

## Against The Postmodernization and Post-Structuralization of Vodou

Mocombe P C\*

West Virginia State University, The Mocombeian Foundation, Inc, USA

### Abstract

This article argues that White and Black Western scholars attempt to postmodernize and post-structuralize Haitian Vodou against its traditional scientific metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This Western reading of Vodou, grounded in postmodern and post-structural identity theorizing, attempts to substantiate the latter two as scientific thought amidst its paradoxical attack on traditional scientism.

**Keywords:** Structurationism; Praxis; Panpsychism; Social Class Language Game; Phenomenological Structuralism; Orchor Theory

### Introduction

This article argues that White and Black Western scholars attempt to postmodernize and post-structuralize Haitian Vodou against its traditional scientific metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This Western reading of Vodou, grounded in postmodern and post-structural identity theorizing, is an attempt, using Vodou as an "other" ethos/episteme against Western scientific discourse, to substantiate the former two (postmodernism and post-structuralism) as both a political project, i.e., the queerification and effeminization of Haitian society, and scientific thought, which represents the True nature of reality, against traditional scientism with its emphasis on universality and objectivity. This postmodern and post-structural position is problematic, however, in that it negates the fact that Vodou promotes a traditional universal objective reality regarding the nature of reality as such by which individual actors must recursively (re) organize and reproduce their being in the world in favor of conceptions of Vodou as epistemically irrational, queer, feminine, fluid, and subjective.

### Background of the Problem

Generally referred to as animism, fetishism, paganism, heathenism, or black magic, in Western academic literature, Vodou (spelled Vodun, Voodoo, Vodou, Vaudou, or Vodoun) is the oldest monotheistic religion, science, and form of life, in the world [1-5]. Commonly interpreted as "Spirits" or

"introspection into the unknown," Vodou is the structuring structure of the Fon people of Dahomey and other tribes of the continent who would arrive on the island of Ayiti as named by the Taino natives [3-5]. Vodou is a form of life, what [4-5] calls "the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism," which seeks to provide the human being with a balance between the lived world (profane) and the unseen (sacred) world out of which everything emerged. In Vodou, the rhythm and harmony of the world, its Schumann wave, is directed by the rhythm of the drums. The rhythmic beats (rit) either connect human practical consciousness to its universal rhythm/wavelength as organized around the agricultural mode of production or, in combination with other sounds, give them access to the psychic wavelengths (lwas) of other beings and concepts throughout the multiverse, which is called upon to appear in Vodou ceremonies and rituals to advise the leaders of the community on how to rebalance or direct human existence in times of imbalance. Four hundred lwas or spirits plus God constitute structure and direct Haitian Vodou physic, metaphysic, ontology, epistemology, and axiology [1-5]. God, Bondye bon or Gran met la, created the lwas as (epistemological) concepts and beings to make the multiverse and serve as intermediaries between itself and human beings to assist them in living out their lives in the material worlds (bondye created multiple planets). The lwas manifest in the physical world through the spirit possession (monte) of an individual to assist human beings in all facets,

\*Corresponding author: Paul C. Mocombe. West Virginia State University, The Mocombeian Foundation, Inc, USA. E-mail: [pmocombe@mocombeian.com](mailto:pmocombe@mocombeian.com)

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i.e., love, health, wealth, war, revenge, etc., of their material existence [1-2]. Embodied, the lwas heal, provide guidance, and predict the future. Axiologically speaking, there is no moral right or wrong in Vodou. The aim is to achieve balance and homeostasis between God, who created the world out of itself, the universe, the earth, and human conduct utilizing the lwas to assist in doing so [1-5].

