My broadest interest in this essay is epistemological, tackling the ambiguity of categories, particularly those of identity (individual, community, regional), the multiple referents that categories engage, and the overlapping subjectivities they engender. I frame this concern with an exploration of the concept of cosmopolitanism and what I argue is its relationship with historiography and representation associated with the Caribbean and Muslims in the Americas. I explore this relationship as formed and symbolized by a number of what I see as mutually constitutive regional narratives about the Haitian Revolution’s famous leader, Boukman; African and South Asian Islam; post-9/11 U.S. political debate about both Islam and Vodou/Haiti; and contemporary Caribbean intellectuals’ discourse about regional identity (which includes the significance of the Revolution for the formation of a Caribbean cosmopolitan consciousness, or subjectivity). I argue that although cosmopolitanism can be a valuable discursive strategy in self-reflexive constructions of regional – Caribbean, Atlantic – identity, the concept marginalizes or elides Islam, and in the process leaves only ambiguous space for Africa (even in valorizations of Vodou), and reconfirms traditional popular (and still not altogether challenged academic) conventions that equate religious identity with ethnic group. In exploring these issues I seek new ways to hear silences and see invisibilities by reexamining how Islam is conceptualized as a world historical phenomenon, how Islam is conceptualized in Africa and the Caribbean, and how implicit assumptions – for example, about religion – inform our analytical vocabulary.

Diverse and at times ambiguously categorized peoples have populated the Caribbean, linking the colonizing “West” of Europe with the colonized “East” of Africa and Asia. The heterogeneity of these groups, and the initial “strangerhood” (Olwig 2010:422; Mintz & Price 1992) and modernity (James 1989, Mintz 1996) that characterized their encounters and relationships gave rise to the perception, among Caribbeans and others alike, that this region is the New World’s definitive symbol of cosmopolitanism, and that cosmopolitanism defines the Caribbean. The meanings and significance
of cosmopolitanism are contingent on particular moments in time and place, but scholars of the Caribbean, and Caribbean politicians, artists, and lay publics have interpreted the region as possessing for centuries cosmopolitanism’s salient qualities. As Stuart Hall (2008:351) asserts, “the Caribbean is by definition cosmopolitan.”

In common parlance today, a few key constituent features inform the notion of cosmopolitanism at its broadest: globalism (breadth and duration), heterogeneity (internal variation), and claims of universality (a shared consciousness, envisioned as appropriate for all). Emblematic cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean region has come in many forms and from various angles. For example, Huon Wardle’s (2000:4) ethnography on cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean finds a “creolized Kant” in the Jamaican worldview. David Graeber (2008:290, 299) argues that the notion of “democracy” and “the West” itself are products of the cosmopolitan spaces or “spaces in between” found on Caribbean pirate ships. W.E.B. Du Bois’s (e.g., 1974) commitment to Pan-Africanism and Pan-Asianism contributed to a vision of cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean resonant with his notion of “double consciousness” (Hall 2008:347), modernity, and mixing/creolization. Mary Waters (2001:202) has suggested that Afro-Caribbeans are “perhaps the quintessential postmodern peoples due to their engagement with capitalism, the preponderance of cultural mixing in the region’s “created societies,” and the importance of migration in their lives. Paul Gilroy’s (1993) interest in “routes” as opposed to “roots” envisioned an emphatic modernity in the “Black Atlantic.” Sidney Mintz’s decades-long insights about the quintessential modernity of the Caribbean assert the region’s cosmopolitanism (e.g., Baca, Khan & Palmié 2009). Stephan Palmié’s work on religion and science argues for the comparability, and integration, of Caribbean and European modernities and modes of reason (Palmié 2002). Marguerite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (1997:1) posit that the West increasingly looks to the Caribbean to understand its own growing “eclecticism” and “difference.” And Ifeoma Nwankwo, building on Aimé Césaire (e.g. 1947) and C.L.R. James (e.g. 1989), approaches the Haitian Revolution as giving rise to “Black cosmopolitanism,” or the self-definitions of personhood among peoples of African descent in the wake of the revolution as they engaged new, empowering notions of “Black community” and old, hegemonic ideologies of race (Nwankwo 2005:10-11). Stuart Hall (e.g., 2008) and C.L.R. James (e.g., 1989) also have invested in the idea of the Caribbean as a particularly cosmopolitan space (which I explore in more detail below). These wide-ranging works demonstrate the pliability of the concept of cosmopolitanism in its applications. This essay pushes its applications further, linking cosmopolitanism with other relevant categorical formations, notably, interpretations of religions in the region.
Despite historiographical and ethnographic recognition of Islam’s claim to globalism, heterogeneity, universality,¹ and a “positive freedom” kind of agency (e.g., Mahmood 2005, Rapport 2006), these qualities carry a different register in the context of the New World and contemporary perspectives. The multifaceted practices and uses of Islam in the Atlantic World suggested in the historical record are not reflected in the portrait of Islam drawn in the contemporary period. Rather than foregrounding the “cosmopolitan” character of Islam, representations of the cosmopolitan Caribbean interpret Vodou, embodied in the revolutionary context of Boukman, Makandal, and their comrades, as a harbinger and indicator of cosmpolitanism. Yet these representations of Caribbean cosmopolitanism also leave an ambivalent space for Africa; in the contemporary moment, so does the representation of Caribbean Islam. The role of the idea of cosmopolitanism is a pervasive and multilayered emblem of Caribbean regional identity. As such, I argue, it has shaped the historiography and imagery associated with Muslims in the region. Looking at representations of Islam, the Caribbean, and Muslims in the Caribbean and in the United States, helps us inquire into the way cosmopolitanism both defines the Caribbean (with its emphasis on modernity and creolization) and invites an eliding of African Islam – despite Islam’s being historically approached as cosmopolitan in ways not typically employed in discussions of Vodou. What is it about the configuration of the concept of cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean that has resulted in marginalizing or eliding Islam in the historical record?

Let us begin our exploration of regionally thematic Caribbean narratives with Boukman and his comrades, indispensable emblems of the making of the Afro-Atlantic. Among the most salient interpretive elements of the Haitian Revolution (even if apocryphal in historical terms) is its catalysis into action that is attributed to Boukman. At an alleged secret meeting of fellow slaves in Saint Domingue’s Bois-Caiman forest on an August night in 1791, Boukman purportedly held a “voodoo ceremony,” which presumably included strategizing, and, as the narrative goes, thus launched the Revolution.² Boukman is celebrated as a Haitian religious and political leader whose skill, charisma, commitment, and knowledge helped to change history and assert the dignity and authority of Vodou in the face of its detractors. This representation of Boukman – as a Haitian Vodou priest – is pervasive. However, Boukman also had a relationship with Islam.

