

## Twin Pillars of Resistance: Vodou and Haitian Kreyòl in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Ti difé boulé sou istoua Ayiti* [Stirring the Pot of Haitian History]

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**ABSTRACT:** Michel-Rolph Trouillot's first book, *Ti difé boulé sou istoua Ayiti* [Stirring the Pot of Haitian History] (1977), exposes the foundational role of Haitian Vodou and the Kreyòl language in Haiti's Revolution (1791-1804). This essay analyzes selected passages from *Ti difé boulé* that explicitly incorporate Vodou songs, prayers, and terminology to illustrate how Trouillot provocatively deploys oral sources of historical narrative and memory in his groundbreaking work. The young activist, writing in Haitian Kreyòl from New York City during the Duvalier régime, powerfully contests official versions of Haitian history by emphasizing the agency of the Haitian people. Vodou and Kreyòl, born out of struggle within a repressive colonial framework, are the cohesive forces underlying Haitian resistance. *Ti difé boulé* examines neocolonial patterns of oppression emerging during the nineteenth century and reassesses revolutionary icon Toussaint Louverture. The government that Louverture established harnessed Vodou to continue systematically subjugating the Haitian people; these class interest-based patterns evolved into Haiti's deep-rooted predatory State. Trouillot's innovative yet understudied masterpiece offers contemporary readers "new narratives" of Haiti, recentering its people, spiritual practices, and native language. Vodou and Kreyòl, as twin pillars of Haitian resistance and cultural identity, remain a vital and vibrant part of the American heritage. They merit more nuanced understandings within a cultural and political context where they have increasingly come under siege, inside and outside of Haiti.

**KEYWORDS:** Haiti, Haitian Vodou, Haitian Kreyòl, Haitian Revolution, historiography, language, religion, Toussaint Louverture

Haitian Vodou and Kreyòl, the Haitian language, stand as twin pillars of resistance underlying the separation of the world's first black republic from France in 1804. In Michel-Rolph Trouillot's last book, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (2003), he contends that Caribbean history signifies a true rupture between past and present—and New World history was indeed "new" for all involved—precisely because the violent colonial encounter spurred the genesis of new languages and religions within the Americas (44). Trouillot's very first publication, *Ti difé boulé sou istoua Ayiti* (1977; henceforth *Ti difé boulé*), describes what he considered to be their origins<sup>1</sup>:

The colonists intentionally separated slaves coming from the same African nation. So the slaves in a given community didn't serve the same *loua* (spirits) or speak the same language. The colonists did that so they could force their own ideas and their own language into the heads of Saint-Domingue's African slaves. But the slaves outsmarted the slave owners. They took the colonists' language, folded it into a bunch of African languages, and produced Creole. They took the colonists' religion, folded it into their own religion, and produced Vodou ... (16).

Kolon yo té fè éspré pa mét pliziè ésklav ki sot nan youn minm tribi Lafrik ansanm. Ositou ésklav ki té nan youn minm lakou pat sèvi minm loua, ni yo pat palé minm lang. Kolon yo té fè sa pou yo té fouré lidé pa yo, lang pa yo nan tèt ésklav afrikin Sindoming yo. Min ésklav yo bay kolon yo payèt. Yo pran lang kolon yo, yo plòtonnin-l nan youn pakèt lang afrikin épi yo mété kréyòl kanpé. Yo pran rélijion kolon yo, yo vlopé-l ak rélijion pa yo épi yo mété vodou kanpé ... (26)

Kreyòl and Vodou inherently bear the hallmarks of resistance, Trouillot writes, because they were "born in struggle" and "baptized in discord" (56). Through the lens of Kreyòl, *Ti difé boulé* powerfully underscores the historical significance and the vulnerability of Haiti's popular religion, which for centuries has simultaneously served as a motor for insurrection and a force ripe for exploitation.

This essay, grounded in a literary-historical approach, sheds light on the treatment of Vodou and Kreyòl in *Ti difé boulé*, a vital yet understudied text about Haiti's revolutionary period that implicitly critiques more contemporary political struggles in the Caribbean nation. After outlining some central features of Vodou, I situate

Trouillot's work within the context of Haiti's literary traditions and revolutionary historiography and critically examine his portrayal of Haiti's popular religion within *Ti difé boulé*. His book—with a few interesting contradictions—shows Vodou and Kreyòl standing at the crossroads of New World history, effectively serving as *potomitan*s, or pillars, for spiritual, emancipatory, and revolutionary discourses elsewhere in the Americas.

### Substance versus superstition

The August 1791 Vodou ceremony of *Boua Kayiman* is widely acknowledged as the beginning of the general insurrection that brought about the Haitian Revolution, which had an enormous impact upon the Atlantic world. Though historians' viewpoints vary<sup>2</sup>, the conventional timeframe ascribed to the revolution is 1791-1804. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Trouillot argues that the slave revolution was "unthinkable" even as it happened, and Western historiography has produced multiple silences around the event (69). But the victory achieved by the enslaved population of colonial Saint-Domingue (as Haiti was known then) nevertheless provided momentum and a measure of tangible support for subsequent independence movements in Latin America, starting with Simón Bolívar's liberation of Venezuela<sup>3</sup>. Contemporary scholars of Haitian history (including Marlene Daut, David Geggus, Carolyn Fick, and Philippe Girard) concur that what undergirded these revolutionary efforts—providing the masses with deep conviction and an organizational network to carry out the anti-colonial struggle against France—was Vodou, which many present-day Haitians continue to practice, alongside Catholicism.

Although—and because—Haiti's popular religion was a central force propelling the revolution forward, Vodou has repeatedly been repressed, criminalized, maligned, and exploited to many ends, inside and outside of the island. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel observe that today Vodou "remains arguably the most maligned African-based religion in the Americas" ("Spirit" xix). Vodou became synonymous with the idea of superstition during the early nineteenth century (Ramsey, "Legislating" 237). As leaders of the newly established nation began seeking international recognition for Haiti, they actively endeavored to suppress what many considered to be backwards or primitive spiritual beliefs belying Haitians' capacity for self-government (ibid; 231). The 1915-1934 U.S. Occupation of Haiti spurred an intense proliferation of negative representations of Vodou, leading the religion's name and spiritual practices to connote exoticism, magic, danger, and violence. This was hardly accidental. Joan Dayan affirms that "representations of Vodou have usually served a political purpose, whether President Elie Lescot's support of the Catholic Church and its 'anti-superstition' campaign in 1941 (among whose outcomes was the clearing of peasant land for United States rubber production) or Haitian dictator François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier's cynical deformation of what he called a uniquely Haitian tradition" (3). In one such strategic

positioning, Duvalier appropriated the discourse of "noirisme" and strategically infiltrated Vodou communities to control the population and repress resistance to his regime. (While Duvalier goes unmentioned in *Ti difé boulé*, he is a clear target for Trouillot.) Ramsey ("Legislating" 252) points out that in general, laws against Vodou have tended to be counterproductive in that they helped reinforce its position as an instrument of popular struggle. Although this essay cannot do justice to Vodou's complex history, a basic framework helps frame my analysis of *Ti difé boulé*.