## Theory and Method

This Vodou metaphysic and physic diametrically oppose contemporary readings of it grounded in postmodern and post-structural identity theorizing where indeterminacy, decentering, and gender fluidity predominates over the objectivity, universality, and determinacy of traditional science and structuralism [7-8]. Postmodernism and post-structuralism against the structuralism of conventional science 1) question the validity regarding the Cartesian rational individual in favor of the dissolution of the subject altogether; 2) question the interdependency of the constitution of a stable structure and a distinct subject with the agency in denying the latter they undermine the former; 3) question the status of science; and 4) finally, question the possibility of the objectivity of any language of description or analysis. In the application of postmodern and post-structural thought to Vodou by both White and Black Western scholars, the understanding is that Vodou is an "other" episteme, like blackness itself, which diametrically opposes Western worldviews through its queerness, privileging of the feminine, indeterminacy, fluidity, irrationality, and improvisation [7-8]. In this work, I argue that Vodou is a science, religion, and form of life, in the traditional sense, with an objective and universal metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and axiology that "enframes" (Martin Heidegger's term), directs, and differentiates the lives and social practices of rational individuals in the material world [1-5]. As such, it has its objective and universal normative beliefs about gender, sexuality, and sex. The community's social life structure, fashion, and ritual performances reflect these beliefs. Vodou cannot be postmodernized or post-structuralized; instead, it must be seen as a duality, as outlined in [4-5]. The structurationist theory draws from phenomenological structuralism. The system interpellates individual actors in this framework, embodying the universal and objective rules of conduct sanctioned in Vodou's metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Furthermore, these actors recursively organize, reproduce, and differentiate these rules in their material practices. I would argue that the postmodern and post-structural positions are, paradoxically, epistemological

and political projects intent on queering and effeminizing Haitian society for Western cultural hegemony under the umbrella of identity politics and not an adequate understanding of Vodou's praxis.

## Discussion

Vodou's metaphysic and epistemology are based on traditional science's objectivity, universality, and determinacy, not the episteme or political project of postmodernism and post-structuralism [4-5]. Vodou science and epistemology would emerge out of its metaphysical worldview and is a vital form of Kantian transcendental idealism and realism, which would be institutionalized throughout the provinces and mountains of the island by oungans and manbos (priests and priestesses) [2], [4-5]. Unlike German idealism, whose intellectual development from Kant to Schopenhauer, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt school produced the dialectic, Marxist materialism, Nietzschean antidialectics, phenomenology, and deontological ethics, Vodou makes a hermeneutical phenomenology, materialism, and an antidialectical process to history, axiologically, enframed by a reciprocal justice as its normative ethics. Individual social actors dialectically invoke this normative ethic of common justice to reconcile the noumenal (sacred-ideational) and phenomenal (profane-material) subjective world to maintain balance and harmony between the two so that the human actor can live freely and happily with all beings without distinctions or masters. As such, Vodou epistemology, what [6] calls "Haitian Epistemology" elsewhere, as a form of metaphysical realism and idealism is phenomenological, in the Heideggerian sense (i.e., hermeneutical), material in the Marxist sense, and antidialectical [9]. It refutes Hegel's claims for the importance of historical formations and other people in developing self-consciousness. Instead, Vodou emphasizes the things in the consciousness (lwa or concepts, ideas, ideals) of the rational individual as they stem from the noumenal/Vilokan world and get bastardized (via the act of interpretation), i.e., recursively organized and reproduced in their lived-experiences, according to their level of learning, development, capacity for knowledge, methods, and modality, i.e., the way they know more profoundly-kinesthetically, visually, etc. as they anti dialectically seek to reproduce them (with or without the assistance of oungans and manbos) in the phenomenal world as their practical consciousness against other interpretive formations of these same concepts in the material world by other people [10]. In other words, within Vodou, the world is a unitary (energy) material world created out of Bondye that can

be known rationally, using the lwas, which reveal knowledge and truth claims to the individual. The world is a creation of a good God, Bondye Bon, which created the world and humanity out of itself composed of two intersecting spheres or parallel universes, the profane (the phenomenal world) and sacred (noumenal/Vilokanic, mirrored world of the profane) [11]. Embedded in that pantheistic material world are (epistemological) concepts, lwa yo in Haitian metaphysics, from the parallel mirrored (Vilokanic) world, that humanity can ascertain via experience and the structure of its being, epistemological forms of understanding and sensibility (dreams, reason and rationality, extrasensory perceptions), to help make sense of their experience and live in the world, which is Bondye, and therefore sacred, as they seek perfection and reunification (reintegration) with God, the energy force/source [12].

