

New Age and Afro-Cuban Religion: Notes on Cultural Creation, between Indigenization and Exogenization

New Age y religión afrocubana: notas sobre la creación cultural, entre la indigenización y la exogeneización

Emma Gobin¹ 

Université Paris 8-Vincennes Saint Denis

LAVUE (Laboratoire Architecture, Ville, Urbanisme, Environnement; Equipe ALTER (Altérités et Territoires) / LAVUE-LMI MESO



Para citaciones: Gobin, Emma. New Age and Afro-Cuban Religion: Notes on Cultural Creation, between Indigenization and Exogenization. *PerspectivasAfro* 2/1 (2022): 81-98. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.32997/pa-2022-4116>

Recibido: 17 de junio de 2022

Aprobado: 19 de agosto de 2022

Editora: Silvia Valero. Universidad de Cartagena-Colombia.

Copyright: © 2022. Gobin, Emma. Este es un artículo de acceso abierto, distribuido bajo los términos de la licencia <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> la cual permite el uso sin restricciones, distribución y reproducción en cualquier medio, siempre y cuando que el original, el autor y la fuente sean acreditados.



ABSTRACT

In Cuba, New Age and Neo-Pagan healing and spiritual practices (reiki, so-called groups of meditation and « energy », neo-shamanism, wicca, etc.) are today appropriated in connection with endogenous practices. Considering that Afro-Cuban religions are historical instances of religious syncretism, one might be tempted to see there no more than a contemporary extension of their internal workings. However, contrasted ethnographical cases reveal that such a perspective occults the diversity and complexity of the processes at stake. While New Age elements do crystallize in a syncretic integration within Afro-Cuban rituals, the dynamics at work also result in the parallel production of apparent local, (Afro-)Cuban, forms of the New Age that not only enacts forms of cultural “indigenization” but also displays a puzzling, concomitant “exogenization” (or self-exoticization) of local referents.

Keywords: Cuba; New Age; Santería; religious exotism; syncretism; religious globalization.

RESUMEN

En Cuba, las prácticas curativas y espirituales neopaganas y de la New Age (reiki, los llamados grupos de meditación y "energía", neochamanismo, wicca, etc.) son hoy apropiadas en conexión con prácticas endógenas. Considerando que las religiones afrocubanas son instancias históricas de sincretismo religioso, uno podría verse tentado a ver allí nada más que una extensión contemporánea de su funcionamiento interno. Sin embargo, los casos etnográficos aquí analizados revelan que tal perspectiva oculta la diversidad y complejidad de los procesos en juego. Si bien los elementos de la Nueva Era cristalizan en una integración sincrética dentro de los rituales afrocubanos, las dinámicas intervinientes también dan como resultado la producción paralela de formas aparentemente

¹ Docteur en ethnologie de l'Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense (Paris 10). Maître de Conférences à l'Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis. Chercheur au LAVUE (UMR 7218) - équipe AUS. Chercheur associé à l'URMIS « Migrations et sociétés » (IRD, UMR 205). Correo: emma.gobin@univ-paris8.fr

(afro)cubanas locales de la Nueva Era. Estas no solo promulgan formas de "indigenización" cultural sino que también muestran una desconcertante y concomitante "exogeneización" (o autoexotización) de los referentes locales.

Palabras clave: Cuba; New Age; Santería; exotismo religioso; sincretismo; globalización religiosa.

New Age and Afro-Cuban religion: Notes on cultural creation, between indigenization and exogenization

Historically rooted in the contemporary West, New Age movements are today largely globalized and present in many sites traditionally studied by anthropologists. There, they contribute to the making of new spiritual ideas and practices but also to the partial reconfiguration of preexistent ones. In 2003, while I was conducting ethnographical research on Afro-Cuban religion in Havana, I was attending one of the most common sacrificial ceremonies of Cuban Santería². Dedicated to *eggun* (dead spirits and ancestors), it implied, as others, to cover one's head, traditionally called *orí*, and generally considered to be the seat of personal divinities. As I had forgotten my headscarf that day, one of the women participating enjoined me to cover my head with my hand, so I could –she surprisingly whispered to me– protect my seventh *chakra*. The same year, a young man who learned that I had Indian origins engaged into an exalted, yet at that time quite unusual monologue. He had recently understood that Eleguá –Santería's trickster deity– was none other than Shiva, "Indian god who masters order and chaos" and "regenerates the cosmos", as he explained to me. According to him, both divinities not only represented the same mythological archetypes, but also shared the same "vibration" and a unique "spiritual essence".