The term "Vodoun" is used by the Fon of southern Dahomey to mean "'spirit,' 'god,' or 'image'" (Dayan, "Vodoun" 2). Elizabeth McAlister, a specialist in Afro-Caribbean religions who has published extensively on Vodou, offers a straightforward definition of Vodou as "a creolized religion forged by descendants of Dahomean, Kongo, Yoruba, and other African ethnic groups who had been enslaved and brought to colonial Saint-Domingue and Christianized by Roman Catholic missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries" ("Vodou" n.p.). On the one hand, Haiti does not have an official religion; religious freedom has been officially inscribed within each of the republic's constitutions (since 1801 approximately twenty such documents have been promulgated). On the other hand, the 1860 Concordat signed by then-President Fabre-Nicholas Geffard—establishing relations between Haiti and the Vatican a full half-century after the Revolution—granted the Catholic Church privileged status and distanced it from practices regarded as "superstition," namely Vodou (Ramsey, "Legislating" 237).

In Haiti today, standpoints on Vodou diverge. The Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique, part of Haiti's Ministry of Economy and Finances, states that Catholicism is Haiti's leading religion, and is practiced by 54.7% of the population; Baptists and Pentecostals number second and third (15.4% and 7.9%, respectively), and nearly 10.2% of Haitians are non-practicing.<sup>4</sup> Curiously, there is no mention whatsoever of Vodou. Notwithstanding this omission, religious categories in Haiti are not clear-cut, because many Haitians who consider themselves Catholic simultaneously practice Vodou, and the ritual feasts of Vodou are intertwined with those of the Roman Catholic calendar. Louis Maximilien explains the coexisting religious rituals observed by Vodou practitioners in terms of Church ceremonies being "open to lay people, and the essentially Vodouesque side as the part reserved for initiates"<sup>5</sup> (5). Public Vodou ceremonies nonetheless occur, and such spaces provide opportunities for recruiting future initiates<sup>6</sup>. The Vodou-Catholicism duality has existed in Haiti for centuries; it is the more recent Protestant Christian practices that are generally less flexible about blended approaches to religion. Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians—denominations established in Haiti during the early nineteenth century—are most accepting, while other Protestant groups such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons—who gained traction during and after the U.S. Occupation—regard Christianity and Vodou as incompatible. Indeed, foreign military forces worsened existing social tensions by implanting racist, anti-Vodou attitudes in

Haiti whilst a steady stream of literary fiction and Hollywood films featuring zombies<sup>7</sup> reinforced pernicious images about Haiti and Vodou, demeaning the religion according to governmental policy of the U.S. (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel, "Spirit" xix). Tensions have mounted further over the past decade due to the external interventions that followed ostensible "natural" disasters in Haiti, as my conclusion notes; under these circumstances, Vodou has remained literally and figuratively under siege.

Though Vodou practices vary across Haiti, the act of serving the spirits—*sevi lwa*—is the religion's main focus. McAlister encapsulates some underlying principles: "everything is spirit. Humans are spirits who inhabit the visible world. The unseen world is populated by *lwa* (spirits), *mistè* (mysteries), *envizib* (the invisibles), *zanj* (angels), the spirits of ancestors, and the recently deceased. All these spirits are believed to live in a mythic land called Ginen, a cosmic 'Africa.'" ("Vodou" n.p.). Vodou practitioners, in exchange for their prayers and devotional rituals, hope to receive protection, health, and other benefits from the spirits; during ceremonies people can enter a state of "possession" by spirits—an idea which bears demystification given the appalling treatment Vodou has received within popular culture. In the context of religious rituals, practitioners may enter a state of entrancement wherein they dance, eat and drink, offer advice, and carry out processes of healing; such acts reflect the divine presence of the *lwa* within their bodies, with the anticipation of restoring balance and energy in relationships between people, as well as between people and the invisible spirits (ibid). Unfortunately, many non-Haitians fail to appreciate that Vodou—intricately woven into daily life in Haiti—is rooted in democratic, ethical, and ecologically-situated practices based on community and culture, family and relationships, history, and identity.

A brief primer on Vodou terminology appears at the end of McAlister's entry. While Haiti's popular religion lacks a central hierarchy, "in the cities, local hierarchies of priestesses or priests (*manbo* and *oungan*), 'children of the spirits' (*ouns*), and ritual drummers (*ountòg*) comprise more formal 'societies' or 'congregations' (*so-syete*)," with some secret societies performing a "religio-judicial function" (ibid). Benjamin Hebblethwaite, et al observe that the religion permeates Haitian culture and society and sustains the population in the absence of a strong government (7). In other words, Haiti's popular religion carries out significant work that in other societies is performed by governmental institutions; it helps alleviate people's suffering and bolsters their ability to survive. Trouillot's *Ti difé boulé* shows Haiti's popular religion as being both palliative and assertive.

Central to Vodou practice and to Haiti's history is the "*potomitan*." Synonymous with "centerpost", but having sacred connotations, the *potomitan* is the literal and figurative pillar within the Vodou peristyle, or place of worship, providing a crucial site for communion with the spirits. The *potomitan* provides a sacred point of entry for the *lwa*, and Vodou rituals and dances take place around it. Vodou practices played a fundamental role within Haiti's anti-

colonial struggle. This brings us to *Ti difé boulé*, whose portrayal of Vodou is captivating but potentially problematic in some instances: while Trouillot's book persuasively presents Vodou and Kreyòl as twin forces cementing cohesion and unity within Haitian society, the text at times seems to idealize Haiti's popular religion.

### Vodou Represented in *Ti difé boulé*

*Ti difé boulé* is certainly not the first study to address Vodou. Over the past century, writers of many persuasions have signaled Haiti's pivotal position, and the importance of Vodou, within the Caribbean region and the broader Americas. Treatments of Haiti's popular religion have ranged widely, with Alejo Carpentier's experimental novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949) being the best-known precursor. The Cuban writer founds his theory of the "marvelous real"—a definition of the singularity of the Americas with respect to European aesthetic and cultural models—upon what he calls "documentation" of the spiritual beliefs held by enslaved Haitians prior to the Revolution. Carpentier arguably essentializes Vodou by over-emphasizing the story of French colonists burning rebel leader Makandal at the stake. *El reino* depicts the enslaved witnesses as being unchastened by the violent spectacle of Makandal's demise, and inspired to take up arms themselves, believing that he was transformed into a butterfly and escaped death. For Carpentier, Haiti's well-established spirit-based faith system exemplifies the magical qualities of the Americas. While I find his representation hyperbolic, it nevertheless signals Vodou's historical significance.