My interest is in Boukman’s relationship to Vodou and to Islam, and to his portraiture by scholars, which suggests the complexities and ambiguities characterizing both religious traditions. Boukman’s being Muslim certainly is plausible, but still generates enough contention among scholars (aspects of which I take up below) to not rest quietly as historical truth. Indeed, one could

2. Discussions of these events in terms of their historical likelihood are in, for example, Geggus 2002 and Geggus & Fiering 2009.
say that it constitutes a historical footnote in terms of the dearth of agreed upon information about his identity currently available. Rather than seeking to establish indubitable Muslim identities for historical figures, it is precisely because of historiographical debate that I want to engage what scholars have to say about these figures and their debatable identities, the roles these identities play in configuring the Caribbean as a subject of scholarly attention, and the implications and consequences of this attention—including ambiguities that persist.

Scholars who comment on Boukman’s Muslim identity (e.g., Buck-Morss 2009, Diouf 1998) recount that he was an English-speaking Jamaican, brought to Saint Domingue by a British slaver. “Boukman,” they suggest, was the French approximation of his moniker in English: “Book Man,” called this because he was literate and associated with a particular book—the Quran—of which some say he owned a copy (Buck Morss 2009:141, Diouf 1998:153). These scholars infer that Boukman, therefore, was one of the “people of the book,” those belonging to the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In Africa, Sylviane Diouf (1998:152) tells us, “people of the book” was a reference to Muslims. Although only somewhere between 4 and 14 percent of all Africans who crossed the Atlantic were Muslim (Buck-Morss 2009:141), African Muslims evidently were disproportionately involved, particularly as leadership, in New World slave rebellions (Buck-Morss 2009, Reis 2001). They included the famous Haitian maroon rebel Makandal (Fick 1990:60), and Boukman’s contemporary, the manbo (Vodou priestess) and presumed Muslim, Fatiman or Fatima (Buck-Morss 2009:141, Diouf 1998:229 n. 26, Dubois 2004:100).

Sylviane Diouf (1998:153) asserts that there is “compelling evidence” that Makandal and Boukman “were not only Muslims but also marabouts,” an Arabic title designating a religious scholar, teacher, and religious leader. As marabouts they could provide both military guidance and “spiritual and occult” assurances to those in revolt (Diouf 1998:153). These specialists emerged from a seventeenth- to nineteenth-century West African context rife with reformist jihads directed toward the culling and modification of various sorts of local syncretisms. Religious syncretism and leadership skills were thus already characteristic of West African societies before being transported as part of enslaved Africans’ cultural repertoire to the “New World.” On both sides of the Atlantic, out of these local debates and tensions forms of leadership became increasingly visible and important. Although Africans of all ethno-linguistic and religious groups both led and participated in slave revolts, African Muslims connote a particular association with uprisings. As just one example, in Saint Domingue, Laurent Dubois (2004:56-57) tells us, a “1779 memoir presented Makandal as a ‘Mohammed at the head of a thousand exiled refugees’ who imagined ‘the conquest of the Universe’.”

Importantly, marabouts were also associated with the production and use of gris-gris, or amulets, which figured prominently in the Caribbean, in Saint
Protection by amulet is common in both Africa and the Caribbean. These objects typically consist of small pieces of paper with Arabic writing, folded up and sewn into a small leather pouch or other receptacle that can be worn. They might also consist of other materials: as Laurent Dubois notes, one Antoine Dalmas, for example—Boukman’s contemporary in Saint Domingue and the only one to write about Bois-Caiman at the time—reported that the Bois-Caiman insurrectionists used hairs from the pig that was sacrificed as part of the religious rites as “a kind of talisman that … would make them invulnerable” (Dubois 2004:100). As “part of the occult sciences, which include astrology, divination … and other categories of magic” (Diouf 1998:129), amulets invoke supernatural powers in providing protection to their wearers. They are also, as Diouf (1998:129) avers, literal conveyers of writings in Arabic that communicated messages among Muslims during uprisings. As such, amulets may be seen as a kind of contact zone between Africans, African Muslims, and indigenous Afro-syncretic religions, drawing together, and imbricating, Islam and Vodou.

Another indication of the imbrications of Islam and Vodou is Laurent Dubois’s (2004:100) mention that those assembled at the Bois-Caiman meeting “took an oath of secrecy and revenge, sealed by drinking the blood of a black pig sacrificed before them. It was a form of pact probably derived from the traditions of West Africa.” Dubois (2004:100) tells us that the same commentator, Antoine Dalmas, “portrayed it as the ultimate expression of African barbarism.” Dalmas’s observation reveals an obvious Euro-colonial racism that from the vantage point of current scholarship is not surprising. Yet Dubois himself makes no comment about how the oath was reportedly sealed. One has to wonder what kind of Muslim, not to speak of marabout, would drink animal blood, especially that of a pig. I am not suggesting that Boukman/Book Man and his comrades could not possibly have done this—perhaps they did; it is unlikely that we will ever know for certain. What I am pointing to here is the way in which narratives of Boukman’s identity as a “Muslim” can be overshadowed by those emphasizing his identity as an “African” (e.g., the slave rebels are associated with West Africa separate from Islam), and at the same time his identity as a “Muslim” can overshadow other facets of his identity (e.g., gris-gris are indicative of Muslim African traditions). The way “Islam” looks and what it means, to both practitioners and observers, is vari-

3. My interest is in the connection among prevalent ideas about African Muslims, amulets, and insurrection. In terms of the issues of ambiguity and category formation, worth considering is the question of the extent to which amulet wearers were able to read Arabic, especially its translation into complex (militarily strategic) messages. Moreover, as anthropologist Allyson Purpura points out, amulets, especially those made by marabouts, are comprised of esoteric, symbolic script that is typically indecipherable even to those who do read Arabic (email communication September 26, 2010). Indo-Caribbeans also have amulet traditions, notably amulets called tabeej, which work to safeguard the wearer.
able, depending on a given historical moment and social context, as well as scholarly perspective. It is therefore useful to look closely at any currents of Islamic belief and practice that may have shaped hegemonic forms, as well as at the way scholars have measured the effects of those currents.

Tackling these questions of how Islam is conceived of in the world, in Africa, and in the Caribbean entails some key conceptual challenges. I will reiterate two already noted above: that “Islam” and “Vodou” are not distinguishable in terms of essence but only in terms of contingent classifications, which themselves depend on the perspectives and personages of a given moment; and that the simplification of ambiguity can produce historiographical silences, as particular aspects of phenomena are highlighted over others. A third challenge is that Muslim peoples – Africans and Asians – in the Caribbean have, respectively, four and two centuries of interaction with the West, and, on a global scale, have almost fourteen centuries of engagement with the West (dating from the 7th century A.D.). Even if not direct or immediate, articulation occurs with such quasi-knowledge as stereotypes, rumors, and misrecognitions. This raises a fourth challenge, asked in many ways in other contexts by numerous scholars, notably from the Caribbean (e.g., Rodney 1972, Williams 1964), about how “Western” (i.e., singular, autonomous) the “West” is, being so deeply dependent upon “non-Western” sources as formative influences. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000) point that Third World nationalisms have participated in promulgating the idea of Europe as the apex of progress further underscores both the agency of subalterns and the dialogic relationship that exists among colonizers and colonized. As Barbara Weinstein (2005:89) points out about Latin America, and I would add the Caribbean, the “region’s long history of colonialism and contact” has given rise to “ambivalence about Western vs non-Western identity.”