For the first time, these striking comments revealed to me that some followers or sympathizers of Afro-Cuban religion had knowledge of quite distant, exogenous spiritual notions but also that they surprisingly tended to apprehend part of their practices (and conversely) through the prism of these exogenous ideas stemming from the world of "Oriental spiritualities", and more broadly of New Age regional and global circuits. In the following years, this trend has further developed in certain circles, along with the parallel growth of properly New Age modes of religiosity or spirituality, particularly in Havana.

This situation that results in new and creative ritual forms portrays an original, renewed continuum of practices that fluctuates between forms of recreation of Afro-Cuban religion on the one hand, and, on the other, the making of apparently innovative forms of the New Age that, at the same time, echo its versions observable elsewhere.

In this paper, my aim is to document and point out some features of these dynamics by drawing on and contrasting a few simple empirical cases collected among priests of Afro-Cuban religion and "spiritual seekers" throughout the years³. While illustrating original developments of Afro-Cuban religion as well as some of the

²Generally labeled "of Yoruba origin", Cuban *Santería* is the most well-known Afro-Cuban religion and is today emblematic of Cuban cultural identity, and also largely transnationalized.

³ I started working on New Age practices in Cuba around 2012 and have previously conducted research for ten years on the internal ritual dynamics of Afro-Cuban religion, specifically on Santería and Ifá. This paper takes up the main lines of analyses presented in seminars and summer schools in Cuba and Paris between 2014 and 2016. It is also oriented by recent fieldwork and research questions on the renewed intersections between ecology and alternative religiosity. I thank the colleagues and students who gave me feedback on some of these early presentations. I am also grateful to Viola Teisenhoffer, Michael Houseman and Alejandro Frigerio for their help with this English version.

innovations that currently affect the local healing practices and the religious field as a whole, this perspective will lead me to formulate some hypotheses in order to better understand the originality of some syncretic dynamics linked to the New Age in this context, but also elsewhere.

The New Age in Cuba: a few elements of context

While the relevance of the term “New Age” at an *etic* level is subject to debate, in the field of Latin-American socio-religious studies it is sufficiently well established (e.g., Carozzi; Magnani; De la Torre et al.) to be used here without discussing thoroughly its limitations. When used *lato sensu*, it is indeed a heuristic descriptive category enabling us to describe a theoretical and practical field which, in Cuba, shares common sociological and ideological features with contemporary spirituality elsewhere. In line with many scholars, I use this term to identify a trend based on the cumulative (re)discovery of ritual techniques, healing practices and cosmologies stemming from diverse cultural and historical origins that are articulated in a logic of personal and spiritual accomplishment. From this perspective, I consider that the New Age implies both a specific “matrix of meaning” (De la Torre, “Religiosidades”) and reinvented, still underexplored forms of ritualization (e.g., Pike; Houseman, “Comment”). Its specificity fundamentally resides in this *double* feature (rather than only one of them, and even less on the nature of one or several practices involved in its circuits).

Although the success of this broad movement cannot be precisely quantified in Cuba⁴, it has expanded significantly, mostly in Havana and other urban areas among middle-upper social classes. Nowadays, in the capital it also involves dynamics of reconfiguration between the urban and the rural (for example, in the form of spiritual retreats in the countryside or the project of a spiritual eco-village). Just as in other contexts, while followers seldom claim to belong to the *Nueva Era* or the New Age (a term that some of them use while others simply ignore it), they often think of and define themselves as *buscadores*, or “seekers” committed in a quest (*búsqueda*) of “spirituality”, a category precisely emblematic of New Age movement at a global scale (see also Gútiérrez Zúñiga; Sutcliffe).

Their mode of participation, bound by a singular equilibrium between community rootedness and intense individual circulation between several rituals, “sharing circles” and “seminars (*cursos*)” (including online ones, since the Covid pandemic and the increasing access to mobile Internet in the country), is equally symptomatic⁵. For them, the disparity of the practices they simultaneously or successively turn to is explicitly transcended by the systems of correspondences they establish and that is based on the idea of a deep unity between mystical, spiritual and religious heterogenous traditions and activates an exemplary “All is One logic” (Teisenhoffer, “Umbanda”) recalling that of hermetic teachings⁶.

⁴ In the absence of statistics, it can be said that this movement is significant enough to have worried the Castro authorities who commissioned a report in 2005 to determine if it could be harmful to the Revolution (Jimenez Berríos *et. al.*).

⁵ As elsewhere (see Altglas, “Exotisme”), the privileged form of transmission of these practices rests upon the constant formation of informal groups and *cursos*. In Cuba, the latter are temporarily or durably settled at a practitioner’s home, sometimes registered in State-administration according to changing requirements, and combined with ritualized sessions.