Nearly three decades later, Trouillot published *Ti difé boulé*, his first book, just after immigrating to the United States from Haiti to escape the Duvalier dictatorship. *Ti difé boulé* is the first-ever history of Haiti's Revolution in Kreyòl, the language accessible to all Haitians. The narrative's genre resists easy categorization, given that Trouillot "simultaneously weaves together the narrative approaches of historiography, social sciences, Marxism, and oraliture in the form of Haiti's storytelling tradition, proverbs and songs" (Past and Hebblethwaite, "*Ti difé boulé*, Considering the stakes" 156). The book remains largely unknown internationally precisely because of that; moreover, it was not widely circulated, has been out of print for several decades, and was translated (to English) for the first time in 2021. Notably, *Ti difé boulé* underscores the leading role of the Haitian people in the still incomplete struggle for self-determination.<sup>8</sup> *Ti difé boulé* bridges substantial cultural and socioeconomic divides<sup>9</sup> and affords "new narratives" of Haiti to contemporary readers of all backgrounds (Ulysse, et al 221). For Trouillot, Vodou and the Haitian language are the forces of cohesion that underlie Haitian resistance efforts; both are indigenous, born out of struggle within a repressive colonial framework.

*Ti difé boulé* simultaneously is, and is not, about Vodou. First, and foremost, Trouillot's early masterpiece is a testament to Kreyòl's legitimacy and viability as a language of knowledge and education. Also, the book provides a revisionist history of the Revo-

lution, emphasizing the contributions of the Haitian people whose extraordinary efforts tend to be silenced within traditional historiography. *Ti difé boulé* weaves together the narrative approaches of historiography, political science, fiction, and oral modes of expression drawn from Haiti's rich storytelling tradition. On the one hand, Trouillot employs Marxist analysis to explore how French capitalists exploited financial, legal, military, administrative, royal and ecclesiastical institutions to establish a plantation economy driven by imported African slave labor. On the other hand, *Ti difé boulé* is poetic and descriptive, infused with evocative proverbs, word plays, drawings, and songs from popular culture and Vodou religious practice.

Trouillot provocatively deploys oral and pictographic sources of historical narrative and memory, elevating and privileging Haiti's popular religion and oral tradition while circumventing conventional historiographical approaches. Most chapters begin with a few lines of verse, song, or Vodou prayers that pull the reader or listener into the story by creating the sense of an informal narrative or oral performance (Past, "Toussaint" 91-92). An example is found at the opening of Chapter Four:

Ago blows and blows  
he blows the Nor'easter  
he blows the Sou'wester  
Ago rumbles and rumbles  
Ago rumbles a thunderstorm  
he blows and blows  
Ago comes from Guinea  
he blows and rumbles (39)

Ago vanté vanté  
li vanté Nòdé  
li vanté siroua  
Ago grondé grondé  
li grondé loraj  
Ago vanté vanté  
li vanté vanté  
Ago soti lan Ginin  
li vanté li grondé (53)

As in the above passage, *Ti difé boulé* contains frequent repetitions, creative reformulations of important concepts, and commentaries directed at the audience, with frequent repetitions, echoing the oral form of Vodou traditions. *Ago* is an exclamation common in Vodou songs. Although the *lwa* is not explicitly mentioned, this song resembles those for Agawou Tonnè, one of Vodou's spirits associated with the wind, storms, lightning, and thunder. By indirectly invoking this spirit, Trouillot situates the Haitian Revolution underway within Vodou tradition and the natural landscape.

*Ti difé boulé* also appears to have didactic goals insofar as Trouillot corrects misunderstandings of Haiti's history. The form of his writing contributes to that process, as it mirrors the style of Vodou

songs—wherein brief, circular, and repeated lines emphasize main ideas, encourage memorization and help trigger spirit possession. *Ti difé boulé* is a written text that necessarily displays Vodou songs in black and white type on the page. In contrast, religious songs are performed in a dynamic context including *oungan* and drumming, and they inspire the triggering of possession on the audience's part. Vodou provides a direct means for Trouillot to establish a connection with his Haitian audience and provoke reflection. Tellingly, *Ti difé boulé* addresses readers using Kreyòl's pronoun "nou," meaning simultaneously "you" and/or "we." This consistently double narrative perspective, alongside the enigmatic allusions within chapter headings, recalls what Karen McCarthy Brown describes as "the expression of multiple meanings, points of view, and interpretations" expressed in many Vodou songs (Hebblethwaite, et al, "Vodou Songs" 42). Eschewing a formal, academic approach, Trouillot's first book embraces a culturally resonant storytelling mode accessible to all Haitians.

Form and tone aside, it is curious that across more than two hundred pages in *Ti difé boulé*, which portrays Kreyòl and Vodou as twin pillars of Haitian culture, only Chapters Two, Four and Seven explicitly discuss Vodou. At times religious references appear rather like flourishes—such as when Grinn Pronmennen, the narrator, pronounces a lengthy economic discourse and suddenly declares, "I'll sip a little cinnamon tea to loosen up my vocal cords [...] Vodou singer, please give us another song!" (135) [M-ap gouté ti tak té kannèl pou m-chofé lalouèt mouin [...] Rinn-chantrel la, tanpri, voyé youn lòt chanté pou nou non! (174)]. While this tangential mention of spiritual practice is effective for the purposes of indicating the narrative's setting, at other moments Vodou references seem more generalized or romanticized. In effect, after Trouillot lays the groundwork in Chapter Two, emphasizing how Vodou gave slaves conviction to fight against their oppressors, he addresses only two episodes in Haitian revolutionary history that involve religion: the 1791 Boua Kayiman ceremony that catalyzed the uprising, and Toussaint Louverture's later repression and exploitation of Vodou.

Boua Kayiman comes under focus within Chapter Four, titled "Fire in the House"; however, the subject receives somewhat uneven treatment. Trouillot's discussion of Haiti's indigenous culture begins with a lyrical section referring to "father's fields / granny's spirits / mother's tongue" (52) [jadin papa-m / loua grinn mouin / lang manman-m (69)]. He then specifies, "The native-born culture that arose in Saint-Domingue had three major features [that] passed into the very marrow of slaves' bones. Those features were so deeply branded that they traverse our entire History, from Boua Kayiman to this very day [...] They were there in 1804<sup>10</sup> and they were there in 1918<sup>11</sup>. From Boua Kayiman up to the present day, the three features of the native-born culture have been: **land, the Vodou religion, and the Creole language**" (53) [Kilti natif natal ki té lèvé Sindoming lan té gin 3 gro mak fabrik. Mak fabrik sa yo té rantré jouk nan mouèl ésklav yo. Yo té si tèlman fouré tanpon yo fon, yo travèsé tout Istoua nou, dépi Boua Kayiman jouk jounin jodi-a [...].

1804 yo la, 1918 yo la. Dépi Boua Kayiman jouk jounin jodi-a 3 mak fabrik kilti natif natal la sé: **latè-a, rélijion vodou-a, ak lang kréyòl la** (70). Boua Kayiman and Vodou are depicted as the two anchors of Haiti's formation, along with the ideal of land ownership.

