plants Extracts Against Multidrug-Resistant Gram-Negative Bacteria. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 13(164). doi: 10.1186/1472-6882-13-164
- Djimassé, G. (2011) Vodun et Culture Fon / Vodun and Fon Culture. In Fondation Cartier, *Vaudou || Vodun: African Voodoo* (201-209). München, Germany: Hirmer Publishers.
- Dokosi, O.B. (1998) *Herbs of Ghana*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Duffin, C. (2007). Fish otoliths and folklore: A survey. *Folklore*, 118(1), 78-90.

- Duke University (n.d.: item A065) “Pakèt Kongo and Boat for Agwe.” *Afro-Atlantic Sacred Art Collection*. Durham, NC.
- Duke University (n.d.: item A057) “Coffin That Carries the Burden / Sèkèy Madoulè.” *Afro-Atlantic Sacred Art Collection*. Durham, NC.
- Duroy, R. (2011) *Vaudou / Vodun : African Voodoo - Exhibition tour – 2011*" [Video File] Retrieved from <https://www.fondationcartier.com/en/exhibitions/les-tresors-du-vaudou>
- Evans-Pritchard, E. (1937). *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain (FCAC) (2011a) “Exhibition: Vodun, African Voodoo.” Retrieved from <https://www.fondationcartier.com/en/exhibitions/les-tresors-du-vaudou>
- Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain (FCAC) (2011b) *Vaudou || Vodun: African Voodoo*. München, Germany: Hirmer Publishers.
- Fournier, Cathy and Robin Oakley (2018). Conversions and erasures: Colonial ontologies in Canadian and international traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine integration policies. In Brosnan, Caragh, Jenny-Anne Brodin and Pia Vuolanto (Eds.). *Complementary and alternative medicine: Knowledge production and social transformation*. Springer Nature: Palgrave MacMillian: 217-246.
- Franklin, K. (2009) *Emic and etic stories*. GIALens 2:1-11.
- Fraser, J. & Prudon, H. (2017). Integrating human rights with local norms: Ebola, burial practices, and the right to health in West Africa. *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review*, 12, 114.

- Gardner, S. (2019, 21 May) Artistes turn to ‘guard rings’ for success and protection. *The Star* Retrieved from <http://jamaica-star.com/article/entertainment/20190521/artistes-turn-%E2%80%99guard-rings%E2%80%99-success-and-protection>
- George (2018, June 25). Re: Obeah Package on the Way: ‘Healer’ Launches City Delivery Service [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/obeah-package-way-healer-launches-city-delivery-service#comment-3959926765>
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gómez, P.F. (2014) Transatlantic Meanings: African Rituals and Material Culture in the Early Modern Spanish Caribbean. In Ogundiran, A., & Saunders, Paula V. (Eds.), *Materialities of ritual in the Black Atlantic* (pp. 143-158). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gong, Z.G., Zhang, J. & Xu, Y.J. (2017) Metabolomics Reveals that Momordica charantia Attenuates Metabolic Changes in Experimental Obesity. *Phytotherapy Research*, 31(2), 296-302. doi: 10.1002/ptr.5748
- Graham, J., Lees, S., Le Marcis, F., Faye, S., Lorway, R., Ronse, M., Abramowitz, S., Peeters Grietens, K. (2018). Prepared for the 'unexpected'? Lessons from the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa on integrating emergent theory designs into outbreak response. *BMJ Global Health*, 3(4), E000990.
- Green, S.A. (2006). Surgeons and Shamans: The Placebo Value of Ritual. *Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research*, 450, 249-254.
- Grønseth, A.S. (2001) In search of community: A quest for well-being among Tamil refugees in northern Norway. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 15(4), 493-514.