⁶ A man I worked with in Havana and who defines himself as a “seeker of truth” (*buscador de la Verdad*) explains this dimension as following: “Nature is unique and there is only one oracle scattered throughout the world”. Hence, according to him, the coherence of this approach that allows combinations of practices that may seem confusing at first sight.



image 1. Author © Early session of Kundalini Yoga, Havana, Finca de los Monos, June 2022

The unity of this otherwise eclectic *milieu* resides mostly in the holistic representations of the individual and a close link to Nature, the idiom of “spiritual healing” (*sanación*) and the emphasis on self-actualization as a potentiality of every human being (see also Heelas). In this vein, the collective pursuit of personal accomplishment and of the “(spiritual) development of oneself” is thought as favoring, in the long-term, a broader social and human development.

At a practical level in individual trajectories, New Age locally involves, successively or simultaneously, a set of very diverse practices⁷. These include the use of “universal” or so-called “pyramidal energy” and *reiki* (which had spectacular success in the 2000s); forms of chromotherapy, lithotherapy or sonotherapy (healing and divinatory techniques respectively based on the use of colors, crystals and Tibetan singing bowls); so-called “tantric” numerology; astrology as well as “past life regression therapies”. In these circuits, there is also a significant interest in different trends of European occultism, (neo-)esoterism or Theosophy (which already developed in Cuba before the Revolution of 1959) as well as Rosicrucianism (*Rosacruces*), historically present in the country. Versions of neo-shamanism (locally known as “Mayan initiation”) or Neo-Pagan practices such as Wicca, coexist with “Vipassana” retreats, mindfulness, and several trends of Buddhism and Yoga introduced during the 2000s. All of this is sometimes combined with an interest in vegetarianism (and very recently,

⁷ I won't discuss here the historical dimensions of their introduction since the 1990s. On these aspects, see Karnoouh, Gobin (“L'émergence”).

veganism), “functional medicine” or urban agroecological options such as permaculture, which may also be appropriated as a dimension of the spiritual construction of oneself, sometimes in connection with that of a “sacred femininity” (Gobin, "Spiritualizing"; "Agriculture").

Regarding matters of context, contrary to the secularized societies where it has initially emerged, in Cuba, the New Age develops in a field already marked by pluri-religious practices as well as syncretism. The latter is especially represented by so-called Afro-Cuban religions⁸, which cover a wide-range of possibly interdependent practices such as *Santería*, *Ifá*, *Palo Monte* and even *Espiritismo*. These have been historically shaped in close mutual interaction, in a syncretic encounter with popular forms of Catholicism and other local religious elements. Based on initiation, possession and –except for *Espiritismo*– animal sacrifice, they also share the crucial role assigned to divination. Furthermore, they are based on ritual kinship and clientelist relationships that have extended far beyond the island especially in Latin America as many contemporary studies show⁹. While the Protestant Churches that rapidly developed in the country since the 1990s tend to demonize them in a dynamic of mutual exclusivity¹⁰, the New Age seems to accommodate and pervade them in different ways, interacting with their worldview in multifarious, differential ways. These are particularly conspicuous in the specific ritual micro-innovations I will focus on in the next sections.

Variations on a single theme? Ritual creation and mutual borrowings

While having specific techniques, symbols and ritual sets, all Afro-Cuban religions broadly share a single theory of personhood and divinity conceived as being intrinsically related. They also share a common cosmology and a ritual grammar¹¹: all of them are equally marked by a principle of constant interaction and reciprocity with several divinities or assimilated entities (*orichas*, spirits, ancestors, *eggún* spirits of the dead, etc.) that are addressed with similar ritual patterns and techniques. For instance, in *Palo Monte* and in *Ifá*, in rituals locally called “works of cleansing” and “witchcraft” (*brujería*), ritual specialists traditionally use a system of graphic signs called *firmas* (literally “signatures”).

These are drawn on the floor, in general close to the material representations of gods, in order to invoke them and/or to mark and protect a specific area of the domestic space or a patient’s body. Involving pre-established and common patterns (for example, geometrical forms such as arrows, circles, crosses, skulls and crossbones, the use of cardinal points, etc.), their shape also depends on the personal inspiration and creativity of the priests. According to their own understanding (and sometimes inspired by the non-human entities that accompany them) and/or the actual situation being addressed, they constantly reinvent them. While formally *firmas* may be considered as a script of ritual action (Bonhomme & Kerestetzi), from an emic perspective these signs are intended to activate the protective or aggressive power of the entities and/or to appease and satisfy them.

⁸ The term is devoid of strictly “ethnic” or “racial” connotations. Although more present in a popular context, these religions are practiced by different sectors of Cuban population. The prefix “Afro” rather denotes thus the historical process of their formation, and they could also simply be labeled as Cuban.

⁹ E.g. Juárez Huet (“Un pedacito”), Saldivar Arellano, among others.