A subsequent section of Chapter Four begins, intriguingly: "the *calinda*<sup>22</sup> rhythm is supposed to be drummed" (55) [kali-nda-a la pou l-bat (72)]. This reference to Vodou practice is similarly unproblematic, as Trouillot's ensuing discussion of the ceremony lends credibility and density to the topic:

A week before the slaves started setting things afire, a bunch of rebel leaders held a ceremony in Morne Rouge, in a place called Bwa Kayiman [...]. In that ceremony, Boukman, an *oungan* rebel leader, prayed to God beseeching support for the rebels. We know Boua Kayiman the best, but a lot of other guerrilla leaders organized ceremonies before going off to fight. Biassou used to tell slaves: don't run from death, because if you die the spirits<sup>23</sup> will return you to Igelefe fort in Africa. And that **concept** helped rebel slaves defy dangers. [...]

But that wasn't all. Many of the guerrilla leaders were *oungan* Vodou priests: Boukman, Biassou, Yasint, Lamour Dérance, Romaine-la-Prophétesse... And three-quarters (3/4) of them were *oungan* before becoming guerrilla leaders. Their status as 'papas of the spirits' helped them organize the rebel slaves. We also mustn't forget that *calinda* dances in Saint-Domingue were the only "meetings" slaves had. And so a *calinda* dance was at the same time a cultural celebration, a Vodou celebration and a political "meeting". (56-57)

Youn siminn anvan ésklav yo té kòmansé mét difé-a, youn pakèt kòmandé té fè youn sérémoni nan Mòn Rouj, koté k-rélé Boua Kayiman an [...] Nan sérémoni sila-a, Boukman youn oungan chèf rébèl, té lapriyé Bondié pou soutni rébèl yo. Sé Boua Kayiman n-pi konnin, min anpil lòt chef gériya té fè sérémoni anvan yo tal goumin. Biasou té konn di ésklav yo: pa kouri pou lanmò, pasé si nou mouri loua Ginin yo ap fè n-rétounin Géléfré. É paròl sa-a té ride ésklav rébèl brave danjé. [...]

Min sé pa tout. Bonkou chef gériya yo té oungan: Boukman, Biasou, Yasint, Lamour Dérans, Romèn-la-profètès... É touaka (3/4) nan yo té oungan **anvan** yo té chèf gériya. Pozision papa loua yo-a té ridé yo òganizé ésklav rébèl yo. Fò nou pa bliyé tou, kali-nda Sindoming yo té sèl grinn <<réyinyon>> ésklav yo té ginyin. Ositou kali-nda té youn fèt kiltirèl, youn fèt vodou, youn <<réyinyon>> politik an minm tan (73).

Here, Trouillot's account of Vodou ritual as a springboard for revolution is pointed and detailed, establishing the connections between

political protagonists and religious practices. Parts of the passage above recall *El reino de este mundo*, highlighting the slaves' firm belief in Makandal's lycantropic powers—but then again, Carpentier does not explicitly situate Vodou within the context of history or revolution, highlighting instead the "marvelous" aspects of Haiti's spirit-based religion. *Ti difé boulé* advances a more substantial argument: Vodou lent moral, organizational, and political support to Saint-Domingue's enslaved masses in the absence of formal education, military training, and weapons.

Trouillot then launches a passionate defense of both Vodou and Boua Kayiman, pointing out the effectual, yet misunderstood, qualities of Haiti's native language and religion:

People badmouth Bwa Kayiman in two ways. They say it was just a **political gathering**. They say it was just a **mystical** ceremony. Whether they take it seriously, or whether they take it for mumbo-jumbo, they don't take it for what it was. [...]

Therefore, it wasn't a **political gathering**, which would mean wasting time, speaking French, and competing against one another. What happened was political, but it wasn't **only** political. In any case, it wasn't the **same kind of politics known to most European people**. But the slaves weren't messing around either, and they weren't cracking jokes. It was a **Vodou ceremony** that was **simultaneously** the most important **political oath** they could mutually take before they decided to turn Saint-Domingue upside down.

In 1791, Vodou gave slaves more **conviction** to fight, but it also gave them more **organization**. It was like a sticky glue that bonded them together. (57-58)

Yo bay Boua Kayiman 2 kalité kout lang. Yo di sé té annik youn **kongrè politik**. Yo di sé té annik youn sérémoni **mistik**. Kit yo pran-l pou sérié, kit yo pran-l pou majigridi, yo pa pran-l pou sa l-té yé [...] Kidonk pat gin piès **kongrè** politik, kòm ki dire sousé kréyon, palé franse, fè konkirans. Sé tè politik ki tap fèt, min sé pat politik **sèlman**. Antouka, sé pat politik **minm jan minm manniè ak pi fò mounn an Èròp yo**. Min sé pat lamayòt non plis ésklav yo tap fè, ni joujou lakomédi. Sé té youn **sérémoni vodou** ki té, an minm tan, pi gro **garanti politik** yo té ka pran youn nan min lòt anvan yo té désidé viré Sindoming tèt anba.

An 1791, Vodou-a té bay ésklav yo plis **konviksion** pou yo goumin, min li té ba yo tou plis **òganizasion**, li té tankou youn lakòl lanmidon ki té kolé yo tout ansanm. (74)

This passage makes several monumental claims. First, Trouillot equates Vodou with community, solidarity, clever strategy, and Haitian agency—qualities that the outside world too infrequently associates with Haiti. Vodou thus transcends notions of superstition. Additionally, *Ti difé boulé* posits Haiti's popular religion as an

authentic pillar of Haitian culture, juxtaposed against the ineffectual and foppish French customs, language and bureaucracy that characterized the colonial period. Trouillot's sarcasm also critiques circumstances in present-day Haiti, where administrative language policy continues to exclude a majority of the Kreyòl-speaking population. Lastly, *Ti difé boulé* inscribes Vodou in the larger context of African religions, wherein political and religious power are likewise intertwined and similar versions of the blood pact can be found (including Aja, Fon, Gedevi, Nago, and other West African ethnicities and religions)<sup>24</sup>.

