Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo, by Margarite Fernández and Lizabeth Parvisini-Gebert. New York University Press, 2011 (2nd ed.). 320pp., 20 b&w illustrations, hb. \$23.00, ISBN-13: 9780814762288.

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Keywords

Creole Religions, the Caribbean, the Diaspora, Postcolonialism, Afro-Caribbean Religions

From Haitian Vodou, Cuban Santería (or Regla de Ocho), Regla de Palo, the Abakuá Secret Society, to the Obeah of the former British colonies of the “West Indies” (Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica and Surinam), Jamaican Rastafari, Myalism, Kumina (“Pocomania”) and Espiritismo (Cuba, Europe, Puerto Rico and United States), authors Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert have assembled a second edition of *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, a volume that attempts to demonstrate widely the dynamics of African-Caribbean people living in groups—what the groups are, how they function, interact, develop and differ from one another. This book is a reorganized version of earlier publications—*Sacred Possession: Vodou, Santería, Obeah and the Caribbean* (1997) and *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and its Diaspora* (2002)—which have focused on the various aspects of cultural and religious practices of African-derived religions in the Caribbean and in the West. Another important task of this new edition is to demonstrate the “syncretic” (9) nature, or the mixing of elements, of different cultures in the Caribbean—for example, how Santería and Vodou combine African religious practices with Catholic elements. Creole religions are, by definition, new combinations created from two or more older religions.

The book reflects the ever-changing scenery of the Creolization phenomenon, using a postcolonial interpretation of the historical background of the Creole religions which developed “in secrecy” (3) in the wake of “European colonization” (2) and of the main religions, *in primis* Christianity. In this work, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert propose that both western and non-western scholars of religion, given the multi-faith context, should not only be interested in dominant and popular religions, but *ought also* to

include other faiths in order to understand sub-groups, marginal beliefs, practices and symbols. The last decades have seen great attention paid mainly by Afro-American scholars to African-Caribbean literature, with a lesser interest in Creole religions. Another interesting aspect of this volume is its anthropological and ethnographic position with regard to the different nature of Creole religions and spiritualities, which remains closer to an historical rather than a sociological and theological perspective. However, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* contributes, with its analytic approach, to the sociology of religion and theology and helps readers to understand how the Creole religions have spread globally and interacted with Western societies.

This book is organized into eight chapters, each of which is a review or revisiting of various African indigenous religions and their *liberative* impact on the subjugated people of the African Diaspora. What is noticeable from this analysis is how the African indigenous religions, surviving their exile and persecution, have manifested their anticolonial and subversive attitude towards the dominant cultures. In a sense, the Creole religions masquerade and dance secretly for their ancestors, to honour collectively their African mythologies, traditions and spiritualities. In the introductory section, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert focus exclusively on the various stages of colonialism and the varying relationships between the indigenous people and European Christianity—from appropriation (adoption) to rebellion (liberation). Creole religions, as the authors observe, have developed in the Caribbean from roots in African indigenous religions, surviving as cultural and spiritual resistance to colonialism. In the religiously pluralistic context of the Caribbean, religious “conversion” from one religion/community to another—Native American religions, African indigenous religions, Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism—has brought about new hybrid and multi-faith phenomena in the Caribbean today. In all the chapters of this book, Creole religions of the Caribbean (Santería, Regla de Palo, Obeah and Rastafari) are shown to be significantly retraceable to the religious influences of Africa. Indeed, West Africa (Benin, Nigeria and Congo) influenced Vodou and Obeah, and the Ethiopian Tawahedo Orthodox Church influenced Rastafari.

Chapter 1 offers an investigation into the history of colonisation in the Caribbean, but more importantly, into the idea of colonialism which has socially, culturally and religiously shaped the growth and transformation of local indigenous populations. It also explores the phenomenon of *marronage* (slave revolt) in the 19th century in the Caribbean context as anti-colonial action of the African new religious movements. For Africans, *marronnage* was the practice of running away from the colonial oppressor. Chapters 2, 3

and 4 describe the development of African-Cuban religions (Santería, Regla de Palo, the Abakua Secret Society) and Haitian religions (Vodou) which are defined by the writers as “folk religions” maintaining, on the one hand, African traditions—from the sharing of beliefs, including cosmology to rituals and religious practices (ancestor worship)—and, on the other hand, Catholic faith with an emphasis on images of Mary and the saints. The pantheon of divinities, spirits and zombies, along with healing, sorcery and witchcraft, enter into the everyday life of the African population of the Diaspora, becoming expressions of their nostalgic sentiments (Afrocentricity). The book provides an important methodological study of African spirituality and traditions within Creole religions, which, in particular the Rastafari movement (in Chapter 6), emphasize the centrality of African psychology in the Pan-African message of Marcus Garvey’s (1887–1940) “Africa for Africans” as a radical trend and “black solidarity” (183).

Creole Religions of the Caribbean provides most importantly a theoretical framework for the study of the new religious movements of the African Diaspora. It is interesting to observe how African new religious movements have expanded globally from Africa to the Americas, from Africa to Europe and even as far as Australia and Asia. Indeed, most Creole religions such as Santería, Vodou and the Rastafari movement have reached not only North, Central and South America but also Asia and the South Pacific. This book is intended for academics and students who wish to explore African-Caribbean new religious movements and spiritualities within contemporary globalized societies. It is also addressed to a wider audience of readers who seek to understand how Creole religions have emerged and developed in the world. The authors discuss the Creole religions of the Caribbean as a new religious phenomenon which emigrated to the Americas. They observe that Creole religions have not only changed names or spiritual features (from Anglo-American Spiritualism and French Spiritisme to the new movements of religious revivalism and the liberation theologies of the Diasporas Latina and Africana), but these religions have also become influential in the emancipation of subaltern groups (from the Rastafari movement to Curanderismo in the United States and Mexico, and the new phenomenon of Vodou led by African women like Mama Lola, a Haitian priestess who established her movement in the West, in Brooklyn in New York City). One might compare this book to another mentioned in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (17) which relates fascinating and remarkable fieldwork on Vodou from a feminist perspective, namely *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, written by the anthropologist Karen McCarthy-Brown (University of California Press, 2001). *Mama*

Lola and *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* are both examples of an empathic approach, but yet with a literary and scientific basis to their investigation of Creole religions. These works provide, in a “respectful” way, the story of the African minority religions of the Caribbean. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* is a very effective and sympathetic study of the Caribbean religions, and it provides this story in a more accessible way than other publications.