- Guo, S., Geng, Z., Zhang, W., Liang, J., Wang, C., Deng, Z. & Du, S. (2016) The Chemical Composition of Essential Oils from *Cinnamomum camphora* and Their Insecticidal Activity against the Stored Product Pests. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, 17(11): 1836-45. doi: 10.3390/ijms17111836
- Handler, J. (2011) Anti-Obeah Laws of the Anglophone Caribbean, 1760s to 2010. Retrieved from [http://jeromehandler.org/wp-content/uploads/Obeah\\_Liverpool-V.6c.pdf](http://jeromehandler.org/wp-content/uploads/Obeah_Liverpool-V.6c.pdf)
- Heaton, M. (2013). *Black skin, white coats: Nigerian psychiatrists, decolonization, and the globalization of psychiatry*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Helland, C. (2000) Religion online/online religion and virtual communitas. In Hadden, J.K. & Cowan, D.E. (Eds.). *Religion on the internet: Research prospects and promises* (pp. 205-224). London: JAI Press/Elsevier Science.
- “How to conduct safe and dignified burial of a patient who has died from suspected or confirmed Ebola or Marburg virus disease” (2017) *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/137379/WHO\\_EVD\\_GUIDANCE\\_Burials\\_14.2\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/137379/WHO_EVD_GUIDANCE_Burials_14.2_eng.pdf)
- Horden, P., & Hus, Elisabeth. (2013). *The body in balance: Humoral medicines in practice* (Epistemologies of healing; v. 13). New York: Berghahn Books.
- Hsu, E., & Harris, Stephen. (2012). *Plants, health and healing: On the interface of ethnobotany and medical anthropology* (Epistemologies of healing; v. 6). New York: Berghahn Books.
- Jackson, M., & Piette, A. (2017). Introduction: Anthropology and the existential turn. In Jackson, M., & Piette, Albert (Eds.). *What is existential anthropology?* New York: Berghahn.

- James, B. T. (2014). Writing Stones and Secret Shrines: An Exploration of the Materialisation of Indigenous and Islamic Belief within West African Spiritual Medicine. In Gemi-Jordanou, E., Gordon, S., Matthew, R. & McInnes, E. (Eds.), *Medicine, Healing and Performance* (pp. 136-159). Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books.
- James, C., Carpenter, K., Pelzer, K. & Weaver, S. (2014) Valuing Psychiatric Patients' Stories: Belief In and Use of the Supernatural in the Jamaica Psychiatric Setting. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 51(2), 247-263.
- Jam-Haitian Candle Shop. (2019, June 6). Re: Big difference between obeah and voodoo! [Facebook comment]. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/obeahnvoodoo/posts/2489066201117778?comment\\_id=2489086311115767](https://www.facebook.com/obeahnvoodoo/posts/2489066201117778?comment_id=2489086311115767)
- Janzen, J. & Arkininstall, W. (1978). *The quest for therapy in Lower Zaire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jardine, N. (2004). Etics and emics (not to mention anemics and emetics) in the history of the sciences. *History of Science*, 42(3), 261-278.
- Jean-Baptiste, G. (n.d.) Paket Kongo. Retrieved from <http://www.bongamusic.org/paket.php>
- Josephson-Storm, J. (2017). *The myth of disenchantment: Magic, modernity, and the birth of the human sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kafoutchoni, K.M., Idohou, R., Egeru, A., Salako, K.V., Agbangla, C., Adomou, A.C. & Assogbadjo, A.E. (2018) Species richness, cultural importance, and prioritization of wild spices for conservation in the Sudano-Guinean zone of Benin (West Africa). *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 14(67), 1-30.
- Kembelo, K. (n.d.) Quelques Plantes Médicinales du Bas-Congo et leurs Usages. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnopharmacologia.org/prelude/pdf/biblio-hk-61-kibungu.pdf>