Chapter Four's conclusion presents a significant contrast in terms of tone. After Trouillot examines why the Haitian Revolution was launched in the Northern region, his prose becomes suddenly romantic, its tone at odds with the strident Marxist analysis on the preceding pages:

On August 22, before the masters could even blink their eyes, fire covered the Northern plain. The rallying cry **to fight for freedom** spread throughout the country. For thirteen more New Year's days of fire that rallying cry grew, was subdued, and changed form. Malevolent types seized it for their personal interests. People died for it in 1795, in 1802, 1843, 1918, etc. That rallying cry is still around, but for us to seek it out and recognize it today, we must know what path it traveled from Bwa Kayiman up to 1804. We must understand the tribulations people have suffered, and the resistance they've put up, from 1804 until today. And so little by little, we'll lay rock upon rock until we establish the Vodou Temple of Freedom. Truly. Completely. (60)

Sou vinndézièm jou moua darout, anvan mèt yo gintan bat jé yo, difé kouvri laplinn-di-Nò. Modòd **goumin pou libètè-a** gayé nan tout péyi-a. Pandan 13 joudlan difé, modòd sila-a grandi, li sibi, li chanjé figi. Malvéyan mét min sou li pou intéré pésonel yo. Abitan mouri pou li an 1795, an 1802, 1843, 1918, etc. Modòd sila-a la toujou, min pou n-rivé rékonèt li nan maché chèché kouniéla-a, fò n-konn rout li té fè soti Boua Kayiman rivé 1804. Fò nou rivé konprann tribilasyon pèp la sibi, rouspétay li gayé, dépi 1804 rivé jouk jodi-a. Épi piti piti, n-a pozé ròch sou ròch jouktan n-mété Péristil Libètè-a kanpé. Tout bon vré. Nétalkolé. (77)

This depiction of the Haitian people collectively constructing a "Vodou Temple of Freedom" diverges from Trouillot's otherwise incisive critique of conditions in the former colony of Saint-Domingue. Then again, perhaps he aimed to alternate playfully between analytical and heroic discursive modes. In any case, the above passage neatly bridges the delineation of historical facts in preceding sections of *Ti difé boulé*, and the development of a narrative resonating with

the more epic tendencies of traditional Haitian historiography. The result is a compelling and multifaceted synopsis of the struggle carried out by the formerly enslaved masses.

Circling back to the question of audience, we remember that *Ti difé boulé* specifically addresses a Haitian audience in the grips of the Duvalier dictatorship—both in Haiti and within the growing Diaspora. It is understandable that in composing his first book for a popular Haitian audience, Trouillot, an emerging scholar of anthropology, would have straddled two very different worlds. He likely thought it unnecessary to describe particular aspects of Vodou or supply explanations of spiritual practices, taking for granted that his readership would be at least somewhat familiar with them. Also, in 1977 Trouillot would not necessarily have anticipated the linguistic shifts within the growing and increasingly permanent Haitian Diaspora, rendering Kreyòl a language that Haitian Americans might be unable to read without some study.

*Ti difé boulé* is a vigorous call to action on the part of contemporary Haitians, exposing how recent governmental failures echo abusive behaviors established by the French colonial regime. Trouillot portrays Haiti's struggles as a hereditary illness transmitted over generations that mutates into new forms. As he subsequently argues in *Haiti, State against Nation*, Trouillot suggests that the Haitian people have become accustomed to mistreatment by rapacious leaders; they have accepted political and socio-economic conditions that undercut the nation's wellbeing. He urges Haitians to see themselves as a powerful social force by recognizing their self-alienation and asserting the majority language and culture. Vodou, a cornerstone of this culture, is a force that Haitian political leaders have long sought to channel. *Ti difé boulé* points out how Vodou's power has been harnessed in nefarious ways. Trouillot muses, candidly, in Chapter Two: "Some people [...] use Vodou to take advantage of the Haitian people." (16) [Zòt sévi ak vodou-a [...] pou monté sou do ayisyin. (26-27)] In Chapter Seven, titled "Cousin that's not what you told me" [Kouzin sé pa sa ou té di mouin], he addresses much more explicitly how Vodou was manipulated by the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture as his rise to power became increasingly self-serving. The nascent yet predatory Haitian state—which Louverture's ideology came to epitomize—began to exploit the people as a matter of course; they normalized their actions through the discourse of "family" relationships. Louverture, a revolutionary icon, of course required no background explanation for a Haitian audience; Trouillot sought to critique tendencies towards hero-worship.

Chapter Seven focuses upon the period of 1793-1799, with Louverture consolidating his power. What divided him from the masses was chiefly the economic aspect of independence. In his business dealings with foreign powers Louverture allied himself with the upper class and military interests, neglecting the former slaves' interests. His rallying cry of "Freedom for All" [Libèté Jénéral] did not imply that the formerly enslaved masses could enjoy autonomy or freely cultivate edible crops on their own properties. To the contrary: Louverture, as controller of the former colony, im-

posed import and export taxes that benefited European countries and the United States instead of Haitians; U.S.-built warehouses mushroomed on the capital's wharf, and Saint-Domingue remained economically dependent. The formerly enslaved population did not benefit from growing the sugar, coffee or cotton that they were required to produce during Louverture's reign; those who planted edible crops such as bananas, potatoes, yams, etc. were punished. To make matters worse, Louverture required that the ex-slaves "respect" the integrity of former plantations by continuing to live and work on them, while he distributed free land to rebel officers. The idea of "freedom" thus lost its resonance amongst the masses.

Trouillot subsequently argues that members of the State of Saint-Domingue and the ruling class gained economically, at the expense of the ex-slave workers; from this point on, the Haitian State sat heavily upon the new nation. *Ti difé boulé* signals a host of conflicts that emerged, with religion among them: "Dependence versus Independence, Plantations versus Food Plots, Commodity crops versus Food crops, White versus Black, Mulatto versus Black, Mulatto versus White, Catholic versus Vodou, French versus Creole..." (137; emphasis mine) [Dépandans/Indépandans, Bitasion/Ti jadin, Danré/Viv, Blan/Nouè, Milat/Nouè, Milat/Blan, Katolik/Vodou, Fransé/Kréyòl...] (177; emphasis mine). Trouillot reminds readers that a true revolution produces profound social changes, inverting the old social order; and the former slaves should have all become property owners. Unfortunately, the competing revolutionary leaders stunted this possibility, neglecting the needs of the poor majority. While Haiti's 1801 Constitution abolished slavery and ostensibly guaranteed universal freedom (Articles 3, 4, and 5), it reinforced existing social conflicts by prohibiting fieldworkers from leaving the plantations: for example, Article 16 granted the governor the authority to take police action to prevent people from escaping. This was not freedom. Trouillot subsequently jests: "a bull won't fit in a goatskin" (142) [bèf pa rantré nan po kabrit] (182). This is a reference to two animals ritually sacrificed (and consumed) during Vodou ceremonies, with the bull being the most significant and precious offering of all—akin to freedom itself, Trouillot seems to imply—which should not be degraded.

Despite its playful tone, *Ti difé boulé* exposes Louverture's use of Vodou in his power grab—at least to some degree. Trouillot argues that the Haitian state, as established by Louverture, was simultaneously a *vèvé*,<sup>25</sup> tracing the path of its elements, and an oppressive Gordian knot, where the complex and twisted socio-economic contradictions favoring a certain class within the ex-colony were inscribed. Just as a *vèvé* outlines the personalities of each individual *lwa* (spirit) and its path at the beginning of a Vodou ceremony, the Haitian state charts the complex and contradictory patterns inherent in its social codes, laying the foundation for all sanctioned activity in the society. Fragile yet profound, *vèvé* images orient Vodou practitioners within space and time, affirming their relationships with the spirits and the secular world. The State-as-*vèvé* serves a similar purpose, asserting the rules of engagement

between the Haitian people and the government; the intricate and frequently contradictory regulations within the Constitution dictate how society functions.