Each of these challenges serves to remind us why categorical distinctions take special effort, and why, even in “contact zones,” “frontiers,” or “hybrid spaces” – all of which have been employed to characterize the Caribbean – where presumably everything is breaking up and becoming rearranged, some orthodoxies remain. Weinstein (2005:71-73) further pushes my point in her question that since the social sciences and humanities have confronted the “teleological tendencies of the master narrative of the Western/liberal tradition,” and since, as a consequence, the “instability” of the subject, along with the very meanings attributed to our terms and categories, is now given, “whose story are we telling?” In other words, by what means do we identify and pin down our subjects without giving in to either the “hyper-reality” of the West (Chakrabarty 2000) or eschewing moral universals so forceful today? The rutted ground of hyper-realness and moral universals pertains unequivocally to the ways we, scholars and laypersons, come to “know” the Caribbean – its peoples, its essences, and its histories.

With these cautioning challenges in mind, let us continue to draw from narratives in the scholarly literature about African Muslim presence in the
Caribbean. With the exception of the studies cited here (and a few others⁴), what is known about African Muslims in the Caribbean is not abundant relative to the study of other religions, and, like all research, the reportage that does exist must be weighed in terms of perspective and accuracy. The history of the Caribbean is conventionally treated as beginning with massive labor projects involving coerced and voluntary displacements of millions of people. Although these projects were characterized by different forms of organization, success rates, and consequences, as part of the development of European capitalism and empire they can be divided into two broad ventures: slavery and indenture. Resting on the labor of enslaved peoples of West and Central Africa, Caribbean slavery is most commonly associated with Africans, as is, in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americas, Islam. Yet as Brinsley Samaroo (1988) and Carl Campbell (1974) have argued, by the mid-nineteenth century a lively and effective African Muslim presence in the Caribbean had ebbed. Since the 1970s Afro-Caribbean Muslims have been increasing in number and have gained visibility particularly through the growth of racially mixed Muslim religious organizations and through political participation. Although there are no definitive statistics of which I am aware that document the population numbers of Muslims of African descent in the Caribbean, they remain demographically fewer than Indo-Caribbean Muslims and, although acknowledged, are less frequently symbolically associated with Islam in the region.

The number of identified Muslims who settled in the Caribbean between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries was certainly small relative to the millions of peoples in multiple diasporas; nonetheless, their presence was felt, if minimally documented, in ways that belied their numbers. For example, João José Reis states that after Brazil’s abolition of slavery in 1888, “formerly enslaved Muslims could still be found as isolated practitioners of their faith” and that some of these Muslims “became well known as makers of amulets.” While Reis (2001:308) observes that the making of amulets reflected “a very unorthodox Muslim way of life,” he does not draw the conclusion that this unorthodoxy necessarily spelled the end of a “Muslim way of life,” however that might be defined. However, beyond the significance of amulets “and the sporadic presence of Islam in the symbolic realm of Afro-Brazilian religions, mostly in fragmented form, Islam was unable to penetrate the national Afro-Brazilian community,” which Reis (2001:308) states “developed a pluralistic worldview combining Catholicism and African ethnic religions.” At the same time, Reis notes the influence of amulets on the world of the occult in Brazil today. Moreover, although I agree with Reis that it is wise not to overestimate presences of any kind or to imagine them where they do not exist, the notion of “fragmented” forms presumes that fragmentation is both self-evident and

necessarily weaker in effect. But how might that effect be measured? And given the hybrid character of Islam, as Reis describes it, both in West Africa and the Americas, would it not also be “pluralistic”? Might this perspective on orthodoxy and fragmentation reflect the premise that the pluralism of Afro-Catholicism is coherent, while the persistence of Islamic forms is fragmented?

To add to this “pluralistic” conglomeration, when slavery was abolished in the Caribbean, colonial plantocracies needed replacement labor to work the sugar plantations. In the British Caribbean’s post-emancipation era, beginning in 1838, the British colonial government operationalized a labor scheme that tied Indians – largely from Oudh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh – to labor contracts, shipping them to Caribbean sugar plantations in British Guiana (1838) and then to Trinidad (1845), the “bound coolie” system lasting until 1917. Caribbean indenture primarily depended on these “willing” subjects in India. The Victorian tendency to treat religion as metonymic of culture and civilization meant that Hinduism and India were perceived as one, and Islam considered a phenomenon of the Middle East – an “Orient” distinct from India (e.g., Said 1979). However, all Indian indentured labor in the Caribbean were “coolies,” a colonial category for the most part identifying Hindu and Muslim together as “Indian.” “Indians” were symbolized in broad strokes: non-Christian, turbans, loincloths, and unlettered manual toil. When distinguished, they were homogenized into “Hindoo” and “Mahometan Hindoos,” or Muslims (e.g., de Verteuil 1858). Probably the most important context of their differentiation was in identifying religious rites, which colonial authority needed to control (so as not to not impede production) even as they were permitted. Colonial ideology also distinguished Indians from Africans, notably in terms of cultural “progress”: inferior to Euro-Christsians, Indians in general still ranked higher than Africans on the evolutionary scale (e.g., Bolt 1971, Khan 2004). Given what appears to be Afro-Muslims’ statistically small numbers relative to others of the multi-million migrations of the Atlantic slave trade, and what was more certainly a fusion of practices and beliefs difficult to pin down as necessarily distinctly belonging to one religion or another, by the mid-nineteenth century the profile of Afro-Muslims in the Caribbean had receded, giving way to an association of Islam with Indian immigrants and their progeny.

A process of what we might call ideological homogenization occurred in this Indo-Caribbean diaspora, where the regional, linguistic, and religious diversity of Indian immigrants was reduced to a selected few identifying categories, reflecting in part the demographic majority of certain regional, linguistic, and religious forms. But the preponderance of certain forms – for example, Sunni Islam – that expressed themselves in diaspora came from the same kinds of syncretistic processes that were occurring in Africa: the overlapping of cultural forms that often made distinguishing among kinds
in order to produce categories an iffy business. Nevertheless, Caribbean Indians, or Indo-Caribbeans, became known to be “Hindu” or “Muslim,” “Sanatanist” and “Suni,” respectively, with a racializing of religion such that, by the time slavery and enslaved Africans were no longer part of living memory (although alive in historical consciousness), “Muslim” in the Caribbean indicated “Indian” rather than “African.”