¹⁰ The Catholic Church has historically had a more paradoxical position toward them, a topic that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

¹¹ This feature leads their followers to turn to them in a complementary way in order to solve daily situations of misfortune (on these aspects and for a broad presentation of (Afro-)Cuban religious field, see in particular Argyriadis, “La religión”; Gobin and Morel).



image 2. Author @. *Rincón de eggun* (ancestors) delimited by its correspondent graphism, Havana, 2003.

What is significant here is that, in connection with the development of the New Age, especially in Havana, a number of practitioners of *Palo* and/or *Ifá*, have seized upon certain signs circulating in new spiritual circles and beyond in order to compose new *firmas*. In the practice of reiki in particular, one can find, for instance, four main ideograms (“*simbolos*”) which are used to heal a patient or to facilitate the transmission of healing powers during so-called « reiki initiations » (these rituals endow a novice with the healing powers that every human being is thought to have and can learn to manipulate). The healer-practitioner (locally called “reikista”) draws them virtually in the air, or upon the body of the person concerned (see **image 3b** below).

Nowadays some *paleros* and *babalaos* (or *Ifá* priests) integrate them into their own ritual repertoire of *firmas*¹², as they also do with certain signs linked to what is locally called tantric astrology. In this process of borrowing, an example of local pragmatic (i.e. action-centered) appropriation of new (New Age) symbolic resources, what is at stake is not the integration of *reiki* principles *per se*, even less an assumption of New Age ideological stances. Those who make use of reiki ideograms do not necessarily know their functions in reiki, nor are they interested in learning their use or meaning for *reikistas*. They mobilize them in their own way in order to invoke “more efficiently”, as they say, some religious entities. Drawing them on the floor and adopting them for habitual ritual purposes (including, might we add, sorcery), these borrowers use them as they do other preexisting Afro-Cuban *firmas*. Their use derives from the local idea that some Cuban divinities and personalized spirits are considered as having Arabic or Asian origins –a way through which another aspect of the colonial and migration history of Cuban society has crystallized within Afro-Cuban religion and *Espiritismo*¹³. In choosing them as potentially effective ritual elements, the most relevant fact for these these practitioners is that « they come from Asia » (at times, that the personalized “Chinese” spirit evoked had an inclination for healing during its life). In other words, these new circulating signs are implemented according to the relational logic of reciprocity that relates practitioners and gods: the latter idiosyncratic entities are believed to have specific tastes and demands,

¹² For similar examples with reiki, see Blanco and, to a lesser extent, De Almeida Cunha.

¹³ See also *Espirito Santo*, “Silent Histories”.

and therefore one has to experiment constantly in order to better please them and thereby trigger their multiple forms of agency. In this way, New Age works as a new supplier of symbolic and ritualized resources that can easily be mobilized as relevant and meaningful from the perspective of Afro-Cuban cosmology and cosmopraxis¹⁴. Other innovative ritual practices that take place where Afro-Cuban religion meets up with the New Age point to different dynamics.

In Cuba as elsewhere, many of the spiritual and bodily techniques that sustain the development of the New Age revolve around bodily cartographies involving the notions of meridians and chakra. Globally, they function in accordance and complementarity with the idea of a universal energy prevalent in meditation circles and reiki groups. These groups are based on the idea of a cosmic circulation of “energy” and on the elaboration of several techniques allowing for a manipulation of this energy, which is thought of as having broad healing and purificatory virtues for individuals and the group as a whole. In reiki for instance, sessions are intended to deal with a number of physical¹⁵ or spiritual ailments through a ritualized work of energetical (re)balancing and cleansing of the person aimed at restoring an efficient circulation of energy in the body. They consist, basically, of an imposition of the practitioner’s hands, a technique which may vary in its details¹⁶. While partaking in shared representations of reiki in many places (e.g. Beaud) and mobilizing a sort of transnationalized vulgate of this practice organized around the notions of “energy” “body channels” and “spirituality”¹⁷, one of the most interesting aspects of how these practice are displayed in Cuba concerns the concrete forms of their ritualization.

