

# Gede and Homosexuality

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This article argues that the Haitian Vodou spirits (*lwas*) of fertility and death, Gede, do not promote homosexuality or the fluidity of sexuality in Haitian culture. The latter position is a Western reading of Gede grounded in postmodern and post-structural identity theorizing. Gede in Haitian ontology and epistemology is *lwas* of fertility and death not sexual identity confusion or fluidity.

**Keywords:** structurationism, praxis, panpsychism, social class language game, phenomenological structuralism, ORCH-OR theory, univon multiverse hypothesis, free-will, determinism, Haitian epistemology, consciousness field theory, Conscious Electromagnetic Information theory (CEMI), psychion, psychon, Vodou, Haitian Studies

## Introduction

Normally referred to as “animism”, “fetishism”, “paganism”, “heathenism”, and “black magic” in the Western academic literature, Vodou (spelled Vodun, Voodoo, Vodou, Vaudou, or Vodoun) is the oldest monotheistic religion, science, and form of life, in the world (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992; Bellegarde-Smith & Michel, 2006; Mocombe, 2016; 2019b). 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 (Bellegarde-Smith & Michel, 2006; Mocombe, 2016; 2019b). Vodou is a form of life, what Mocombe (2016; 2019b) calls “the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism”, that seeks to provide the human being with a balance between the lived-world (profane) and the unseen world (sacred) out of which everything emerged. In Vodou, the rhythm and balance of the world, its Schumann wave, is directed by the rhythm of the drums; their rhythmic beats (*rit*) either connects human practical consciousness to its universal rhythm/wavelength as organized around the agricultural mode of production, or in combination with other sounds gives them access to the psychonic wavelengths (*lwas*) of other beings and concepts throughout the multiverse, which are called to appear in Vodou ceremonies and rituals in order 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 Haitian Vodou physic and metaphysic (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992; Bellegarde-Smith & Michel, 2006; Mocombe, 2016; 2019b). God, *bondye bon* or *Gran met la*, created the *lwas* as concepts and beings to serve as intermediaries between itself and human beings in order to assist them in living out their lives in the material worlds (*bondye* created multiple worlds). The *lwas* manifest in the physical world through the spirit possession (*monte*) of an individual to assist human beings in all facets, i.e., love, health, wealth, war, revenge, etc., of their material existence (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992). There is no moral right or wrong in Vodou; the aim is to achieve balance and harmony, 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 (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992; Mocombe, 2019b). The lwas, in essence, are epistemological (universal and objective) concepts that assist human beings in recursively (re) organizing and reproducing their being-in-the-world.

The Gede lwas of fertility and death assist Vodou communities in maintaining a reproducible balance between human beings in the material world and the ancestors of the afterlife (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992). Human beings must be sexually active and fertile to reproduce ancestor spirits from the afterlife into the material world of the living in order to perpetuate the cycle of life. This article argues that the Haitian Vodou spirits (lwas) of fertility and death, Gede, do not promote homosexuality or the fluidity of sexuality in Haitian culture. The latter position is a Western reading of Gede grounded in postmodern and post-structural identity theorizing where indeterminacy and decentering predominates over the determinacy of traditional science and structuralism. Haitian metaphysics and epistemology are based on the latter not the former, and it is within the scientific episteme of the latter that Gede must be understood (Mocombe, 2019b). Gede is lwas of fertility and death not sexual identity confusion or fluidity, which Vodou does not accept. Vodou posits that homosexuality is an anomaly that occurs in nature, and its practitioners should not be oppressed or killed for the behavior. In fact, in Vodou metaphysic, Ezili Dantor is the protector lwa of women, children, homosexuals, and lesbians. That does not mean that the behavior is condoned or promoted in Vodou. Homosexuality and lesbianism are identified as anomalies of life, and their practitioners ought to be protected, not discriminated against or harmed. Gede, unlike Dantor, is not associated with homosexuality or lesbianism. Gede more so gives us an ontological insight into the nature of death, life, and procreation, rather than sexual identity; sexuality is promoted in relation to procreation and death, not sexual identity confusion and fluidity.

### Background of the Problem

Traditional interpretations of the Haitian Revolution, subsequent to the constitution of Haitian identity, attempt to understand them, like the constitution of black diasporic and American practical consciousnesses, within the dialectical logic of Hegel's master/slave dialectic (Du Bois, 2004; 2012; Mocombe, 2016). Concluding that the Haitian Revolution represents a struggle by the enslaved Africans of the island who internalized the liberal norms, values, and rules of their former French masters, for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution within and using the metaphysical discourse of their former white slave/masters to convict them of not identifying with their norms, rules, and values as recursively (re) organized and reproduced by blacks. From this perspective, Haitian identity/practical consciousness, as such, was and is a simulacrum, of European practical consciousness and identity, which is universalized and presented as the nature of reality as such. This position, predominantly held by white Westerners, is usually juxtaposed against the postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial approaches of whites, Haitians, and other black bourgeois intellectual elites (i.e., Aimé Césaire), which highlight the hybridity, ambivalence, *négritude*, syncretism, and *créolité* of the Revolution and Haitian consciousness and identity (Fick, 1990; Desmangles, 1992; Trouillot, 1995; Bellegarde-Smith & Michel, 2006; Mocombe, 2016).