While Islam eventually came to be seen as Indo-Caribbean, it is also worth asking why its African traces are acknowledged in such limited fashion. If fragmentation – and the syncretism, pluralism, creolization that is said to follow it – is allegedly a hallmark of the Caribbean, then why are the combinations of Christianity and African religious traditions understood to constitute a meaningful presence in the Caribbean while a kind of silencing is being produced about Caribbean Islam with the assumption that somehow its fragmentations and unorthodoxies cannot have similar outcomes? This question in turn leads to others relating to what “Muslim” is and means. The signification processes that tie “marabout” to “Muslim” in Muslim minority societies, for example, are flexible and not necessarily predictable. Carolyn Fick (1990:63) tells us that as “a legendary figure, [Makandal’s] name became identified with almost all forms of fetishism, with poisoning, sorcery, and slave dances. Thereafter, the houngan, or voodoo priests, were often referred to as ‘makandals’; to possess certain powers or simply to practice voodoo was to be a ‘makandal’ … voodoo talismans were ... often referred to as ‘makandals’.” This association between ritual talismen, or amulets, and Makandal the man was undoubtedly strengthened by Makandal’s being convicted of “‘mingling holy things in the composition and usage of allegedly magical packets.’ One of those he made included a crucifix, and Makandal invoked Allah, Jesus Christ, and God when he created them” (Dubois 2004:51). It seems there was a mutually shaping overlap among an African Muslim man’s leadership skills and commitment to fighting the system of slavery, which drew from Makandal’s Muslim worldview (already “syncretic” in Africa before ever arriving in the Caribbean); his practice of an Islam in Saint Domingue that undoubtedly took on Afro-Christian dimensions; and his broad capitalizing on the power of the sacred, spiritual, and supernatural, which inspired him as well as his fellow revolutionaries. In the loose application of the name-term makandal to amulets (virtually universal cross-culturally), to sorcery (a phenomenon on both sides of the Middle Passage), and to houngans (a role indigenous to Saint Domingue but magnetizing various kinds of elements), we lose sight of any clear discrimination between “Islam” and “Vodou.”

In his work on African Muslims in the Americas, Michael Gomez observes that in the Haitian Revolution, Muslims “made common cause with others of

African descent,” both as “soldiers and as mallams or holy men who called upon the forces of the Islamic sciences in pursuit of their cause” (Gomez 2005:87). That said, he highlights Makandal as emerging “as the quintessential houngan [Vodou priest]” because he “absorbed a number of non-Muslim influences,” with “everything about [his] life point[ing] in the direction of religious synthesis” (Gomez 2005:89); thus, Makandal formed “the epicenter, along with Boukman, of folklore celebrating the ideal of the houngan” (Gomez 2005:89). Gomez (2005:90) bolsters his position that in this context Islam was superseded by more influential religious traditions with the observation that, as respected Vodou leaders, Boukman, Makandal, and Cecile Fatiman would have had difficulty explaining their behavior to Muslim reformers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West Africa. In all likelihood, Gomez posits, many of their practices would have amounted to shirk as interpreted by Sunni Muslims, and therefore probably not have been “the kind of legacy a Sunni or orthodox mallam would want to leave behind” (Gomez 2005:89).7

Moreover, even if Gomez (2005:90) implies more finality than is necessary, the implications of his assertion that “African-born bearers of Islam would be swept up (and away) by the events of 1791-1804” warrants consideration. What does that sweep entail and what might its consequences be – for Caribbean cultures and histories and, for my purposes in particular, for our knowledge of them? Gomez’s points that Muslims were too small a population, too integrated with the rest of the Saint Domingue population, and too religiously syncretic to sustain a “viable” Muslim community are well taken (Gomez 2005:87). Even if viability is a difficult and subjective calculation, however, it is certainly the case that “Muslim” in the Americas is a multidimensional category, as other scholars have shown. For example, Joan Dayan (1995) observes that many of the early African arrivals in Saint Domingue were from the kingdoms of the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique and “had been both affected by ‘Islamic propaganda’ and ‘inculcated with ideas of catholicity by the Portuguese ... around the fifteenth century’” (Dayan 1995:245, Price-Mars 1930). Early twentieth-century Haitian writer Jean Price-Mars surmised that the majority of Africans brought to Saint Domingue “were pious peoples attached simultaneously to the Muslim and Dahomean faith, and even slightly Catholic” (Price-Mars 1930:126-27; quoted in Dayan 1995:325 n. 149). The difficulty of drawing precise lines around our categories renders these issues vexed to start with, and heterogeneous populations of African Muslims in the Americas make for diverse ways of being Muslim.

What power, then, is in a name to suggest an identity, and is there necessarily an isomorphic fit between the name and the thing? What (and who) decides what the preeminent qualities of that thing are? These questions are

7. In Islam shirk is the association of people or things as equal to Allah – inarguably incorrect practice.
Islam, Vodou, And the Making of the Afro-Atlantic

key to the ways that the relationship between Islam and Vodou – to each other, to Africa, and to the Caribbean – is construed. When discussion of Muslims in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americas emphasizes the context of resistance (either as African Muslim leaders or rank-and-file rebels) in the cause of subverting domination with the goal of freedom, a romanticized image emerges which requires scrutiny: representations of resistance are shaped both by the perspectives that define it as such and the contexts from which resistance is said to emerge. That leaders of New World slave rebellions were often Muslims is known “but not attended to,” Buck-Morss (2009:142) observes, making the point that “highlighting their presence plants a small intellectual bomb causing the politics of Western interpretation to bifurcate almost immediately” (Buck-Morss 2009:142). Distasteful aspects of slave rebels’ behavior, she says, can be attributed to the influence of Islam; the same rebels were motivated in part by two centuries of West African jihadist reform movements, and identification, at least at some level, with being Muslim (Buck-Morss 2009:142). “The political question emerging from this historical encounter, that urgently needs to be addressed,” she asserts, is “how is it that the revered Euro-American revolutionary slogan, ‘Liberty or Death’, came to be cordoned off in Western thought and practice from the allegedly infamous tradition of Islamic jihad?” (Buck-Morss 2009:143). In other words, on what epistemological basis does a double standard such as this rest? The issue is that somehow our attachment to the idea of historical African Muslims as resistance leaders overshadows seeing African Islam in other, perhaps as salient ways. At the same time, in the West today Muslims are associated with a different sense of resistance, one with a negative valuation (terror), hence the difficulty in legitimately recognizing them.

We have seen so far that in the Caribbean (as everywhere else), religion is refractive and syncretic, and the religious identity of Boukman/Bookman and Makandal, and Muslims in general, is ambiguous, symbolized largely in terms of the Revolution’s religious-military leadership and production and use of amulets. But it is also worth asking why these Muslim aspects were so apparently rather easily diminished. One could instead emphasize the Islamic shaping of Afro-Atlantic religions, or at least caution that we can only speculate about these processes of creolization. In either case, we would need to probe our speculations – any teleological predeterminations inhering in our historical narratives – as well as revisit our analytical categories. The latter would include even “orthodoxy” itself: for example, Gomez approves of what he reads in The Black Jacobins as James’s “correct judgment” to “sublimate” Makandal’s Muslim background, given that “in the New World [Makandal] was no longer living life as a Muslim, or at least as an orthodox

8. Interestingly, in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries this association with resistance would be recast in predominantly negative terms as terrorism.
one” (Gomez 2005:88-89). But the very contexts of non-Muslim influences that Muslims in Saint Domingue (and in the rest of the New World) undoubtedly did absorb are precisely why such categories as “orthodoxy” require unpacking, as well as “orthodoxy”’s relation to what form(s) of “Islam.”