That is to say, it, Bondye, provided humanity with objects, concepts, ideas, ideals, and practices, i.e., lwa of Vodou, proverbs, rituals, dance, geometry, knowledge of herbal medicine, trades, and skills, by which they ought to know, interpret, and make sense of the external (phenomenal profane) world and live in it comfortably [13]. These transcendently natural objects, concepts, ideas, ideals, and practices can either be known epistemologically, through revelations, i.e., dreams, divinations, experience, or rationality and become the structure (once reified and institutionalized as proverbs, husbandry, dance, rituals, institutions, etc) [14]. Through this, humanity knows to hold beliefs and truth-claims [15]. So Bondye, a powerful energy force that always existed, created the world and humanity out of itself using four hundred and one transcendently actual concepts (God and four hundred lwa or concepts), ideas, and ideals (geometric principles, mathematics, etc.) [16]. Humanity, and the world around it, are an aggregation of bondyes material energy, the energy of God, which constitutes its existence [17]. In humanity, this existence is composed of three distinct collections of energy (ti bon anj; gwo bon anj; ko, the body), all of which are material stuff, which constitutes our name (souls) where personality, truth-claims, knowledge, and beliefs are deposited, via dreams, revelations, extrasensory perceptions, divinations, experience, reason, the energy source of a God as manifested via a lwa, and can be examined and explored as the synthetic a priori of the human agent [18].

For humanity to constitute its existence and be in the world according to the will of God or Bondye, in other words, transcendently actual concepts, lwa, stemming from God's will (the mirrored world of the profane, Vilokan) are embedded in the material world, which is God. Humanity can ascertain

and embody them via their constituted being as a material being with extrasensory perceptions, reason and rationality, and or through experience [19]. As these transcendently fundamental (universal and objective) concepts are ascertained, they are constituted and institutionalized and passed on through humanity via priests, priestesses, and early ancestors who institutionalized (reify)/ institutionalize them in the natural world via religious ceremonies, dance, rituals, herbal medicine, trades, concepts, and proverbs [20-25]. These trades, ideals, sayings, and or ideas are truisms, mechanisms to ascertain and constitute knowledge, which although they are deduced from the constituted make-up (i.e., consciousness) of the human being, in Vodou metaphysics they are attributed to God and the ancestors who institutionalized (reified) them to be applied in the material world so that their descendants can live freely in the world, satisfy their needs, be happy, and achieve perfection to reunite with God after their sixteen reincarnated life cycles (eight times as a man and eight times as a woman) [26]. This interaction between the noumenal (world of Vilokan) and the phenomenal world is a dialectical (dual) process. That is, the concepts as they stem from the noumenal world are universal and objective and can be embodied and perfected in the phenomenal world by an individual human actor anti-dialectically warring against other interpretations (which can be distorted and imperfect) of these concepts for their own (subjective) interpretations and manifestations as revealed by the lwas in dreams and through other signs. The final act of understanding, in other words, is not up to the individual or other people but is contingent upon the approval or disapproval of the lwas, which can threaten the ontological security of the individual [27].

## Conclusions

From this scientific standpoint, Vodou does not promote fluidity, indeterminacy, subjectivity, etc., i.e., Postmodern and post-structural logic. Instead, it must be viewed as a duality: Vodou highlights a universal and objective scientific worldview that is through five systems, i.e., language, mode of production, communicative discourse, ideology, and ideological apparatuses that interpellate the human actor who internalizes and recursively (re) organize, reproduce, and differentiates its universal and objective social class language game, i.e., rules of conduct that are sanctioned by Vodou priests and priestesses, in their material practices. Postmodern and post-structural discourse captures the latter position against the scientism of the former. The former place is a result of the linguistic turn in social scientific discourse in the West and its attempt to reify

the postmodern and post-structural worldview as both a political project, via identity politics, and an epistemological methodology despite their theoretical position to the contrary

highlighted by their attacks against the universality and objectivity of the scientific worldview.

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