Besides being a *vèvé* and a Gordian knot choking off the life of the people, the Haitian state also plays the role of "counterweight" [poua 50], balancing the society's internal conflicts (and recalling the chains worn by enslaved people). Trouillot warns his fellow Haitians: "And so we shouldn't be surprised if we see the 1801 Constitution as chock-full of contradictions. It tied peasants to the table legs of plantation owners, yet it 'guaranteed freedom' to each citizen. It gave Catholic practitioners a greater voice than Vodou initiates (articles 6-7-8), yet it proclaimed that the law treats everyone the same way, without bias. It gave the governor the right to arrest any person under suspicion (Article 40), yet it also proclaimed that all citizens have the right to request which judge will judge them (Article 42)" (140) [Ositou, fò nou pa sézi si nou ouè Konstitisyon 1801-an chajé ak kontradiksyon. Li maré kiltivatè nan pié tab mèt-bitasyon, min li <<garanti libètè>> chak sitouayin. Li bay katolik pratikan lavoua sou inisié vodou (atik 6-7-8) min li di laloua manyin tout mounn minm jan, san patipri. Li bay gouvènè-a doua arété ninpòt ki mounn ki sispèk (atik 40), min li di tout sitouayin gin doua réklamé ki jij ki pou jijé yo (atik 42)] (180-181). Turning again to Vodou, Trouillot explains how the Haitian state has maintained its power from the very beginning.

The final function of the State—that of *chwal*<sup>6</sup>—explicitly draws from Vodou tradition:

The conflicts in the society sit astride the State, and they lend it a mouth to speak. Quite often, the ideas aren't clear, that is, the words are like ritual language in Vodou ceremonies, because the State pressures each conflict and power that it appropriates from all the other conflicts. It plays this role to give society an appearance of balance. But let's suppose that one conflict speaks up so forcefully that it threatens that balance? [...] This conflict (this force) appears as a wild *loua* that isn't inscribed in the *vèvé*, one that takes over [possesses] a *chwal*. This *chwal* is the State, yes, it is! (141)

Kontradiksyon sosiété-a chévoché Léta, yo prété diòl li pou pale. Byin souvan, paròl sila-a pa klè, paròl sila-a kòm ki diré youn paròl langaj, pasé Léta fè fòs sou chak kontradiksyon ak kouray li pran nan min tout lòt kontradiksyon yo. Li fè travay sa-a pou mété youn sanblan ékilib nan sosiété-a. Min, asipozé youn kontradiksyon louvri bouch li si tèlman fò li minnasé ékilib sa-a? Kontradiksyon sila-a (fòs sila-a) parèt tankou youn loua ki déréfizé pakou vèvé-a épi ki parèt anvan lè-l. Kontradiksyon sila-a parèt tankou youn loua bosal ki p at inskri nan vèvé-a épi k-fè dappiyanp sou youn choul. Choul sila-a, sé Léta, oui! (181-82)

In this extended passage Vodou is deployed in several ways: as metaphor, as part of an historical account, and as a translation of Haitian culture writ large. Tapping Haiti's rich and vivid religious imagery, Trouillot makes his revisionist historical analysis resonate with many Haitians. In this case, he shows exactly how Louverture forced peasant workers to carry out his own vision of economic development for the former colony, casting Louverture's neocolonial policies in terms that the Haitian peasantry can understand, but stopping short of explaining the revolutionary leader's own relationship to Vodou. Louverture effectively paved the way for other Haitian leaders seeking to display an inherent right to govern and control the people, harnessing a range of religious beliefs to his own end (a tendency which is certainly not unique to Haiti):

To mask the conflicts, big shots in Europe as well as regional leaders in Africa commonly used the ploy of making political power appear to have supernatural origins. This ploy that it was God who kept each person in her or his place, and it was God who gave the team in power dominance over the rest of society. To maintain that disguise, Toussaint drew on **both the Catholic religion and the Vodou religion**. Even while he was crushing Vodou [...], the rumor ran through Saint-Domingue that Toussaint was a *makandal*. That is, he was everywhere at once. That is, he knew all that went on. [...But just] as Vodou organizations had spread disrespect for the former system and former "leaders," they also refused to bow their heads before Louverture's regime. [...] So Louverture's general staff attacked Vodou groups because those groups threatened their political power. But Louverture's Ideology propped itself up on religion (both Christian and Vodou) to disguise that political power as a magical power, a special power that supernatural forces (either God or the spirits) gave the uncle<sup>27</sup> so he could run the country. (158-160)

Pou maské kontradiksyon yo, ni grandon an Èròp, ni chèf tribi an Afrik yo, té konn fè youn mannigèt asavoua pouvoua politik gin youn rasi-n sinatirèl. Mannigèt sila-a prètann di sé Bondié ki mòt chak moun nan plas yo, sé Bondié ki bay ékip ki opouvoua-a dominans sou rèz sosiyete-a. Pou soutni déjizman sa-a, Tousin té joué **ni sou rélijion katolik la, ni sou rélijion vodou-a**. Atout li tap krazé vodou [...] bri tap kouri nan Sindoming asavoua Tousin té youn makandal. Kòm ki diré li té toupatou alafoua. Kòm ki diré l-té konn tou as k-tap pasé [...] Minm jan òganizasyon vodou yo té simin déréspektans kont anyin sistèm nan ak anyin <<chef>> yo, sé minm jan an yo pat bésé tèt dévan réjim Louvét-a. [...] Kidonk, étamajò Louvét-a té frapé group vodou yo pasé group sila yo té minnasé pouvoua politik yo-a. Min Idéyoloji

Louvèti-a té piyé kò-l sou larélijion (ni krétyin ni vodou) pou déjizé pouvoua sila-a tankou youn pouvoua majik, youn pouvoua éspésial fòs sinatirèl yo (kit Bondié, kit loua yo) té bay tonton an pou dirijé pèyi-a. (200-202)

Although historians debate the extent to which Louverture practiced Catholicism over the course of his life, he unquestionably hijacked Vodou's subversive capacities for his own political ends and opted in one case to smash a rival organization that was grounded in popular religious beliefs (at other moments he left Vodou groups alone). The attack on Vodou by the Haitian state-under-development served as a precedent for continued exploitation of Haiti's people on the part of an ostensible, paternal protective figure—such as François Duvalier, who goes unnamed<sup>28</sup>.