In tackling the tension between real people and their representation, Diouf takes a different tack from Gomez. She argues that although “Muslims were essential in the success of the Haitian Revolution,” their “role and contribution have not been acknowledged” (Diouf 1998:129). Diouf (1998:153) advises us that although Boukman “has passed down in history as a voodoo priest,” this “does not mean that he was such. Because the Muslim factor has largely been ignored, any religious leader of African origin in the Caribbean has been linked to voodoo or obeah.” Diouf offers an interestingly provocative view. Although I do not think Muslims have been deliberately expunged from the archival record, the overshadowing of Muslim “Book Man” by Vodou “Boukman” is meaningful as both an accident of history and an artifact of historiography – the two never being entirely distinct, in any case.

A key aspect of the relationship between history and historiography is what cosmopolitan societies are imagined to be, and how they produce cosmopolitan persons. Who might these people be and how do they merit being conferred this appellation? It seems to be the case that “historical” African Muslims fulfill the requirements for cosmopolitanism, in terms of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, diversity of exposure to multiple others (in West Africa and in the Caribbean), and hybridity (in religious practice), if not explicitly in terms of the kind of modernity that most scholars of the Caribbean agree emerged there. As “historical” Africans become “contemporary” Afro-Caribbeans, however, Africa becomes a different sort of symbol in this (Caribbean) modernity. No longer having a significant association with African Muslims, “contemporary” Africa becomes a symbol of (Afro-) Caribbean indigeneity and blackness (its authenticity represented by, among other things, Vodou). Certainly in the colonial Caribbean, Euro-colonizers associated Africa with blackness, but perceptions of blackness were denigrating, largely unconnected to Europeans’ ideas about modernity except as its antithesis. In the postcolonial era, however, Caribbean intellectuals and scholars of the Caribbean saw modernity, and one of its key features, cosmopolitanism, as emerging from, and thus defining the region through, Afro-Euro articulations of one sort or another. In the relationship and cultural dialogue between Africans and Europeans in the Caribbean that produced the region’s special defining qualities (modernity, cosmopolitanism, creolization, diaspora), Africa was configured as either at the center or as an equal partner with Europe. But this Afro-Euro interlocution did not

10. “Postcolonial era” here indicates the turn of the twentieth century, prior to Caribbean countries’ independence, and into the present, post-independence era.
meaningfully involve Islam. This would not have been an automatically logical move, in any case, given Islam’s compartmentalization into the historical envelope of slavery and its forms of resistance, and its particularization as an Indo-Caribbean phenomenon. That is, as long as Islam’s principal connotations were certain forms of resistance in the context of slavery, it was both compartmentalized and particularized – occupying a certain conceptual space and possessing certain definitive features.

The meaning and significance of “cosmopolitanism” reflect different moments in time. Among its most basic distinctions is the contingent symbolism of hope and promise, as opposed to caution and doubt, that the concept carries. Cosmopolitanism, Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco (2009:1) explain, “remains largely a prescriptive concept concerning the development of a new world order or a descriptive concept that enables one to label and distinguish between cosmopolitans and non-cosmopolitans.” I find this a useful differentiation although I would suggest that the concept is necessarily simultaneously prescriptive and descriptive rather than one or the other. It prescribes the should’s and describes the is’s, but the latter are putative, given the tricky relationship between is and ought to be. Imbued with utopian connotations and “an unpleasant posture of superiority” (Appiah 2006:xiii), cosmopolitanism “is really the latest phase of capitalist modernity operating on a global scale” (Hall 2008:346). Contemporary globalization, Stuart Hall observes, produces two kinds of cosmopolitanism, one from “above,” associated with circuits of global investment and capital, and the global entrepreneurs who follow them, and the other from “below,” the “vernacular cosmopolitanisms” that comprise those who are “obliged to uproot themselves from home, place and family” (Hall 2008:346). The latter populations form culturally variegated new settlements whose way of life and forms of consciousness are “diasporic” and whose “diasporic dilemma” is a question of identity – how is the sense of self understood when one’s lived reality is movement among places, histories, cultures, religions (Hall 2008:347)? Hall sees this existential conundrum as “inevitably the site of what Du Bois called ‘double consciousness’” (Hall 2008:347). These discussions suggest that we look at cosmopolitanism as a way of being in the world that reflects the lived experience of unequal relations of power, and as a way of thinking about the world that reflects the moral aspiration to level those inequalities through dreams and deeds.

Contemporary predominant versions of cosmopolitanism privilege tolerance and diversity. The recent revival of scholarly interest in cosmopolitanism of which Nowicka and Rovisco (2009) speak may be related to its new twenty-first-century incarnation, which particularly emphasizes “empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values” and “reaching out across cultural differences through dialogue” (Werbner 2008:2), and which, as social theory, battles “the politics of disillusionment” (Fine 2007:xvi). Upon closer inspection of any given position, however, we are reminded that each is linked...
to a particular vantage point, a reflexivity that slants interpretation. In the current zeitgeist, deployment of the concept of cosmopolitanism – a way of being in and thinking about the world – can result in some interesting judgments of both Islam and Vodou. In the examples below, Islam (ostensibly extracted from specific locations) retains its profile as beneficial in some distant historical past and is negated in the current moment as malevolent. Vodou, here now an explicit foil rather than an ambiguous companion of Islam, retains its popular image as historically murky and contemporarily malevolent, but the latter more in the sense of self-destructive rather than harmful outside itself (read: harmful to us-U.S.). When looked at through the contemporary Western realpolitik lens of cosmopolitanism, Islam is seen as malevolent to others, Vodou as malevolent to its own people. Hence the concept of cosmopolitanism is as much a projection of its purveyors as it is a complex of features identifiable in certain contexts and populations. In other words, “cosmopolitanism” is a conditional category, not a categorical condition.

The question of how societies shape people, how people respond and in turn shape their social milieus, and the kinds of characterizations that emerge about those societies and their members has become of late far more freighted than solely an academic question, given the “enemy within,” “sleeper cell,” and “anchor baby” narratives familiar in the current moment of scrutinizing the relationship between Islam and the West. Reference to Muslims is not necessarily any less pointed when emerging from untypical comparisons with unlikely others. We can see these characterizations of self-destructiveness and malevolence in interpretations of recent events. A couple of years ago New York Times op-ed columnist David Brooks11 joined numerous other so-called pundits in trying to explain the degree of destruction of Haiti’s January 12, 2010 earthquake. In his brief essay, “The Underlying Tragedy,” Brooks stated that this tragedy signaled the time to “rethink our approach to global poverty,” which requires acknowledging “a few difficult truths” – the underlying causes of the devastation. The third of his “truths” caused something of a firestorm in the popular media. “It is time,” he said, “to put the thorny issue of culture at the center of efforts to tackle global poverty. Why is Haiti so poor?” Comparing Haiti unfavorably with Barbados and the Dominican Republic – which Brooks views as analogous to each other, mentioning variables he finds sufficient bases for comparison (“history of oppression, slavery and colonialism”) – he relies on Lawrence Harrison’s (2006) exposition on Truth for an explanation.

