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Review Essay

Sorcery and Rhythms in the Black Atlantic

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Sorcery in the Black Atlantic
Edited By LUIS NICOLAU PARÉS AND ROGER SANSI
The University of Chicago Press, 2011, 300 pp.

Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances
Edited By MAMADOU DIOUF AND IFEOMA KIDDOE NWANKWO
The University of Michigan Press, 2010, 292 pp.

Both *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* (2011), edited by Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi, and *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World* (2010), edited by Mamadou Diouf and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, offer fresh collections of essays, which approach the notion of the black (Afro-)Atlantic from fascinating thematic perspectives. While *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* probes the themes of sorcery, witchcraft, and modernity, the cultural forms of music and dance in Africa and her diaspora inform the contributions in *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World*. The question of religiosity and circulating modes of cultural production link the two volumes as each collection works out a critical vocabulary and conceptual terrain.

An ambitious anthropological study, *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* examines the "historicity of sorcery" and explores how "discourses and practices of sorcery have been shaped through the historical space of the Black Atlantic" (2). Focusing on historical perspective and the geography (or "territoriality") of the Black Atlantic, moving beyond contemporary Africa as the primary template, this study argues for a broader contextualization of sorcery beyond the "presentism" of contemporary analyses. The geography of the Black Atlantic represents an "intermediate space" that problematizes the imperialist dichotomy of "wild, primitive" Africa and "civilized, modern" Europe.

Developed from conference proceedings in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil in October 2006 and London in January 2007, this book includes twelve chapters with an introduction co-authored by the editors and essays written by experts in the field of anthropology. Peter Geschiere's chapter concludes the volume that addresses "the formations and transformations of discourses and practices of sorcery through a historical, Atlantic perspective" (5).

The contributors of this collection explore sorcery in Brazil, Cuba, South Africa, Cameroon, and Angola. With a clear emphasis on the Lusophone transatlantic world, five essays address the Brazilian case in specific regions (Recife, São Paulo, Rio de

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Janeiro, Bahia) across several decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly, four of the essays (by Laura de Mello e Souza, Yvonne Maggie, Luena Nunes Pereira, and Patricia Birman) appear in English translation from the original Portuguese. Peter Geschiere's final chapter is translated from French.

The issue of translation is significant given the emphasis on the complexity of terminology. Like the mobility of the Atlantic world itself, terms and concepts shift such that it is "highly precarious" to distinguish between witchcraft and religion, and witchcraft and modernity. Sansi insightfully argues for the importance of the "history and uses of some key terms to understand the transformations of an Atlantic discourse of sorcery." Whereas Maggie comments that she uses "the terms 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' interchangeably," Ndjio notes that he "indiscriminately" uses the terms "'sorcery, 'witchcraft,' 'occultism,' and 'magic.'"

In his final chapter, Geschiere reveals in a parenthetical aside that "after working so long on witchcraft in Africa (and still not knowing what it is)," he is struck by its differences in Bahia, Brazil. This statement embodies the probing spirit of this volume, in which each scholar looks for convergences and contrasts across the Black Atlantic, yet readily remarks on the impossibility of distinguishing, for example, witchcraft from sorcery. Indeed, some contributors use the terms interchangeably.

The introduction begins with a description of new reports from the last ten years linking accusations of "satanic abuse of children" (ritual sacrifices) and subsequent "witch hunts" to Lusophone and African immigrants in the United Kingdom and Africans in postcolonial Africa. There are two camps: the believers of sorcery and the witch-hunters (anti-sorcerers). Privileging the term *sorcery*, the editors establish a theoretical framework that notes the ambiguity between the terms *witchcraft, sorcery, magic*, and *fetishism*, and emphasize the "Atlantic circularity" of the forces of sorcery, that is, African and European discourses of sorcery work in concert: it both shifts back to traditional beliefs and pushes forward to a modern present or future.

The collection of papers contributes an insightful cross-section of voices and themes. Although there is some repetition between chapters as authors outline their definitions of key terms (*feitiçaria* and *feitiço*, for example), each chapter refers to the work as a whole, making clear the connections and divergences between the arguments in each chapter.

The strength of this book lies in the rich, expert use and persuasive interpretation of archival materials that contribute to ongoing conversations about the global and local impact of sorcery, not only in anthropological studies, but also in history, sociology, and other humanities disciplines. The ethnographic research and analyses further enrich this collection. Some of the most perceptive readings of the history of stigmatization and criminalization of sorcery in the Black Atlantic appear in passages that present analysis of inquisition records, police reports, and newspaper articles. Several articles address the Republican Penal Code of 1890 that prohibits the practice of magic, sorcery, spiritualism, talismans, and charms. The book also sheds light on the mutual discourses of sorcery and how white slave masters, politicians, and others used it to achieve their goals.