Resorting to ritual creativity, several *reikistas* with whom I worked at Havana conduct their private reiki sessions in the following way. Before imposing their hands on key parts of a patient’s body, they first pray directly to the “headmaster of the head” (i.e. the tutelary *oricha* of the person in Santería’s ideology) and to all the entities (“beings”) who accompany the person, among them the *oricha* Elegúa, “who guarantees the circulation of vital energies”. By doing so, they perform what resembles a simplified *moyugba*, i.e. the propitiatory invocation before any individual ritual takes place that is addressed in Afro-Cuban religion to various entities (parents, ritual parents, ancestors, personal gods) considered to be intimately linked to the person. Here, the prayer, which involves an endogenous theory of personhood shared by all Afro-Cuban religions, is reinvented, being reduced to its simplest idea¹⁸. It is mobilized in connection with the broad idea that the human body channels non-human “forces” or “powers” as well as *aché*, a term borrowed from Afro-Cuban religious vocabulary (and which amounts to a local “mana-concept”; see Holbraad, “The power”). Significantly, there are no offerings (of water, food, or even less of animal blood) nor sophisticated ritual invocations, as happens in common initiatory, divinatory or cleansing Afro-Cuban rituals (the circulation of “*aché*” between non-human and human beings being considered to be crucially depending on such procedures). The entities in question are invoked as pure principles, almost depersonalized or disincarnated entities, perceived as generic and cosmic forces, rather than as idiosyncratic entities defined by their personalized ties with the person concerned. This

¹⁴ According to a similar logic, small Buddhas that had invaded Cuban marketplaces in the 2000s also knew a great success in Afro-Cuban altars considering the local, historical place granted to “oriental entities” in Afro-Cuban and *Espiritismo* pantheons.

¹⁵ Experiments with cancer have been led in Cuba by some volunteers.

¹⁶ It may, or not, imply the physical touching of the patient (it can even be led in the physical absence of the patient) and a healer can “give himself/herself reiki”. As taught in Reiki circles in Cuba, the Japanese-derived term *ki* refers to the idea of breath or life energy. Many practitioners also equate it with the Hindu concept of *prana*. Learning to domesticate and channel this energy requires training (called initiation, albeit not amounting to an anthropological initiatory scheme).

¹⁷ The ideas of “energy flux”, “pranic body” or “aura”, conceived as almost scientific notions, also form part of it.

¹⁸ In proper Afro-Cuban religious practice, the *moyugba* is a complex ritual and linguistic practice that aims to situate the person in a relational space (Gobin, “Un complexe”). It requires equally complex skills in order to appropriately relate living humans, gods and dead (see Wirtz).

kind of appropriation is thus more about the adoption of the most general features of a vernacular theory of the person and of the encompassing cosmivision of Afro-Cuban religions than of Afro-Cuban practices *per se*, which are in no way appropriated as *cosmopraxis*¹⁹ –that is, as a set of practical and relational knowledge about the world, about human beings and about their relations with other entities, requiring in this case the undertaking of a series of complex, highly codified, personalized ritual operations. As revealed by the exegeses provided by the persons concerned and the way they ritually address these entities, Afro-Cuban ideas appear filtered through the prism of their possible equivalents in other cultural universes: the idea of "guardian angel" or tutelary *oricha* can be easily related to the New Age idea of an "inner divinity" present in each of us or to a natural force one should "connect with"²⁰, the notion of *aché* recalls the idea of a universal cosmic energy, etc. Such "shortcuts" then create bridges between universes of meaning –Afro-Cuban practitioners for instance (and even priests who incidentally attend these new practices, see **image 3b**), thus easily find a certain familiarity between them – that are nonetheless distinct. Though testifying to the innovative ritual ways encounters between the New Age and Cuban popular religious elements can take place, as in our previous example, this second case actually enacts quite different, even opposite or reverted logics that require further comments.



Image 3a. Author ©. A woman consulting a *babalao* or Ifá diviner for *ebbó* (sacrificial operation resulting from divination)
Image 3b. Author ©. After the *ebbó*, the women, also initiated into *reiki*, "gives reiki" to the *babalao* suffering headache

Differential appropriation and mutual embeddings?

As suggested by Frigerio (48), in Latin American contexts where syncretic dynamics are usual, it is crucial to grasp the logics of "New Age syncretism", for otherwise, we risk either missing out its originality and novelty or, on the contrary, diluting it in every practice where elements considered to be "New Age" sometimes appear²¹. In Cuba, this is all the more relevant because, as suggested by the examples above, the local implantation of the New Age has resulted in recurrent, multifarious interactions with pre-existing Afro-Cuban religions. To the extent that Afro-Cuban religiosity incarnates historical instances of religious syncretism (e.g. Bastide), and

¹⁹ For the transposition of this concept from Andean anthropology to the world of Afro religion, see Holbraad ("The Power").

²⁰ Consider this quotation from a woman who has been involved in yoga and reiki practice for decades: "*Orichas* are pure power and energy. *Ochún* is the vibration of the river, *Yemaya* is the force of the sea. Do you think it makes sense to relate to them [...] giving them a chicken or three coins, asking them to do something for you, for your trivial things in everyday life, because your neighbor has spoken badly to you or whatever. [...] This is a very low level of spirituality. This is a very petty relationship to the Godhead!"