In his polemic, The Central Liberal Truth, Harrison’s (2006:87) analytical lens is trained on “culture,” treating religion as its principal explanatory device: “some religions do better than others in promoting the goals of demo-

An example of “a religion that is highly resistant to progress [is] Voodoo, the dominant religion of Haiti and a surrogate for the many animist religions of Africa, the birthplace of Voodoo ... It ... has made a major contribution to the sociopolitical pathology [of Haiti]” (Harrison 2006:87). My interest here is not in rebutting Harrison but in underscoring his all-too-common invocation of democracy, justice, prosperity, and progress as a kind of expansive vision of charitable optimism, a universal form of consciousness and sense of self that contrasts with the alleged myopia and taciturnity of inward-looking and amoral/immoral – failed – Haiti. In stark contrast to scholars of the Caribbean, Voodoo for Harrison seems simply beyond redemption. In Harrison’s portrait, Haitians implicitly are not cosmopolitans; if they were, they could have reasonable expectations to become modernized and cease being “progress-resistant” (Harrison 2006:119). In Harrison’s portrait, as well, Voodoo’s various inadequacies make impossible his teleological goals of Western (read: American) democracy.

Interestingly, Harrison has a somewhat more generous appraisal of Islam. Although “Islam has fallen far behind the Western religions and Confucianism in virtually all respects,” and the data for Islamic countries “reveal a strong resistance to modernization,” these disappointments are “in striking contrast to the vanguard role of Islam during its first several centuries” (Harrison 2006:96). Over the course of time, unfortunately, the world witnessed “Islam’s transformation from progress prone to progress resistant” (Harrison 2006:119). In charting Islam’s alleged devolution, Harrison alludes to aspects often equated with cosmopolitan qualities, notably exposure to diverse others and duration over time. Harrison’s judgment of Islam’s “falling behind” its own early precociousness is, implicitly, a nod to its longevity. Of course, Islam’s historical “vanguard role” has been lost or negated in much of today’s discourse in the West, with its focus on terror. Yet even in this, the cosmopolitan is sought, perhaps to rescue what was vanguard, and certainly to seek a rapprochement between “East” and “West” – notably with “Easterners” in the “West.” The issue I am underscoring here is not whether certain “acceptable” and “tolerant” Muslims (descriptors which have appeared in the media) are really cosmopolitans or not. Rather, the issue is the language (which forms the discourse) that is being used: the acid test is Western values and priorities, not, for example, Islamic ones – which may (or may not) be different.

Equally significant for understanding cosmopolitanism, however, is the “new cosmopolitanism’s” interrogation of the very premises of this concept, its twin pillars of universalism and modernity. This interrogation rests on what Hall (2008:349) calls “the paradox at the heart of the Enlightenment –

the particularism of its conception of universality.” That is, the Enlightenment (Kantian) version of cosmopolitanism represented itself as universal, but that universality was yoked to the West, never coming to terms with being embedded in a specific historical moment and intellectual tradition. This tradition assumed the West as the ones “whose civilizational duty and burden it was to enlighten … the unenlightened, the non-cosmopolitan” (Hall 2008:349). In a sense, the universal is always vernacular and thus always ultimately slanted toward the self-serving in some fashion. To borrow from Renato Rosaldo’s (1989:217) notion of “useful fictions,” “the West” itself is a useful fiction rather than a self-evident source. However, for the Caribbean intellectuals and activists who have interpreted the Caribbean as being “by definition cosmopolitan,” these definitions have particular objectives, and consequences, that do not necessarily look askance at Enlightenment thinking as itself representing “fictions.”

While those to whom I now turn were anything but naïve or superficial in their reflections, critiques, and aspirations, the hope and self-identification they had for cosmopolitanism, as they understood it, produced certain characterizations of Caribbean (or Atlantic World) identity whose universalist visions both transcended African particularities (like religious traditions, ethno-linguistic groups, and such) and yet drew upon symbolic Africas as part of the cosmopolitan equation. These visions gave voice to some and may have (inadvertently) silenced others. Despite contributing to the historically cosmopolitan Caribbean, African Muslims do not stand out in conceptualizations of the contemporary cosmopolitan Caribbean; their Muslimness recedes into their Africanness (their race), and Africa itself does symbolic work that does not require (or is even hindered by) being particularized. In the Afro-Euro dialogue that constitutes cosmopolitanism, Indo-Caribbeans – who in the contemporary moment largely signify Caribbean Islam – find no place, their Indianess receding into their Muslimness (their religion). And in connection with their Indianess, Indo-Caribbeans’ Muslimness is not construed as possessing cosmopolitan attributes, or those attributes make no contribution to the cosmopolitan character of the Caribbean.

In the Americas, a post-Enlightenment place and peoples filtered through Enlightenment valuations, the concept of cosmopolitanism took on an emphasis on modernity, a quality (i.e., a state of mind, a capability of agency) that was not of great concern to sixteenth-century commentators, much less to earlier ones. Ideas about Caribbean cosmopolitanism tend to be organized in ways that elide or overlook Islam – in part because Africa’s symbolic importance often supersedes (and otherwise is equal to) its being a site of particular histories and cultures. Cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean is characterized by certain features that have long been fundamental to the ways peoples of the region have understood themselves, and have been understood by others, in relation to being modern. Among the most important of those who
linked the Caribbean to a cosmopolitan argot is Trinidadian intellectual and activist C.L.R. James. Counting James along with Martinicans Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon as among the Caribbean’s greatest thinkers, Edward Said (1989:224) argued that they represented a “model for the postimperial world [that] depended on the idea of a collective as well as plural destiny for mankind, Western and non-Western alike.” Said’s statement is both a point of fact about shared birthplace and a symbolic association between the Caribbean and the concept of cosmopolitanism.

James was involved with Pan-Africanism (the revival of the movement in London) and in the Trotskyite movement (Hall 1992:7-10), projects whose internationalist agendas and universalist visions are inherent to them. In *The Black Jacobins*, James’s (1989:391) embrace of cosmopolitanism is lyrical and unequivocal. “West Indians,” he says, “first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution.” This sense of self, or self-consciousness, emerged from struggles involving justice, rights, and progress, and also, not unrelatedly, from the condition of modernity that James saw as characterizing the Caribbean. Arguing that the pattern of life wrought by the slave plantation system was “sui generis, with no parallel anywhere else,” and not native in any sense (James 1989:392), James’s Caribbean was not European, African, or (North) American, but “original” (James 1989:391).