- King, N. (2002). Security, disease, commerce: Ideologies of postcolonial global health. *Social Studies of Science*, 32(5-6), 763-789.
- Kingdon, Z. (2015) "The Deconsecration of Mangaaka Figures in Africa." *Kongo Exhibition Blog: Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/kongo/blog/posts/deconsecration-mangaaka-figures-africa>
- Koen, B.D. (2013). "My Heart Opens and My Spirit Flies": Musical Exemplars of Psychological Flexibility in Health and Healing. *Ethos*, 41(2), 174–198.
- Koenane, M.L.J. (2014). The phenomenology of illness, healing and cure among Africans: Our way or theirs. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(6), 363-374.
- Kpobi, L., & Swartz, L. (2018). Implications of healing power and positioning for collaboration between formal mental health services and traditional/alternative medicine: The case of Ghana. *Global Health Action*, 11(1), 1-7.
- Kreps, C. (2019). *Museums and Anthropology in the Age of Engagement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kuete, V., Ango, P.Y., Yeboah, S.O., Mbaveng, A.T., Mapitse, R., Kapche, G.D., Ngadjui, B.T., Efferth T. (2014) Cytotoxicity of Four Aframomum species (A. arundinaceum, A. alboviolaceum, A. kayserianum and A. polyanthum) Towards Multi-Factorial Drug Resistant Cancer Cell Lines. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 14:340. doi: 10.1186/1472-6882-14-340
- Landgrave, M. & Nowrasteh, A. (2018) "Incarcerated Immigrants in 2016: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin." *Immigration Research and Policy Brief No. 7*. Retrieved from <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/irpb7.pdf>
- Larner, C. (1984). *Witchcraft and religion: The politics of popular belief*. New York, NY: Blackwell.

- Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Lebowitz, M., & Appelbaum, P. (2019). Biomedical Explanations of Psychopathology and Their Implications for Attitudes and Beliefs About Mental Disorders. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 15*, 555-577.
- Lloreda-Garcia, J.M. (2017) Religion, Spirituality and Folk Medicine/Superstition in a Neonatal Unit. *Journal of Religion and Health, 56*(6), 2276-2284. doi: 10.1007/s10943-017-0408-y
- Li, H.L., Deng, Y.T., Zhang, Z.R., Fu, Q.R., Zheng, Y.H., Cao, X.M., Nie, J., Fu, L.W., Chen, L.P., Xiong, Y.X., Shen, D.Y. & Chen, Q.X. (2016) Evaluation of Effectiveness in a Novel Wound Healing Ointment – Crocodile Oil Burn Ointment. *African Journal of Traditional, Complementary, and Alternative Medicines, 14*(1), 62-72. doi: 10.21010/ajtcam.v14i1.8
- Liao, J.C.Y., He, M., Gan, A.W.T., Chong, A.K.S. (2017) The Effects of Autologous Platelet-Rich Fibrin on Flexor Tendon Healing in a Rabbit Model. *The Journal of Hand Surgery, 42*(11), 928.e1-928.e7. doi: 10.1016/j.jhssa.2017.06.098
- Lipinski, J. (2013, July 19) A Visit From the Devil. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/nyregion/feared-traditional-priest-from-ghana-spends-a-year-in-the-bronx.html>
- Lipman, E. (Producer), & Oakes, B. (Director). (2019) *Remastered: Devil at the Crossroads – A Robert Johnson Story* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/title/80191049>
- Lüdtke, K. (2008). *Dances with spiders: Crisis, celebrity, and celebration in a southern Italy*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Luhrmann, T. (2011). Hallucinations and Sensory Overrides. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 40*, 71-85.

- Lyndon, A.E., Crowe, A., Wuensch, K.L., McCammon, S.L. & Davis, K.B. (2019) College Students' Stigmatization of People with Mental Illness: Familiarity, Implicit Person Theory, and Attribution. *Journal of Mental Health*, (28)3, 255-259. doi: 10.1080/09638237.2016.1244722
- MacGaffey, W. (1977). Fetishism revisited: Kongo nkisi in sociological perspective. *Africa*, 47(2), 172-184.
- MacGaffey, W. (1987) Lulendo: The Recovery of a Kongo Nkisi. *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 52(3-4), 339-349
- Macgaffey, W. (1988). Complexity, astonishment and power: The visual vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14(2), 188-203.
- MacGaffey, W. (1991) *Art and Healing of the Bakongo, Commented by Themselves: Minkisi from the Laman Collection*. Stockholm: Folkens Museum—Etnografiska.
- MacGaffey, W. (1993). The eyes of understanding: Kongo minkisi. In MacGaffey, Wyatt & Harris, Michael D (Eds.). *Astonishment and power* (pp. 20-103). Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- MacGaffey, W. (2000). *Kongo political culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Magubane, B. (1996). Chapter VI: The Irish Precedent. In *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa, 1875-1910* (pp. 139-162). Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press.
- Malinowski, B. (1948) *Magic, science and religion and other essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Mama Ifawale (2018, December 19) "Revenge Coffin." Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BrlmSLphGgeOCDkJN8-O3hcy-aqLBPOfNpYB1Q0/>