²¹ In Frigerio's words (48), we risk « seeing *New Age* everywhere (any syncretism indicates the presence of the *New Age*) » or, by confusing it more or less with a pre-existing "usual and omnipresent syncretism" (the "daily Latin American syncretism"), of "not seeing it in any way (the *New Age* does not exist anymore)".

intrinsically entails reflexive ritual innovations (Brown; Gobin, "L'intégration"), one might be tempted to see these new practices as no more than a contemporary extension of Afro-Cuban religion's internal (and historical) workings, that is, as a new stage in their contemporary history attesting to their capacity to adapt to new circumstances²². When looking at the ritual dynamics evoked, however, such an interpretation tends to hide the diversity and the complexity of the processes at work; it sets aside a whole section of what are the most recent of such practices. While several of the principles in operation do involve what may be defined as forms of cultural indigenization of the New Age, one can also observe a concomitant process which I would describe as an "exogenization" of local referents. Let us look further into such matters.

From indigenization ...

By indigenization, I mean, in line with Appadurai, a process of "vernacularization" of the New Age coupled with a concomitant process of resemantization of the signifiers implied, which is then (re)localized or culturally (re)appropriated²³. In the formal and pragmatic reworking of New Age elements incarnated by the integration of reiki symbols into some Cuban priest's own repositories of *firmas* as supplementary relational tools to deal with certain entities, such a process allows these elements to become significant in terms of local representations. Unusual and culturally exogenous elements are transformed in this manner into something immediately relevant, even familiar²⁴. As in many other possible examples, something similar is illustrated in the photograph below which shows a divinatory tray made by an Ifá diviner with whom I work. It includes astrological signs as elements considered influencing the construction of a person. However, the addition of such signs does not change the divinatory protocol or the way he uses this tray as compared with other *babalaos*. In configurations such as this, ritual and material creativity works in accordance with syncretic and innovative patterns common in Afro-Cuban practices. The latter are not restructured by the inclusion of elements that are reworked according to preexisting logics. In short, de-signified New Age elements are embedded in an Afro-Cuban ritual logic and, more than that, are *encoded* according to the latter's distinctive cosmopraxis and operational logics.



image 4. Author ©. Ifá tray adorned with astrological signs

²² This is the analytical line suggested by the few authors who have noticed similar empirical facts (e.g. Da Cunha; Palmié; Espirito Santo, "Developing").

²³ On these dynamics linked to religious globalization and/or transnationalization, see also Argyriadis *et al.*

²⁴ Let us notice that similar dynamics are at work in others contexts where New Age comes to provide supplementary resources to local preexisting practices such as Siberian shamanism (e.g. Pimenova).

... To New Age syncretism ...

To the contrary, when *reikistas* evoke elements of a somewhat decontextualized Afro-Cuban religious theory of personhood in their healing sessions, a symmetrical, inverted logic is at work. Of course, the quite frequent use of Afro-Cuban elements by “spiritual seekers”, notably in their healing sessions, does lead one to consider the possibility of local, (Afro)Cubanized forms of the New Age (Gobin, “Un New Age”), that also involve other forms of indigenization capable, in this case, of “cubanizing” imported spiritual practices. The elements mobilized are nonetheless subordinated to clearly different spiritual stances and purposes, while being at the same time incorporated and *reworked* within a larger, more encompassing New Age derived matrix of meaning that radically transform them on the level of ritual practice. Let us just consider this quotation from a woman who has been involved in yoga and reiki practice for decades, which strikingly converges with observations made on contemporary spirituality elsewhere:

Orichas are pure power and energy. Ochún is the vibration of the river, Yemayá is the force of the sea. Do you think it makes sense to relate to them [...] giving them a chicken or three coins, asking them to do something for you, for your trivial things in everyday life, because your neighbor has spoken badly to you or whatever ? [...] This is a very low level of spirituality. This is a very petty relationship to the Godhead!

In other social contexts, scholars of New Age and Neo-Pagan movements have already emphasized how New Age ritualization appeals to generic notions such as “energy”, “vibratory universe”, “true Self” in order to promote the achievement of a full human “spiritual potential”, whereas Neopaganism, centered on the revival of a pre-industrial sensibility, evokes “larger totalities” such as Nature, Mother-Earth, life beings, planetary cycles, etc. (Houseman, “Comment” 214). In Cuba, where the neo-esoteric market is more constrained than elsewhere, and does not allow for sharp distinctions, both tendencies actually merge. What one finds, however, is that the spiritual and natural entities convoked are all equally “depersonalized”, including the local “Afro-Cuban” ones. This contrasts sharply with the very different processes at work in Afro-Cuban religion where *orichas* and other entities are defined and ritually constructed above all as highly personalized entities or agents, whose specific bonds with a particular adept lie at the very core of all ritual practices²⁵. *Orichas* and other entities are clearly mobilized in a different way by “seekers”, mainly in order to allow a participant “to experience [his/her] own holistic, monistic potential” (Houseman, “Afterword”) through experiencing his/her “connection” with diffuse and essentially impersonal entities and flux.