*Ti difé boulé* acknowledges that Louverture's subsequent capture by the French motivated the *rasin* (roots, i.e., the Haitian masses) to stand up and fight for independence from France, which ultimately did lead to universal freedom. Thus, living up to the surname of "Louverture" that was given him, Toussaint indeed opened the gate to independence and warrants appreciation for that. When one revisits the ideology of Toussaint Louverture, and concurrently that of the state of Saint-Domingue, one must not forget that, despite all its weaknesses, *Libèté "Jénéral"* (Freedom for All) was originally a powerful unifying factor, meriting recognition. In *Ti difé boulé's* conclusion Trouillot avers, "[Toussaint] knew where he wanted to go, but he got lost on the way" (168) [Li té konn koté l-té vlé rivé, min li té pèdi nan chimin" (211). To his credit, Louverture's experience demonstrated that liberty without political independence was a senseless notion, and others (such as Dessalines) were able to subsequently capitalize on this lesson.

Trouillot suggests that, more than 170 years after the revolution, the task of bringing about real social change in Haiti—and seeing the ambitions of the Revolution fulfilled—is incomplete. Readers may infer that the stagnant socio-economic and political situation in Haiti that he describes in 1977 stems not only from the unfulfilled promises of the Revolution and War for Independence, but also to the escalating damages wreaked upon the Haitian nation by the Duvalier regime and its manipulative cronyism coupled with its totalitarian indigenist ideology; other factors of course involved power-grabbing by mixed-race people in the preceding decades, the U.S. occupation, and economic manipulation by the U.S. and other foreign governments. Advancing Vodou and Kreyòl as centerposts of Haitian culture, and *potomitan*s for broader discourses of liberation, *Ti difé boulé* makes the case that the transformative potential of Vodou and Kreyòl will help Haitians chart a path to true sovereignty, carrying out the promises of the country's unfinished Revolution. Trouillot's first book embeds the Revolution in Vodou discourse in an approach that helps counter misunderstandings of Haiti's history, but his treatment of Vodou simultaneously elevates and to some degree eclipses the religion at times, leaving many open questions.

### Haitian Vodou after *Ti difé boulé*

Whether in the Haitian language or in English translation, *Ti difé boulé sou istoua Ayiti* exposes the beauty, power, and vibrancy of Haitian culture to a local and international readership while retaining Vodou's opacity with respect to outside readers. That Trouillot does not articulate the elemental principles of Vodou beliefs and practices is understandable given the Haitian readership that his study originally targets. But given that his argument about Haiti's revolution relies so heavily upon Vodou as a social force in Haiti's development, it is notable that *Ti difé boulé* scarcely touches on characteristics of individual *lwa*, the role and work of the priesthood, and important institutions of Vodou spiritual practice such as initiation. A glance at Trouillot's sources is similarly revealing.

The oral, informal, and often playful tone maintained in *Ti difé boulé*, together with the absence of notes or bibliographic references, belies the extensive research upon which Trouillot bases his first book. The bibliography lists over fifty published sources in both French and English, including classic Haitian historical works such as Thomas Madiou's multivolume *Histoire d'Haiti* (1847-1848), Beaubrun Ardouin's *Études sur l'histoire d'Haiti* (1958; orig. 1853-1860), and Pauléus Sannon's *Histoire de Toussaint Louverture* (1920-1933). Trouillot also cites important contemporary studies, including C.L.R. James' seminal *The Black Jacobins* (1963), *Prospectives d'Histoire* (1961) by his father, Ernst Trouillot, and *Économies et finances de Saint-Domingue* (1965) by his uncle, Hénock Trouillot. The vast majority of titles concern Haiti's history and major historical figures like Toussaint Louverture, Henri Christophe, Napoleon I, and Sonthonax. There is almost nothing on Haiti's religion, however; this relative lack of depth and detail on Haiti's popular religion is puzzling, given how prominently *Ti difé boulé* features Vodou as a symbol.

Particularly curious with respect to Trouillot's bibliography is that under the name of the eminent Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars (1876-1969), there appears "*Le Phénomène et le Sentiment religieux chez les nègres de Saint-Domingue nan Une étape de l'évolution Haïtienne* (san dat) [undated]." Why just this short piece? Price-Mars is best known for his essay collection, *Ainsi Parla L'Oncle: Essais d'Ethnographie* (1928), which he published during the oppressive U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). The foundational text, which documents and celebrates Haiti's African cultural heritage, including the Vodou religion, helps launch the Haitian Indigenist movement and also participates in the wider Negritude movement. Trouillot would certainly have been familiar with Price-Mars' most prominent publication; in composing *Ti difé boulé* perhaps he simply opted to focus on a text specifically addressing Haitian religion within the colonial context, notwithstanding its lesser-known status. But even if Trouillot did not seek to educate his Haitian readership about basic aspects of Vodou—rather, to use Vodou as a lens for symbolizing aspects of Haitian politics, and to underline Vodou's role in early revolutionary events such as Boua Kayiman—why does he not at

least mention Métraux's well-known study (1968) *Vaudou haïtien*, or Laënnec Hurbon's (1972) *Dieu dans le vaudou haïtien*, with which he surely was also familiar? Other accessible sources on Haitian religion, that Trouillot could easily have known and referenced, would have been work on Vodou by Claude Planson, or Maya Deren's infamous (1953) *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti*. Given that in *Ti difé boulé* Trouillot corrects misconceptions of Haitian history and culture, and, given Vodou's arguably central part within Haiti's national imaginary and collective consciousness, it stands out—at least to me—that his bibliographic sources bypass the subject.

Does this absence subtly play out in terms of larger, lingering misunderstandings about Haiti? Such a question is impossible to answer; in any case, that *Ti difé boulé* has had a low profile to date would indicate otherwise. Some forty years after the publication of Trouillot's first book, the task of correcting misunderstandings of Haiti in general, and the vibrant Vodou religion in particular, clearly remains. On the one hand, despite Haiti's centuries of political and economic marginalization, unjust international media treatment of the January 2010 earthquake, and noxious discourses in the present-day United States, the world's first black republic has occupied a pivotal position. And though Haiti is not often associated with Latin America, as Paul Farmer notes, in many ways it is the "most representative of Latin American republics" (123). Joel James Figarola sees Haiti as a microcosm of the tensions and conflicts arising in the Caribbean region beginning with European conquest of the Americas, to anticolonial independence wars (123). And cycles of liberation and exploitation involving Vodou continue to resonate with post-colonial conflicts elsewhere in the Americas.