- Mama Ifawale (2019, December 31) “Internet Business Charms (IBC).” Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B6uXpR-npf01Zfbegh7py65QZc65G3LqeHHeh00/>
- McCarthy Brown, K. (2001). *Mama Lola: A Vodou priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- “Medical Dictionary of Health Terms: J-P” (2011) *Harvard Health Publishing*. Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/j-through-p>
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) (n.d.: item 1979.206.127) “Power Figure: Male (Nkisi): 19<sup>th</sup> – mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.” Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/312342>
- Meyer, B. (1998). 'Make a complete break with the past': Memory and post-colonial modernity in Ghanaian pentecostalist discourse'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28(3), 316-349.
- Michael C. Carlos Museum (MCCM) (n.d.: item 1935.001.006) “Power Object, Nkisi,” Michael C. Carlos Museum Collections Online, Emory University, Druid Hills, GA. Retrieved from <http://carlos.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/items/show/6630>
- Michael C. Carlos Museum (MCCM) (n.d.: item 1935.001.015) “Power Object, Nkisi,” Michael C. Carlos Museum Collections Online, Emory University, Druid Hills, GA. Retrieved from <http://carlos.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/items/show/6693>
- Mol, A. (2015). Who Knows What a Woman Is... On the Differences and the Relations Between the Sciences. *Medicine Anthropology Theory* 2(1): 57–75. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.2.1.215>
- Moran-Thomas, A. (2013). A salvage ethnography of the guinea worm: Witchcraft, oracles and magic in a disease eradication program. In Biehl, J. & Petryna, A. (Eds.). *When people come first: Critical studies in global health*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Moreno, J.J. (1995) Ethnomusic Therapy: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Music and Healing. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 22(4), 329-338.
- Muir, E. (2005). *Ritual in early modern Europe*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Mullen, P.B. (1969) The function of magic folk belief among Texas coastal fishermen. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 82(325), 214-25.
- Myren, B. & van Andel, T. (2011). *Magic plants in the south of Ghana*. Unpublished manuscript, Leiden University, Leiden, South Holland, The Netherlands.
- Oakley, R. and Sigfrid Grønseth, Anne (2007). Anthropology in Action: Ethnographic Humanism: Migrant Experiences in the Quest for Well-Being. Guest Editors. Volume 14 Issue 1-2.
- “Obeah law could be repealed soon” (2019, June 5) *Loop News*. Retrieved from <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/obeah-law-could-be-repealed-soon>
- “Obeah Package on the Way ‘Healer’ launches city delivery service.” (2018, June 24) *Loop News*. Retrieved from <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/obeah-package-way-healer-launches-city-delivery-service>
- Ogundiran, A. & Saunders, Paula V. (2014) On the Materiality of Black Atlantic rituals. In Ogundiran, A., & Saunders, Paula V. (Eds.), *Materialities of ritual in the Black Atlantic* (pp. 1-27). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ohwofasa, I.T. & Okwena Pondei, J. (2018) Synergistic Effect of the Extracts of *Vernonia amygdalina* and *Solenostemon montostachyus* on Gram-negative Bacteria. *Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences*, 21(8), 369-375. doi: 10.3923/pjbs.2018.369.375.
- Okokon, J., Davis, K.A. & Azare, B.A. (2016) Antipyretic and Antimalarial Activities of *Solenostemon monostachyus*. *Pharmaceutical Biology*, 54(4), 648-53. doi: 10.3109/13880209.2015.1070880. Epub 2015 Oct 16