As it is well acknowledged by scholars on the topic, the New Age is in itself based on a process of cultural borrowing aimed at favoring and designing certain experiences; it does not exist outside the various, often essentialized or simplified, historical and cultural traditions it draws upon and revisits in the light of personal accomplishment (a fact that applies to Cuban New Age as well). Thus, the main question becomes: how should we understand not so much that New Age initiatives are locally modulated or “Afro-Cubanized”, but the fact that in equal measure endogenous Afro-Cuban referents integrate exogenous ritualized practices? I would like to suggest that this is linked to a process of “self-exoticism”.

²⁵ On these topics, see Argyriadis (“La religión”); Espirito Santo (“Developing”); Kerestetzi; Gobin (“Un complexe”).

... and self-exoticism

Echoing recurrent observations in the field, the sociologist Véronique Altglas ("Exotisme religieux", "From Yoga") has proposed we ponder the "exoticism" that lies at the heart of New Age practices. For her, this "exoticism" constitutes the underlying dynamic of New Age syncretic *bricolage* (which has its limits, she says)²⁶ as it draws on distant historical and cultural forms, often subaltern ones, that arouse both fascination and aversion. New Age exoticism should thus be understood as a kind of tool for the domestication (i.e. fragmentation and decontextualization) of these "traditions" that amounts to a "neutralization" of their "particularities" and differences (and also of their potential strangeness). It is a process that allows for "forms of minor adherence" that can be appropriated as symbolic, "psychologized" resources that, in the end, become largely indistinguishable in spite of their disparate origins.

My argument here is that in Cuba, everything suggests that the relationship to Afro-Cuban religious elements established by some spiritual seekers (in our example, the *reikistas* who also rely on Afro-Cuban religious conceptions) is surprisingly close to that described by Altglas with the notion of "exoticism". This fact is particularly evident in the way isolated cosmological representations are disengaged from the overall cosmopraxis: while the presence of Afro-Cuban referents seems to "Cubanize" these new practices, in fact, the latter are emptied of their more local meanings and disassociated from the actual sets of practices that give them substance. As previously noted, the tutelary *oricha* or "guardian angel" is reduced to no more than a relatively impersonal natural or social force (invoked rather like the way an astrological sign is invoked); the *oricha* Eleguá is generally limited to its function as a catalyst of "energy"; *aché* is reduced to the idea of a circulating cosmic flux that may be activated by certain bodily manipulations. Equally significantly, as we will see, sacrifices are completely set apart. As a result, what distinguishes this New Age syncretism from the fundamentally "indigenous" "Afro-Cuban" syncretism resides in my view in the puzzling dynamics of self-exoticism it implies, a dimension that an additional example will highlight further.

In the Neo-Pagan Wiccan circles and "courses" that I attended in Havana, several introductory sessions were dedicated to the premises of the practice; one of them, in particular, was devoted to the question of the personal choice of "one's god and goddess". Participants were presented with the choice of a couple of male/female deities that would later become for them the representation of the Great God and Great Goddess at the core of Wiccan ritual practice²⁷ (see **image 5**). During this session, our "master" or "teacher" enumerated the deities that could inspire us, detailing for each one their origin, their main characteristics, so that different people could better orient their choices: Zeus/Hera, Apollo/Aphrodite, Thor/Freya, Vishnu/ Lakshmi, etc. I was surprised to hear him mention the male and female *orichas* Changó and Yemayá in the middle of this list without even alluding to their presence or historicity in Cuba. They were placed on exactly the same level as the others, and linked to their "Yoruba origin", emptied of all their local flavor and in this way exoticized by being "exogenized", to be (re)approached through the prism of this dynamic of decontextualization outlined by Altglas. For this matter, it is equally significant that one of the *reikistas* integrating a simplified *moyugba* into his ritualized sessions once spoke to me about Olorun by appealing to a "Dogon poem" dedicated to the sun.

²⁶ See also De la Torre *et al.*

²⁷ For more details, see Pike.



Image 5. Author ©. Representations of Wicca great God and Goddess exposed to neophyte during a Wicca teaching session. Havana, 2012.

In short, far from excluding Afro-Cuban religions from its circuits, the New Age seems rather to appropriate certain aspects of them by a singular process of *self-otherization* or *self-exoticism* (in the sense given to the latter notion by Altglas). And if we can talk about *self-otherization* in this context, it is in reference to a national cultural identity precisely defined by a series of commonly shared referents, including Afro-Cuban religious referents with which most Cubans are familiar, if not by primary religious socialization, because they actually have been patrimonialized for several decades and erected as emblems of a revolutionary and unitary Cuban identity also defined by its African contribution ²⁸.