At the same time, on the one hand, “the African had to adapt what he brought with him to the particular circumstances which he found in his environment,” where his “philosophy and religion proved to be a combination of what he brought with him and what his new masters sought to impose on him” (James 1984:21); on the other hand, Caribbean people were “cut off from all contact with Africa for a century and a quarter,” presenting “today the extraordinary spectacle of a people who, in language and social custom, religion, education, and outlook, are essentially Western and, indeed, far more advanced in Western culture than many a European community” (James 1977:25; quoted in Henry & Buhle 1992:x-xi). As Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (1992:xi) aptly note, what predominates in James’s work are not icons of exile and dispossession but rather “people actively appropriating the modern possibilities left them by a heritage of Westernization.”

Deriving from the Caribbean’s plantation mode of production, the modernity of which James spoke has a Janus-faced aspect. The enslaved Africans entered into a large-scale agricultural system that was modern in its industrialization and in its social relationships, which James (1989:392) saw as requiring a closeness far beyond “any proletariat of the time.” He sums up, “The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life” (James 1989:392). It thus was both the “most civilizing” and the “most demoralising” influence in West Indian development (James 1989:392). James felt that the Caribbean’s link to European civilization gave the region a special advantage. Although part of the Third World, the Caribbean had been
“universalized” by European influence; and the region’s great figures must, James felt, be viewed as part of the great metropolitan tradition, not simply as regionally important (Lamming 1992:33). Darrell Levi (1991:489) clarifies the distinction James made between Western traditions and Western imperialism: the former he admired, the latter he decried. In his admiring view, “the African” symbolizes a place of origin but, in being the crucible of Westernization, represents a successful and admirable Westerner; he/she is a creolized persona who certainly has identifiable and specific cultural, ethnic, and linguistic features, but these features are the raw material from which cooked (creole) cultural forms are produced. Muslims do not seem particularly relevant to James; as we saw in Gomez’s (2005:88-89) remark, James “sublimated” Makandal’s Muslim background. This could mean anything from “redirected” to “expurgated,” but the point is that for James, Vodou/Afro-Atlantic religions are perhaps clearer symbols of Africa in the Caribbean.

Where James found “Africa” in the Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean intellectuals from the late 1960s on tended to emphasize what was perceived as the dearth of living ancestral traditions as a source of alienation; others saw the absence of ancestral traditions as only amounting to cultural mimicry and thus a source of weakness (Look Lai 1992:180). Although not a feature of James’s work (which emphasized potency and vitality), the abiding themes of deficiency and regeneration that accompany discourses of exile and dispossession are nonetheless characteristic of Caribbean reflexivity. Among scholars and Caribbean intellectuals, the tropes of deficiency and regeneration are expressed in the theoretical perspectives, or problematics, commonly known as “the absence of ruins” and “creolization.” While both James and later Caribbean intellectuals looked to Africa, they did so for different reasons. These perspectives have been significant in shaping Caribbean discourses seeking to present the region in terms of certain histories, agents, cultures, and forms of authenticity. These forms of authenticity revolve around an originary moment emerging from an Afro-Euro axis, a foundation to which Indo-Caribbeans are not perceived to belong, except as subsequent historical-cultural additions.

Toward the end of his recent novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, Junot Diaz (2007:258-59) writes about “the power of the Untilles,” the “amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination” (my italics). In this brief characterization of the Caribbean, Diaz captures the essence of much of contemporary scholarship’s investment in history, memory, and consciousness in the Caribbean, an investment that has marked the Caribbean as a particular kind of place in the world – where the “true history of the New World,” as Derek Walcott (1974:4) sees it, is “amnesia” and where the Caribbean is a “shipwreck of fragments” (Walcott 1993) where being West Indian means living “in a state of utter pastlessness” (Patterson 1982:258), characterized, in Orlando Patterson’s lyrical estimation, by an “absence of ruins.” And then of course there is V.S. Naipaul’s famously
contemptuous charge that nothing was ever created in the Caribbean. It is noteworthy that these sentiments come from literary figures rather than social scientists (or activist intellectuals like James), who have spent entire careers pursuing counternarratives about Caribbean history, memory, and consciousness – from Melville Herskovits’s (e.g., 1958) empirical search for African “survivals” in the Americas to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995) interest in the unequal relations of power that both imagine and silence the past. Fundamentally at issue here are decades of debates about the region’s culture, quantity and quality: how much was allegedly lost by diasporic populations in the Americas, what of the remaining “fragments” was salvaged, and what is the value to each group of their cultural remnants in being counted as present in the region.

Because Caribbean fragments, as the thinking goes, have phoenix-like regenerative possibilities to create new forms, a companionate trope of Caribbean studies attempts to capture these creations. This is the concept of “creolization,” which works in interesting tension with the “absence of ruins.” Where ruins represent a loss of Culture (and where Culture is the medium of history and the circumstance of consciousness), creolization represents the surfeit of cultures, heterogeneous groups in ongoing encounters. This diversity tends to be spoken of in the abstract, as broad references to different ethno-linguistic and racial groups, which are in turn identified with certain religions. As the demographic majority in the region, Afro-Caribbeans are differentiated according to Old World ethno-linguistic group history (e.g., Hausa, Yoruba) and culturally authenticated by scholars according to the “creolized” or “syncretic” religions that they brought to, and elaborated in, the New World (e.g., Vodou, Candomblé). Islam among these populations was also “creolized” (and, indeed, was never “pure” to begin with) and in some cases was folded into other religious traditions. However, while there is no necessary reason why Islam cannot represent Afro-Caribbeanness (symbolization being a matter of social construction rather than dependent on, say, statistical data), Islam becomes a defining, and culturally authenticating feature of the region only among a subsequent diaspora – Indians from the subcontinent.

As Hall (2008:350) aptly notes, the idea (and practice) of universalism does not work when viewed as a state of being, but only in terms of a “constantly shifting horizon towards that point where ... our history ends, and another history begins”; in this overlap, aspects of difference will remain on all sides, reminders that subject position self-sufficiency is impossible, fully defined only by what is left out or excluded – “its constitutive outside” (Hall 2008:350). It would seem, then, that the Caribbean/cosmopolitan self is ever an incomplete one, necessarily both in reality and in perception of that reality. Not only is the idea of essence a matter of ideology, but this ideology is freighted with Enlightenment-based aspirations to rethink humanity in terms of individuals who are free of the burdens of tradition, thus becoming open to modernity. This aspect of what Hall (2008:353) sees as “liberalism” reveals
its own fatal flaw: it has “never understood its own culture”; that is, there is no such possibility as a neutral, liberated ground of a-cultural existence. Thus essences become invented, “useful fictions” (Rosaldo 1989) in discourses that disallow movement (of encultured bodies, of cultural imaginaries) as loss, as ruins’ absence. And multiplicity can become a substitute for absence (many rather than none), still posing the question of which many, representing what, and to what end?