### Theory and Method

Both interpretations, contrary to the position of Haitian intellectuals such as Jacques Roumain and Jean-Price Mars, who advised the Haitian intelligentsia class to look to the provinces and the peasant classes to constitute Haitian culture, identity, and nation-state, are problematic in that they are ethnocentric and racist (Du

Bois, 2012; Mocombe, 2019b). They both overlook the universality of the initial African practical consciousness, what Mocombe (2016) calls “the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism,” of the majority of the Africans on the island for either the practical consciousness or discourse and discursive practices of the mulatto and petit-bourgeois black elites, *Affranchis*, looking (because of their interpellation and embourgeoisement) to Europe, Canada, and America for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution, or for their (*Affranchis*) logic of postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial theories to undermine the logic and semantics (“Haitian epistemology”) of that African presence in favor of notions of hybridity, *créolité*, *négritude*, fluidity, syncretism, intersectionality, double consciousness, etc. This latter position dominates the academy today as highlighted by the application of postmodern and post-structural epistemology to understanding Vodou logic, concepts, and processes against the scientific ontology and epistemology of Haitian metaphysic, physis, axiology, and epistemology as highlighted by the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism of the African people of Haiti (Mocombe, 2016; 2019b).

The linguistic turn in meaning and identity constitution, whether in linguistics or the social sciences, presupposes that meaning and the nature of human identity or consciousness is nothing more than the relationships which pertain within a given linguistic system, structure, culture, or social structure. Thus, such questions as those pertaining to matters of human agency, individual or shared interests, community, etc., have generally been ignored by so-called “structuralists” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 383). This in turn makes most structural approaches synchronic; that is, most structuralists approach a phenomenon at a single moment in history, or as something existing outside history, which is unchanging.

It is well known that Ferdinand de Saussure in linguistics, to Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, and Talcott Parsons and Louis Althusser in sociology postulate this synchronic world ordered into an interconnected semiotic system. In Saussurean structuralism, which serves as the model for the social sciences, language “is viewed as a purely arbitrary system of signs in which *parole* or speech is subsidiary to *langue*, the formal dimension of language. *Parole* is the world’s messiness that the semiotic order [or formal dimension] shuns” (Obeyesekere, 1997 [1992], p. 18), subjecting social actors to its binary rules that give them their conceptual framework, rather than the other way around (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Marshall, 1998; Saussure, 1972 [1916]).

In anthropology, Lévi-Strauss extends this idea to culture, and culture too becomes a system of external signs, which reflect the structure or categories of the mind, exercised in social relations to order experience (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 279). Just the same, in sociology Talcott Parsons employs the notion of structure or system to refer to modern capitalist society as an “organic” whole or totality consisting of interrelated parts (i.e., structurally differentiated) that perform specific functions in relation to each other and contribute to the maintenance of the whole, i.e., structural functionalism (Parsons, 1951, pp. 5-6). The structural Marxism of Louis Althusser and many others replaces both Parsons’s conservative holism and Levi-Strauss’s mental (cultural) categories by positions in modes of production and relations to the means of production for the structure or system that governs meaning and gives social actors their conceptual framework (Althusser, 2001 [1971]).

The logical consequence of the adoption of the Saussurean position by Lévi-Strauss, Parsons, and Althusser in philosophy and the social sciences, however, is the implication that human action, or consciousness, lies in the reproduction of the relational (binary rules for inclusion and exclusion) objective models of society as either structured by our minds, or the external interrelated structures of signification as internalized by social actors. Therefore, to understand human social agency, one only needs to understand either how the mind structures reality (transcendental idealism), or the differentiating rules of a culture, social structure, or social system.

Both positions, however, are problematic. In the psychologism of the former case, social structure reflecting the structure of the mind, social practice or action and its variability are inconceivable in that there is no analytical means to explain how the internal “binary” processes of the mind give rise to the external empirical phenomena of social structures, practices, and their variabilities. In the latter case, structure or social structure as a reflection of the internalization of external functional structures of signification, i.e., part/whole relationship, the possibility for, and the origins of, the variability of practices, which have ontological status in the world, amongst irreducibly situated subjects, is inconceivable, as human subjects or social actors are only reproducing in their actions the relational meaning and representation of the external objective social world (society), without any alternative practices, deviations, or improvisations outside of the structural differentiation of the social structure.

Moreover, since the 1960’s with the advent of postmodern and post-structural theories, with their emphasis on *Parole*, into the theoretical discourses of social science academics, a new struggle regarding the origins and nature of identity and consciousness vis-à-vis the aforementioned problematics has dominated social science and philosophical theories. The issue centers on several factors raised by postmodern and post-structural thinkers in the likes of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan against the structuralism of the sciences: (1) They question the validity regarding the Cartesian rational individual, which Foucault and Derrida deny in favor of their attempt to dissolve the subject altogether; (2) they question the interdependency of the constitution of a stable structure and a distinct subject with agency, in denying the latter they undermine the former; (3) they question the status of science; (4) finally, they question the possibility of the objectivity of any language of description or analysis.