- Okokon, J.F., Davis, K. & Nwidi, L.L. (2016) Anti-inflammatory and Antinociceptive Activities of *Solenostemon monostachyus* Aerial Part Extract in Mice. *Avicenna Journal of Phytomedicine*, 6(3), 284–294.
- Oosten, J. G. (2005) Ideals and values in the participants view of their culture: A view from the Inuit field. *Social Anthropology*, 13(2):185-198.
- Original Products Botanica (2015a) “High John the Conqueror Root: A Staple of Hoodoo Magic.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/high-john-the-conqueror-root-a-staple-of-hoodoo-magic/>
- Original Products Botanica (2015b) “How Do Voodoo Dolls Actually Work?” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/voodoo-dolls-rituals-spells/>
- Original Products Botanica (2016) “The History of Hoodoo.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/the-history-of-hoodoo-rootwork/>
- Original Products Botanica (2017) “How to Make and Craft Mojo Bags.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/mojo-bags-conjure-toby-gris-gris/>
- Original Products Botanica (2018) “Baron Del Cementerio/Baron of the Cemetery.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/baron-del-cementerio-cemetery-samedi/>
- Original Products Botanica (2019) “Bring More Luck Into Your Life This St. Patrick’s Day.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/more-luck-st-patricks-day-products/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-a) “About Our Store.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/about-our-store/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-b) “Burn a Candle of Protection on our Altar.” Retrieved from <https://www.originalbotanica.com/burn-a-candle-for-protection-on-our-altar/>



- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-c) “Camphor Blocks.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/camphor-blocks/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-d) “Camphor Oil.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/camphor-oil/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-e) “Circle of Protection Amulet.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/circle-of-protection-amulet/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-f) “Coffin Nail.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/coffin-nail/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-h) “Iron Railroad Nail/Clavo de Linea.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/railroad-nail/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-g) “Control Evil Spirits Amulet.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/control-evil-spirits-amulet/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-i) “Lucky 8 Amulet.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/lucky-8-amulet/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-j) “Lucky Horseshoe Nail.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/horseshoe-nail/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-k) “Lucky Rabbit Foot Keychain.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/lucky-rabbit-foot-keychain/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-l) “Seal of Antiquelis Amulet.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/seal-antiquelis-amulet/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-m) “Shipping & Returns.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/shipping-returns/>
- Original Products Botanica (n.d.-n) “Spiritual Services.” Retrieved from  
<https://www.originalbotanica.com/spiritual-services/>
- Palmer, R. (1981) *Deep Blues*. New York: The Viking Press.

- Parish, J. (2015) "Beyond Occult Economies: Akan spirits, New York idols, and Detroit automobiles." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2), 101-120
- Patil, V.K.A. (2018) Camphor oil (Kapoor Ka Tel): Know its surprising benefits!  
Retrieved from <https://www.lybrate.com/topic/camphor-oil-surprisingbenefits/5618764dd2b89ed804acd57b054a3e25>
- Paton, D. (2009) Obeah Acts: Producing and Policing the Boundaries of Religion in the Caribbean. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 13(1), 1-18.
- Paton, D. (2019) The Racist History of Jamaica's Obeah Laws. *History Workshop*.  
Retrieved from [www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-racist-history-of-jamaicas-obeah-laws/](http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-racist-history-of-jamaicas-obeah-laws/)
- Peper, E. & Harvey, R. (2017) The Fallacy of the Placebo-controlled Clinical Trials: Are Positive Outcomes the Result of "Indirect" Treatment Effects? *NeuroRegulation* 4(3-4), 102-113.
- Pereda-Miranda, R., Fragoso-Serrano, M., Escalante-Sanchez, E., Hernandez-Carlos, B., Linare, E. & Bye, R. (2006) Profiling of the Resin Glycoside Content of Mexican jalap roots with Purgative Activity. *Journal of Natural Products*, 69(10), 1460-6.
- Poggie, J.J.Jr. & Gersuny, C. (1972) Risk and ritual: An interpretation of fishermen's folklore in a New England community. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 85(335), 66-72.
- Ramsey, K. (2011). *The spirits and the law: Vodou and power in Haiti*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Randy\_Jam (2019, May 21). Re: Artistes turn to 'guard rings' for success and protection [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <http://jamaicastar.com/article/entertainment/20190521/artistes-turn-%E2%80%99guard-rings%E2%80%99-success-and-protection#comment-4471379182>