On the other hand, inside and outside of Haiti, Vodou is increasingly coming under attack. In an essay "Religion in Post-earthquake Haiti" that appeared in Martin Munro's edited collection *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010*, Leslie Desmangles and Elizabeth McAlister express concern for the fact that more and more foreign NGOs controlled by Protestants and evangelicals have taken root in Haiti, actively seeking to suppress Haiti's indigenous religion. The volume highlights the significant discursive shift brought about by the earthquake: "In the realm of theology, for example: *vodou* rituals, conducted in the open, exposed practitioners to the outside world, with disapproving, American-trained evangelicals openly attacking. That new, conservative religious aid groups try to 'save souls before lives,' tying food aid to conversion, made the Haitian writer and artist Frankétienne voice fears that *vodou*, a source of creative strength for Haitians and their culture, is increasingly threatened by fundamentalist Protestants and other NGOs seeking to capitalize upon the earthquake" (Past, "Review of *Haiti Rising*" 150). *Haiti Rising* highlights the problem of what Bellegarde-Smith describes as "capitalisme sauvage," along with the increasing social divides in Haiti that were exacerbated by the earthquake, which writer Evelyne Trouillot (sister to Michel-Rolph) laments, signaling that such projects strip away Haitian agency. Vo-

dou has historically afforded Haitians a sense of agency and solidarity given its inclusive, accessible approach with flexibility regarding gender roles.

In Haiti and the wider Haitian diaspora in Florida, New York, New Jersey, Boston, Montreal, and Paris, Vodou is simultaneously a religion like any other, and much more. It is a way of life, a spiritual system, and a fount of creative inspiration. Bellegarde-Smith notes Vodou's importance "in most art forms such as music, dance, the plastic arts, and oral literature, as befits a system that is also the culture's repository for social thought, organization and ideology" ("Resisting" 103). Along with Kreyòl, Vodou in and of itself represents a *potomitan*, a central nexus and support. The Haitian state has not historically been either strong or supportive, and the Haitian people have never depended upon it. They have long depended upon Vodou. Through centuries of enslavement in Saint-Domingue, to complex revolutionary efforts, nineteenth- and twentieth-centu-

ry turbulence, the rubble of 2010, and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti's popular religion has provided a source of strength and freedom. In the contemporary moment, Vodou—as Haiti's social fabric, and as creative and spiritual foundation—bears recognition and understanding more than ever for its pivotal position within the Caribbean and the larger American region. However short on detail and undeveloped may be Trouillot's treatment of Vodou within *Ti difé boulé sou istoua Ayiti*, his first book warrants further critical consideration because of how accessibly and profoundly it intermingles history and a forceful defense of Haiti's popular religion, radically articulated via the Haitian language. Having nurtured revolutionary efforts at home and beyond, as well as sustained a population across centuries of exploitation, Vodou and Kreyòl arguably remain vital and vibrant aspects of America's heritage.

## NOTES

1 Spellings have varied widely, from "vaudou," "vaoudou," "vodun," "vodoun," and "vodou," to the often but not always pejorative "voodoo." Although Trouillot writes "vodou" in *Ti difé boulé*, I employ "Vodou" to reflect contemporary scholarship on the religion and culture. Scholars generally agree that the Vodou religious tradition bears classification among world religions alongside Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and others (see Hebblethwaite *et al* 2012). This essay refers to the Haitian language as "Kreyòl" in accordance with Haiti's 1979 efforts to standardize spellings. All English translations are from *Stirring the Pot of Haitian History* (Past and Hebblethwaite, Liverpool UP, 2001). Kreyòl quotations are from Trouillot's original text (1977).

2 Generally speaking, historians tend to accept that the time frame of the Haitian Revolution spans the years from 1791—beginning with the legendary ceremony of Bois-Caïman in the Northern province—to 1804, when Dessalines declared the new republic's independence from France. However, both Trouillot and Juan Bosch—in *La ocupación haitiana*, published in his *Obras completas* (Santo Domingo: Editora Corripio, 1989-[1991])—posit 1789 as a starting date, noting the large influence that the French Revolution had upon the turn of events in Haiti (and vice-versa). Regarding the ending of the revolutionary period: most accounts of the Haitian Revolution acknowledge that 1804 in no way marked an absolute conclusion, given that widespread social and political unrest prevailed for several decades to come. For his part, Trouillot proposes 1820, the year of the King Henri Christophe's suicide, as a closing date for the revolutionary era.

3 Venezuela declared independence from Spain on July 5, 1811, and subsequently established independence in 1821 as part of La Gran Colombia; sovereignty was achieved in 1830. That President Alexandre Pétion of Haiti lent military and economic support to Bolívar's early campaign was not widely publicized at the time, or since.

4 This information appears on the Institute's website, within a section entitled "Statistiques Démographiques et Sociales": [http://www.ihsi.ht/rgph\\_resultat\\_ensemble\\_population.htm](http://www.ihsi.ht/rgph_resultat_ensemble_population.htm).

5 Maximilien writes, "Les cérémonies de l'Église [...] sont considérées comme la partie ouverte aux profanes et le côté essentiellement vodouesque comme la partie réservée aux initiés" (translation mine).

6 See Yvonne Payne Daniel's "Public vodun ceremonies in Haiti" videorecording (New York: Insight Media, 2000-2009).

7 See Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), for example; also, among hundreds of feature films about zombies, one might see Halperin's "White Zombie" (1932), Romero's multi-sequel "Night of the Living Dead" (1968), de Ossorio's "Blind Dead" series (1970s), and Brugués' "Juan of the Dead" (2010).

8 Carolyn Fick notes that the participation of the masses in the Haitian Revolution is rarely studied (1-2).

9 Dubois suggests that the goal of Trouillot's first book was to "bridge the gap between the French language historiography written by Haitian intellectuals and the historical knowledge propagated in these other ways [...] Bridging that gap was part of a larger attempt to bridge the chasm between elite and popular Haiti, to seek out the foundations for political alliances that could help generate a truly participatory democracy in the country" ("Éloge" 26-27).

10 On January 1, 1804, revolutionary leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti's independence from France.

11 Here Trouillot references the period of Haiti's occupation by U.S. forces, 1915-1934.

12 Freeman and Laguerre note that "kalinda" are "nocturnal dances before [the Haitian] Revolution (probably serving to conceal outlawed Vodou ceremonies)" (340).

13 The *Lwa Ginen* ("African Spirits") are Vodou spirits transmitted within families.

14 Gilbert Rouget (2001) and Roger Brand (2000) discuss blood and the blood pact as essential features of Vodou and Dahomian religion.

15 In Haitian Vodou ceremonies *vèvè* are ritual designs traced with flour on the ground of worship spaces to invoke one or more spirits; they are also traced at crossroads and entryways for religious and protective purposes.

16 The horse ("choual" / "chwal") figure is a "Vodouist in a trance; victim, slave; unbaptized person" (Freeman & Laguerre 2002, 142).

17 Trouillot's use of the term "tonton" here can be understood straightforwardly as "uncle" or "old man", which connects to the previously discussed notion of the "family" disguise worn by Toussaint's ideology. It also resonates with the infamous *Tonton Makout*, or government-sponsored assassins in Haiti during the (1957-1986) Duvalierist regime, the period when Trouillot himself escaped to the United States.

18 See pp. 189-191 in Trouillot's *Haiti: State Against Nation* for a discussion of Duvalier's explicit infiltration of Vodou communities.

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