Contemporarily, interpretations of Vodou concepts, processes, and logic have been viewed within this latter postmodern and post-structural logic, which I argue here is problematic (Mocombe, 2016; 2019a; 2019b). Vodou concepts, processes, and logic must be viewed within the structural logic of traditional science. The former, postmodernism and post-structuralism, undermines the structural scientific episteme of Haitian epistemology and ontology, which are not based on post-modern and post-structural notions of indeterminacy and decentering. Instead, the scientific and structural understanding in Haitian epistemology and ontology is that there is an objective world created by *bondye* (God) out of itself that can be known using the four-hundred concepts and processes *bondye* utilized to create the material world (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992; Mocombe, 2019b). Postmodern and post-structural thinking undermine this scientific reading of Vodou for the logic of decentering, indeterminacy, and floating signifiers. In this latter position, McAlister (2004), for example, applies a postmodern and post-structural reading of Gede to suggest that they represent the fluidity of Haitian identity and sexuality. This is an inaccurate reading and imposition of Western (postmodern and post-structural) contemporary philosophical thinking on possession rituals of Gede. Gede, in Haitian ontology and epistemology, is nothing more than the lwas of fertility and death, not homosexuality or the fluidity of sexual identity in Haitian Vodou culture. Sexuality in Gede is posited in relation to fertility and death, not sexual orientation.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In Haitian Vodou physics and metaphysics, *Gede* is the closest lwas to humans. They are ancestors who lived real lives, and now exist in the spiritual afterlife where they claim it is dark, cold, and watery (Deren, 1972; Desmangles, 1992; McAlister, 2004; Mocombe, 2016; 2019b). In Haitian cosmology, they have become a family of lwas that embody the powers of death and fertility. Haitians call upon them for healing, wealth, vengeance, and fertility. They are highly sexualized spirits with a crass sense of humor either sexual in nature or directed at

the political order, both national and international. When embodied by a host, *chawal*, Gede claims to come from a cold body of water, *anba dlo*, where it is dark. Some, such as Papa Gede, are psychopomps, who possess the divine abilities of telepathy, prognostication, and foreknowledge of the worlds of the living and the dead (In Haiti, Papa Gede, the first corpse of material reality who awaits at the crossroads to take spirits to the afterlife, is called upon when children are sick or dying; a *chawal* embodied (*monte*) by him will not take the life of a child before their time). As a result of their dark and cold origins out of water, those embodied by Gede will drink a concoction made of *kleren* (rum) and peppers to warm themselves up, request cigarettes to smoke, don dark shades with one missing lens to protect their sights from the brightness of the material world, utilize a walking stick to symbolize their phallus, and adorn themselves with white powder. They are also known for their high pitch nasal speech (given their water origins), cursing, *betiz*, and provocative dancing where they whine, *gouye*, their hips to the drum rhythm and dance known as *banda*. Gede is celebrated, F   Gede, on the first and second days of November, and their colors are black, white, and purple. Gede's testimonies regarding where they come from in the afterlife and their abilities to prognosticate the future are empirical evidence not to highlight the postmodern and post-structural reading that they represent the fluidity of Haitian identity and sexuality as McAlister (2004) highlights. The latter position is an inaccurate reading and imposition of Western (postmodern and post-structural) philosophical thinking on possession rituals of Gede, which are spirits (energies) that are able to mount, *monte*, both male and female *chawal*, and manifest themselves in the latter as the gender of their past lives.

Gede must be understood within the universality and objectivity of Haitian Vodou metaphysic and epistemology, which is scientific and structural, not postmodern and post-structural tropes of decentering, indeterminacy, and fluidity. Gede, within this former logic, substantiates four claims: (1) Consciousness exists outside of the physical substrates of the brain, one source for the origins of consciousness (which we all return to after all of our lived-experiences); (2) personality persists after life; (3) there is no free-will in the universe/multiverse highlighted by their abilities to prognosticate the future; and (4) sexuality must be understood in relation to procreation and death, i.e., to procreate in order to bring dead ancestors back to the material world of the living and perpetuate the cycle of life. Gede, once embodied, *monte*, by a *chawal* replaces the station of the *chawal*, and when describing their origins, *anba dlo*, from the afterlife, are highlighting the nature of what Mocombe (2016; 2019; 2021a; 2021b) calls the absolute vacuum, the zero-point field where all the elementary particles for all of existence are one; it is a nonlocal space, the state of which is in the form of a cosmic soup that is cold, watery, and contains the phenomenal properties of past, present, and future consciousness as a probability wavefunction. What can be further deduced from the testimonies, telepathy, and prescient abilities of Gede is that our lives and experiences are predetermined, consciousness is nonlocal and transmitted (as a frequency wavelength) from the absolute vacuum to material realities, and personalities are tied to consciousness and persist after life. The human being's role in the material world is to live well and procreate sexually so as to maintain an equilibrium between the living and dead ancestors. That is, as one transitions from the material world to the after-life another life from the latter emerges in the former through sexual intercourse.

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