- Reuber, A. (2011). Voodoo dolls, charms, and spells in the classroom: Teaching, screening, and deconstructing the misrepresentation of the African religion. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 4(8), 7-18.
- Roberts, J. (2011) Ritual interment as a challenge to funerary conventions in Accra, Ghana: The case of *agbalegba*. In Jindra, Michael & Noret, Joel (Eds.). *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a social phenomenon* (pp. 207-226) New York: Berghahn Books.
- Roberts, J., Codjoe, R., Davison, J., Martin, F., Mills, J. and Parsons, Z. (in press) Medicine for Hatred: Civil, Criminal, and Supernatural Justice at the Nae We Shrine Tribunal in Accra, Ghana. *African Studies Review*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, M. (2012). Tradition is always now: African arts and the curatorial turn. *African Arts*, 45(1), 1-7.
- Ross, C. (2010). Hypothesis: The Electrophysiological Basis of Evil Eye Belief. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 21, 47 - 57. doi: 10.1111/j.1556-3537.2010.01020.x.
- Ruchti S., Meier, A.R., Würbel, H., Kratzer, G., Gebhardt-Henrich, S.G., Hartnack, S. (2018) Pododermatitis in Group Housed Rabbit Does in Switzerland-Prevalence, Severity and Risk Factors. *Preventative Veterinary Medicine*, 158, 114-121. doi: 10.1016/j.prevetmed.2018.06.011
- R. v. Welsh (2013) Ontario Court of Appeal (ONCA) 190. *Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanLII)*. Retrieved from <http://canlii.ca/t/fwspf>
- Ryan-Poirier, K., Whitehead, P.Y., Leggiadro, R.J. (1990) An Unlucky Rabbit's Foot? *Pediatrics*, 85(4), 598-600
- Santo Products (n.d.-a) "About Us." Retrieved from <https://santoproducts.com/pages/about-us>

- Santo Products (2014) “African grey red tail feathers.” Retrieved from <https://santoproducts.blogspot.com/2014/10/african-grey-red-tail-feathers.html>
- Santo Products (n.d.-b) “Pluma de Loro Africano – Red African Grey Feathers.” Retrieved from [https://santoproducts.com/products/red-african-grey-feathers?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=781723920&\\_ss=r&variant=932727499](https://santoproducts.com/products/red-african-grey-feathers?_pos=1&_sid=781723920&_ss=r&variant=932727499)
- Sarr, F. & Savoy, B. (2018) *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*. Retrieved from [http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf)
- Scheper-Hughes, N., & Lock, M. (1987). The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 1(1), 6-41.
- Sen Moise, H. (2018) *Working Conjure: A Guide to Hoodoo Folk Magic*. Massachusetts: Red Wheel/Weiser.
- Shaniah (2019, May 22). Re: Artistes turn to ‘guard rings’ for success and protection [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <http://jamaica-star.com/article/entertainment/20190521/artistes-turn-%E2%80%99guard-rings%E2%80%99-success-and-protection#comment-4472335345>
- Shanklin, E. (1994). *Anthropology and Race*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Singh Sings (2019, June 17). Re: Obeah law could be repealed soon [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/obeah-law-could-be-repealed-soon#comment-4505260227>
- Skinner, J. (2005). Interning the Serpent: Witchcraft, Religion and the Law on Montserrat in the 20th Century. *History and Anthropology*. 16, 143-165. doi:10.1080/02757200500116139.