Each contributor explores questions around magic and modernity. It is not clear, however, that each author is operating under the same understanding of, say, the

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distinction between sorcery and witchcraft, further indicating the complexity of developing a definitive critical terminology.

Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances similarly covers expansive geographic, cultural, and thematic ground. This edited anthology focuses primarily on eight countries—Senegal, Kenya, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Cuba, Brazil, and the United States—but also explores intersecting transnational contact zones and hybrid cultural identities (e.g., Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in New York).

Originating from a March 2005 conference of nearly the same name at the University of Michigan—Atlantic World changes to Afro-Atlantic World in the book title—the volume provides thirteen compelling essays or case studies concerning the interconnectedness of dance, contemporary music, and religious rituals in this region. Editors Mamadou Diouf and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo introduce the volume with a short essay mapping out the linkages between cultural production in identity formation and agency of Afro-Atlantic people. The case studies show in various ways how Afro-Atlantic music and dance "travel or churn in place," capturing both African diasporic communities and international audiences across Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Afro-Atlantic peoples represent and reinvent themselves through revision: "a constant (re)composition and (re)mixing of local sounds, gestures, epistemologies, and memories." Rejecting the dichotomies of local/global, modern/traditional, and cultural/political, the contributors to the volume expose the transnational, transoceanic, and interdisciplinary implications of traveling cultural forms. The reverberations of the migrating cultural products extend to political, cultural, and economic spheres via consumerist globalization, commodification, and citizenship.

One of the most distinctive features of the anthology is its instructive theoretical framing. While acknowledging the foundational work of Paul Gilroy's landmark *Black Atlantic*, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg announces in the epilogue the theoretical formulation of the volume draws on Joseph Roach's widening vision of the "circum-Atlantic world." Indeed, the directional prefixes *trans-*, *circum-*, and *inter-* propel the arguments throughout the chapters.

The anthology is organized into three parts: religion, dance, and contemporary music. The last section receives the most elaboration with six essays, perhaps reflecting the history of heighted scholarly attention to music over dance as the main mode of Afro-Atlantic cultural expression. These three thematic divisions, however, overlap and intersect significantly.

The first essay of the volume, Yvonne Daniel's "The Economic Vitamins of Cuba: Sacred and Other Dance Performance," appears in the religion section, though it might have been placed in the section on dance as well. In dance, Daniel argues, "African-derived religious performance has been included in and successfully promoted as tourist entertainment," traveling from the religious to the secular in what she names "circum-Caribbean locales." Contrary to the image of sacred dancers exploited by tourists, Daniel posits that religious performance in the Cuban tourist setting has helped to preserve African religions and bolster national economies.

In part two, Lucía M. Suárez's "Citizenship and Dance in Urban Brazil: Grupo Corpo, A Case Study" points out the "contact zones between Brazilian cultural production and local sociocultural realities" and argues that "they define interpretations

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of Brazilian national identity and make important interventions" in what she describes as a "fragile democracy." Focusing on the dance company, Grupo Corpo, she asserts that dance links citizenship and national identity through the complicated notion of the spectacle, which moves beyond the local sociopolitical problems to global communities.

Perhaps the most intriguing theoretical concept emerges in Susan Leigh Foster's experimental chapter, "Muscle/Memories: How Germaine Acogny and Diane McIntyre Put Their Feet Down" in which she "stage[s] a duet" between a Senegalese and an African American choreographer (121). Foster theorizes the concept of "muscle memory" in dance as "a set of actions" that "vitalizes a connection to past instances of dancing and other ways of moving." Muscle memory references the past ("re-members" it) without being identical to it.

The final section on music presents a wealth of emergent and existing musical traditions of the Afro-Atlantic world including timba in Cuba, soca and go-go music as well as the lesser-known rapso in Trinidad, hip-hop in Africa, and salsa and bomba in New York. Strikingly, Raquel Z. Rivera argues in her chapter that Haiti becomes the "mythical bridge that connects New York Caribbean Latinos to the blackness within."

Through its extensive coverage, *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances* opens up a broad theoretical approach to interpreting the interaction of peoples and cultures in the circum-Atlantic world. *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* encourages a consideration of the concept of sorcery within a transatlantic geography. Both volumes urge readers to reexamine religious, political, economic, and cultural exchanges in the Atlantic world.

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