The Caribbean, as Hall (2008:351) summarizes, is “by definition cosmopolitan,” this quality partially residing in the fact of its original inhabitants no longer existing and everyone there coming from somewhere else. These “true diasporic” societies produce a sort of “natural cosmopolitan” individual by virtue of movement, the movement of bodies across space. But another form of movement is also key in Hall’s logic. The movement of bodies across space results in diverse cultures engaged with each other in new and different ways. What is really indigenous today in the Caribbean is creolization, “the cultural mix of different elements” that constitutes “a kind of cosmopolitanism at home,” where the predominant African presence exists in translation with other cultural elements (i.e., peoples with other cultural heritages). At heart the issue is not about what is African but what “Africa” has become in the New World. Hall goes on to query how one can remain at home and be a cosmopolitan. Despite its difficulty, he says, this is possible “if you understand your history as always a history of movement, migration, conquest, translation, if you don’t have some originary conception of your own culture as really, always the same … you could become a cosmopolitan at home” (Hall 2008:351-52). Thus it seems that the cosmopolitan Caribbean person necessarily has a history of movement, translation, and dialogue with alterity, and a history of self-reflexive thinking about that movement (a consciousness), shaping the formation of regional and personal identity. Yet historical Caribbean Muslims, Africans whose cultural heterogeneity and religious hybridity could lend them such congruence with “cosmopolitanism,” are figures who morph into contemporary Caribbean Muslims, Indians (despite the presence and, in some cases, visibility of Afro-Caribbean Muslim peers) whose putative cultural homogeneity and religious monochromatism apparently render them incongruent with “cosmopolitanism.”

13. Referring to the post-1960s United States, Vijay Prashad (2000:68) observes that: “Within the framework of New Age orientalism, the Indian is seen as intensely spiritual and apolitical, as noble but silent, as knowledgeable but not cosmopolitan.” Indo-Caribbeans historically have not been equated with being spiritual or noble in the sense that Prashad means (they are too grassroots for that), or with being apolitical or silent (there is too much identity politics in the Caribbean for that), or as being knowledgeable in the sense of possessing lofty intellect (instead, allegedly possessing a crafty shrewdness). Still interesting is that a non- or un-cosmopolitan feature applies to Indo-Caribbeans as it does to their desi cousins in the United States.
When associated with African history in the Caribbean, Islam is superseded by racial identification and by the authenticating, syncretic religions that are attached to that race. As the logic continues, Islam may contribute to the cosmopolitanism of worldly and diverse African groups in the Caribbean seeking redress and justice on the basis of an encompassing definition of exploitation (as opposed, for example, to idiosyncratic actions) but it cannot represent the Afro-Caribbean. Book Man becomes Boukman. I am not arguing that Indian indentured laborers under the colonial gaze were considered more “cosmopolitan” than Africans (although they were generally ranked higher in colonial cultural evolutionary models), but I am suggesting that an implicit assumption is that as Islam is creolized, so to speak, out of Africans in the Caribbean, they emerge generations later as, in Hall’s notion, cosmopolitans at home (Hall 2008). I am also not suggesting that scholars and other observers have made any explicit or deliberate elisions to effect a silencing of Islam and its contribution to cosmopolitan identity in the Caribbean – indeed, as we have seen, Muslims’ anything but parochial attributes are part of historians’ and other scholars’ discussions. In relation to the Afro-Atlantic, cosmopolitan Islam adds to the overall cosmopolitan character of the Caribbean, but this contribution is in specific ways whose possibilities have not been sufficiently explored much beyond Muslims constituting part of the region’s early history and its emblematic contemporary diversity. A different image of Islam, one that supersedes race as a symbol of a group, represents Indo-Caribbeans. But this form of cosmopolitanism seems not to come out of, or be in tandem with, the modernity that defines the region and that the region defines. In contrast to Boukman’s Islam (which overshadows Book Man’s Islam), Indian Islam is seen by Indo-Caribbean Muslims and others as (ideally) stable and conservative.

For James, what matters most is a Pan-African and, in a sense, non-specific, African influence, along with Enlightened modernity. For absence of ruins proponents, the past is at best murky and haphazard, which precludes an enduring Muslim reference point. For such thinkers as Hall, what is most significant is the modern African/Afro-Caribbean diaspora, not the Islamic past. Individual Caribbean actors produce and exchange specific, and visionary, cosmopolitan thoughts, while ordinary Caribbean communities possess a kind of collective consciousness that reveals a particular, shared – diasporic – experience. While those outside the Caribbean might look to Islam as a potential partner in cosmopolitanism, in the Caribbean itself it remains outside of cosmopolitanism, something apart from the creolizing energy that defines the region.

Despite, or because of creolization, cosmopolitanism still seeks authenticity, even though it purports to transcend the limitations of borders. Vodou (and other Afro-Atlantic religions) provides the authenticity sought for the Caribbean, which can redress the “ruins” argument. Vodou represents Africans’ essence and thus is able to symbolize Africa in the Caribbean; Vodou (and other Afro-Atlantic religions) is more habitually characterized as “syncretic”
or “hybrid” than is Islam, which is more often treated (implicitly or otherwise), when associated with Indo-Caribbeans, as more predictable, more stable, less in flux. The “hybridity” of the Islam of Africans in the Caribbean did not help it to remain steadfast; in a sense, it was malleable enough to disappear. The “hybridity” of Vodou has somehow maintained its integrity as a recognizable thing. Islam interpreted as “stable” belongs to another component of Caribbean diversity, Indo-Caribbeans, iconic of the region in a different sense than Afro-Caribbeans of any religious connotation. Despite its acknowledgement as being part of Africans’ historical routes to the region, Islam is typically associated with Caribbean peoples other than Africans – mid-nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asian indentured immigrants – which also contributes to Islam’s often not being sought to exemplify (confirm) the region’s historical roots. While the Caribbean may be aptly characterized as “cosmopolitan,” the latter is a concept, not a condition; hence we need to be clear about: (1) why we desire to envision the Caribbean in that particular way, since everything is in some sense a construction (e.g., Hacking 1999, Trouillot 1995), and (2) the limitations of that image, for example in relation to Muslim identity and its historical and cultural significance to the region.

The deep and long-standing roots of Islam in Africa are indisputable. At the same time, it is the encounter between Africa and Europe that is seen as shaping the Caribbean, but Islam is not seen as inherently African. I have suggested that we inquire into the kinds of premises and perhaps unnoticed essentialisms that go into what both “Muslim” and “African” mean in the Caribbean, and how these premises and essentialisms have contributed to erasures in the history of Islam in the Caribbean. By erasures I mean an absence of certain themes. Muslims do appear in scholarly accounts of Caribbean history, particularly in the earlier periods; their role tends to be emphasized as one of heroic resistance, notably as leaders. One challenge is recovering the multiple ways (historical, cultural) that Africans are “Muslim” and Muslims “African.” Another challenge is establishing who “Muslims” were. Thus we remain with the richly abiding question: Who indeed was Boukman?

REFERENCES


AISHA KHAN
Department of Anthropology
New York University
<ak105@nyu.edu>