- Small, P. (2012, December 17) "Police Officer Breached Religious Rights by Posing as Obeah Man, Court Hears." *The Star*.  
[https://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2012/12/17/police\\_officer\\_breached\\_religious\\_rights\\_by\\_posing\\_as\\_obeah\\_man\\_court\\_hears.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2012/12/17/police_officer_breached_religious_rights_by_posing_as_obeah_man_court_hears.html)
- Smith, J.J. (2015) Standing with Sol: The Spirit and Intent of Action. *Anthropologica*, 57(2), 445-456
- Solomon, A. (2008, October 29) Notes on an Exorcism. Retrieved from  
<https://themoth.org/stories/notes-on-an-exorcism>
- Speak up (2019, June 6). Re: Obeah law could be repealed soon [Blog comment]. Retrieved from <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/obeah-law-could-be-repealed-soon#comment-4491651972>
- "Stabbing a Voodoo Doll of your Boss Can Reduce Work Stress, Study Finds" (2018) *CBC Radio*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-friday-edition-1.4569603/stabbing-a-voodoo-doll-of-your-boss-can-reduce-work-stress-study-finds-1.4569609>
- Stelley, S. (Director). (2011) *The Sakawa Boys*. [Video file]. Retrieved from  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o26Eks801oc>
- Sternberg, E.M. (2002) Walter B. Cannon and "'Voodoo' Death": A Perspective From 60 Years On. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(10), 1564-1566.
- Tabi, M., Powell, M., & Hodnicki, D. (2006). Use of traditional healers and modern medicine in Ghana. *International Nursing Review*, 53(1), 52-58.
- Tambiah, S. J. (1990) *Magic, science and religion and the scope of rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- “The Bahamas International Religious Freedom Report 2018” (2018) *United States Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/BAHAMAS-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- “The Obeah Act” (2016) *Government of Jamaica, Ministry of Justice: Jamaica Laws Online*. Retrieved from <https://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/The%20Obeah%20Act.pdf>
- Tuckey, Captain J.K. (1818) *Narrative of an expedition to explore the river Zaire, usually called the Congo in South Africa, in 1816*. London: W. Bulmerand Co.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). London: Zed Books.
- Tylor, E.B. (1861) *Anahuac: Or, Mexico and the Mexicans, ancient and modern*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts.
- Tylor, E.B. (1865) *Researches into the early history of mankind and the development of civilization*. London: John Murray.
- Tylor, E.B. (1891) *Primitive culture*. 2 vols. London: John Murray. (Original work published 1871)
- Tylor, E.B. (1881) *Anthropology an introduction to the study of man and civilization*. London: Macmillan and Co.
- “UK Collection” (n.d) *Watchover Voodoo*. Retrieved from <https://www.watchovervoodoo.com/index.php?uk-collection#.XoNxGYhKhPY>
- Utu, W. (2019) *Conjuring Harriet “Mama Moses” Tubman and the Spirits of the Underground Railroad*. Massachusetts: Red Wheel/Weiser.
- Van Der Merwe, J. (1995). Physician-Patient Communication Using Ancestral Spirits to Achieve Holistic Healing. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 172(4), 1080-1087.

- Venters, H. & Gany, F. (2011) African Immigrant Health. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, 13, 333-344. doi: 10.1007/s10903-009-9243-x
- Vilaire, P. (2011). Les Objets du Vaudou || Vodun Objects. In Fondation Cartier, *Vaudou* || *Vodun: African Voodoo* (pp. 219-226). München, Germany: Hirmer Publishers.
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-a) “Baron Samedi Doll.” Retrieved from <https://www.voodooishop.com/products/dolls/A18.html>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-b) “General Voodoo Questions: Voodoo (FAQ Answers).” Retrieved from <https://www.voodooishop.com/voodoo/FAQanswers/faqgeneral.htm>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-c) “Herbal Blends.” Retrieved from <http://www.voodooishop.com/products/oils/F-5.html>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-d) “No Mo’ Blues Man.” Retrieved from <http://www.voodooishop.com/products/dolls/A3.html>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-e) “Magick and Rituals.” Retrieved from <http://www.voodooishop.com/voodoo/FAQanswers/faqmagick.htm>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-f) “Voodoo Dolls: Voodoo (FAQ Answers).” Retrieved from <http://www.voodooishop.com/voodoo/FAQanswers/faqvoodoodoll.htm>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-g) “Voodoo Ritual Kit.” Retrieved from [http://www.voodooishop.com/products/ritual\\_kit/index.html](http://www.voodooishop.com/products/ritual_kit/index.html)
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-h) “Voodoo Spirit Forces: Voodoo (FAQ Answers).” Retrieved from <https://www.voodooishop.com/voodoo/FAQanswers/faqvoodoospiritforce.htm>
- Voodoo Authentica (n.d.-i) “Wild Gator Heads: Cajun Hoodoo & The Louisiana Gator.” Retrieved from [http://www.voodooishop.com/products/ju\\_ju/N-1wild.html](http://www.voodooishop.com/products/ju_ju/N-1wild.html)

