Roberto Strongman, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2019. xi + 284 pp. (Paper US\$25.95)

Queering Black Atlantic Religions is an interesting, timely, yet at times inscrutable book about homosexuality and alternative gender expression in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Lucumí (Santería), and Brazilian Candomblé. Through its focus on research studies and artistic representations of queerness, it produces an advanced review of the scholarly literatures in many languages concerning these Afro-Atlantic traditions as well as virtuoso analyses of the work of important artists and filmmakers who explore the polymorphously queer experiences afforded by Afro-Atlantic ceremonial praxis. Roberto Strongman connects many sprawling ritual, aesthetic, and cultural dots with the concept of transcorporeality, understood as an Afrodiasporic ethnopsychology that ostensibly sees the self as “multiple, removable, and external to the body that functions as its receptacle” (p. 2). Even more ambitiously, and in our view less persuasively, he analogizes his text with the sacred initiatory chamber as well as the entranced body in rituals of Afro-Atlantic possession performance.

Chapter 1 surveys the twentieth-century ethnographic genre of what Strongman dubs Vodou écriture feminine, the corpus of pioneering investigative work by Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Deren, Katherine Dunham, Karen McCarthy Brown, and Mimerose Beaubrun. Their contributions constitute a “feminist and queer convergence” concerning the multifarious forms of nonheteronormativity embodied and promulgated by Vodou mythology and ritual praxis. Chapter 2 canvasses the queer (white) male ethnographic contributions of Pierre Verger and Hubert Fichte regarding Vodou’s multiply queer dimensions. Strongman finds their work more problematical than that of the women in harboring overdetermined fetishizing tendencies, yet descriptively and analytically important—bearing numerous partial truths. This discussion is counterpointed by an analysis of Haitian artist Hector Hyppolite, whose compelling mystical imagery and gender-bending aesthetics cannot be fully captured or tamed by scholarly representation.

Chapter 3 surveys scholarship on queer dimensions of Lucumí, which developed in fits and starts over the twentieth century, yet progressively clarified the ways this tradition accommodates queer and transgender experience, kinship, and transformation. It also offers an analysis of the 1993 film *Fresa y Chocolate*, which is as much about Afro-Cuban religion as it is about sexual dissidence, only more coded and indirect, camouflaged by the film’s overt queerness. Chapter 4 examines Lydia Cabrera’s pathbreaking ethnographic

investigations of queer Lucumí, informed by her own censored lesbianism. Cabrera's work also influenced the captivating artistic production of Wifredo Lam, the celebrated Cuban painter whose hybrid style combined Surrealist aesthetics and Afro-Cuban imagery, which Strongman sees as foregrounding transcorporeality. This chapter opens with an ethnographic anecdote regarding Fran, who found his way into Lucumí during a difficult stint in New York, which enables Strongman to emphasize Lucumí's orientational powers in diaspora.

Chapter 5 considers Candomblé as a vector for the proliferation of dissident sex-gender expression akin to Vodou and Lucumí. Yet Afro-Brazilian religion includes a dynamic and unruly pantheon of masculine *exu* and feminine *exua* spirits embodying all sorts of nonheteronormative identities and behaviors in mythology and ritual praxis. Strongman's most original contribution here is his analysis of the pioneering novel-turned-film *Dona Flor e Seus Dois Maridos*, which delivers a potent nonheteronormative message within a manifest plotline of heterosexual lust undergirded by an *orixá* subtext.

The penultimate chapter explores Portugal as Candomblé's new frontier, with various sociohistorical twists and transformations, especially processes of gentrification and symbolic de-Africanization. Mário de Andrade's 1928 novel *Macunaíma* is seen as foreshadowing Candomblé's extension to Portugal, especially in the symbolism of the protagonist's parrot flying from Brazil to Portugal as a coded representation of Oxalá's bird. The spirit of wisdom and master of all heads, Oxalá is syncretized with Nossa Senhor de Bonfim in Brazil, whose devotions are now observed at L'Église de la Madeleine in Paris as well, spawning a new form of transatlantic Catholic interculturalization mediated by Oxalá.

Strongman masterfully weaves together scholarly and aesthetic representations that reveal the profoundly queer dimensions of Afro-Atlantic religions. Yet his characterization of the transcorporeality of the Afro-diasporic body is not only sweeping and homogenizing (painted in contrast to a straw-man version of Western ethnopsychology), but also an ideal-type analysis that hovers distantly from the microtextures of personal experience. His brief conclusion floats the notion of transcripturality as the representational correlate of transcorporeality, enabling him to conceptualize his text as akin to the entranced body of spirit possession, and himself as the new master of ceremonies for Black Atlantic religious studies. Whether he succeeds in bringing the overall project to fruition will likely vary among readers, but he pursues his materials with investigative prowess and scholarly verve, making this a major new reference point for scholarship on the subject.

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