- Wang, S., Li, Z., Yang, G., Ho, C.T. & Li, S. (2017) Momordica charantia: A Popular Health-Promoting Vegetable with Multifunctionality. *Food and Function*, 8(5):1749-1762. doi: 10.1039/c6fo01812b
- Weber, M. (1958). Science as a vocation. *Daedalus*, 87(1), 111-134.
- Welch, J. (2003). Ritual in Western Medicine and Its Role in Placebo Healing. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 42(1), 21-33. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/27511652](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27511652)
- “What are Minkisi?” (2011) *National Museums Liverpool*. Retrieved from <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/humanworld/worldcultures/africa/min-kisi.aspx>
- White, E. (2013) “Police Violate Religious Rights in Canada, Pose As Obeah Man,” *Obeah Spells: The Spiritual Mystery of the Caribbean*. Retrieved from <https://obeahspells.wordpress.com/2013/01/11/police-violate-religious-rights-in-canada-pose-as-obeah-man/>
- White, E. (n.d.-a) “Testimonials of Obeah Rituals and Ebenezer White: Keisha’s Story.” Retrieved from <http://www.obeahrituals.com/obeah-stories.html>
- White, E. (n.d.-b) “Welcome to Papa Ebenezer’s Obeah Rituals.” Retrieved from [www.obeahrituals.com](http://www.obeahrituals.com)
- Wiredu, K. (1998) Toward decolonizing African philosophy and religion. *African Studies Quarterly*, 1(4), 17-46.
- Xu, D.H., Luo, Z.Z., Mei, X.T., Ma, H.P., Zeng, J.L. & Xu, S.B. (2007) Effects of Alligator Zhikegao on Relieving Cough Dispelling Phlegm and Anti-inflammation. *Zhongguo Zhong Yao Za Zhi (China Journal of Chinese Materia Medica)*, 32(10), 961-5



Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (YPMNH) (n.d.: item YPM ANT 009815)  
“Beetle taken from the neck of an African chief...,” Anthropology Department,  
New Haven, CT.

Retrieved from <https://collections.peabody.yale.edu/search/Record/YPM-ANT-009815>

Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (YPMNH) (n.d.: item YPM ANT 249865)  
“Bronze statue, 49cm tall...,” Anthropology Department, New Haven, CT.

Retrieved from

<https://collections.peabody.yale.edu/search/Record/YPM-ANT-249865>

Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (YPMNH) (n.d.: item YPM ANT 250242)  
“Two canvas covered wooden dolls...,” Anthropology Department, New Haven,  
CT. Retrieved from <https://collections.peabody.yale.edu/search/Record/YPM-ANT-250242>

Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG) (n.d.: item 1954.28.19) “Unconsecrated Power  
Figure,” Linton Collection of African Art, New Haven, CT. Retrieved from  
<https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/15056>

Young, S. (2019, November 7) "Reconciliation and Repatriation on Haida Gwaii:  
Reconsidering Museum Collections and Community Engagement." Public Talk.  
Dalhousie University.

Zimmermann, F. (1992) Gentle purge: The flower power of Āyurveda. In Leslie, Charles  
& Young, Allan (Eds.). *Paths to Asian medical knowledge*. (pp. 209-223)  
Berkeley: University of California Press.