In line both with Galinier, who spoke about “exo-shamanism” to account for New Age appropriations of Mexican Otomi shamanism, and with Appadurai and his notion of indigenization, it is this process of exoticizing appropriation of local cultural elements at work in New Age circuits that I intend to designate by the term *exogenization*. Considering that it also seems relevant in other American, especially Afro-American contexts ²⁹, I also suggest that we may have here a characteristic feature of the Latin American New Age and the way it proceeds in the appropriation of local referents.

By way of a temporary epilogue (or on contemporary conflicting visions of nature)

By means of the previous deliberately simple and short ethnographical examples, I have tried to contrast two forms of ritual or cultural creation at work in the current cultural encounter between Afro-Cuban religion

²⁸ On this process, see notably Argyriadis (“Les batá”). I agree with Frigerio that in many cases, it seems that cultural process of patrimonialization is an element favoring the fact that “spiritual seekers” draw from this or that religious universe of reference (this is moreover the case for the few African referents inserted into the New Age circuits, such as that of the Dogon briefly mentioned above, see Jolly), or in other words this exoticization.

²⁹ I have in mind the case of the Templo Guaracy (a New Age Umbanda Temple of Brazil) as studied by Teisenhoffer (“Produire”). As she illustrates, it is precisely this exoticizing process of rereading in Brazil the principles of local umbanda that have guaranteed the insertion of this practice in other national contexts.

and the New Age in Cuba. This has led me to stress the dissimilar processes of cultural appropriation operating at this level, evidencing on the one side processes of cultural *indigenization* already documented in other contexts and, on the other, dynamics of *exogenization* that have remained globally unnoticed in the studies of cultural and religious globalization until now. How can we appreciate better this double process, and especially the second one?

At first sight, the latter, which relates to forms of exogenous apprehension of local referents, could be related to some sociological factors which are still in need for further clarification³⁰. Indeed, the specificities of Cuban egalitarian politics undertaken since the 1960s somehow blur the classical boundaries of social classes that operate in neighboring contexts, redistributing social hierarchies in different ways. While a tighter sociology of this new spiritual *milieu* is yet to be elaborated, a few issues can already be pointed out. As stressed by the Cuban researchers of the CIPS (Jiménez Berrios et al.), the New Age recruits its “spiritual seekers” mostly among an educated, “White”, urban and female population. My own recent research on alternative spiritualized ecology in Cuba indicates that these practices could even be a form of “distinction” for some groups of individuals³¹. These first insights suggest that the exo-apprehension of Afro-Cuban religion at work in New Age ritual creations could be primarily understood in the light of the biographies of “spiritual seekers”, most likely relatively detached from the practical world of Afro-Cuban religions – a point which would lead back to the issue of a binary mutual religious embedding above all linked to individual trajectories and religious socialization: Afro-Cuban specialists would appropriate and indigenize New Age elements while “spiritual seekers” would do the same with exogenized Afro-Cuban elements... However, while this dimension cannot be entirely discarded, it does not exhaust the empirical material: things are not that simple and, for now, two concluding examples will demonstrate this better than refined speculations.

As I mentioned briefly earlier, animal sacrifices are a pillar of the ritual universe of Afro-Cuban religions as animal blood is conceived as one of the main vectors of *ache*, the force that, in Santería and Ifá, guarantee the dialogue and reciprocity between human beings and the deities. These sacrifices are generally made on the material representations of the personalized entities that initiates of different initiatory levels (including “minor levels” implying the acquisition of protective objects and “weak” forms of involvement) keep at home and which they regularly “feed”. While several “spiritual seekers” involved in reiki, yoga and “universal energy” circles that I have met have gone through these first initiatory degrees, they also have developed distinctive conceptions of the specific care these objects require, questioning precisely the relevance of animal sacrifices. According to them, these are detrimental to the “harmony between man and nature”, the reasoned and “spiritual evolution of humanity”, and, more generally, the “elevation” and “spiritual development” of individuals³². In other words,

³⁰ In order to dispel any doubt, it is important to keep in mind that the emergence and development of the New Age has been and is still mediated by external relays. During the period of Covid confinement and thanks to the development of mobile Internet services, there was an upsurge of online courses provided (at a reduced rate for Cubans) by foreign Latin-American “spiritual masters”. Nonetheless, its practice and appropriation mostly concern Cubans on the island rather than foreigners in Cuba.

³¹ The promoter of an alternative ecological project in the Western mountains of Cuba spoke to me in a humorous, yet significant way about a peasant that chose to live like an hermit in a cave of, the region: “ah, when you think you’re freaky, there’s always one who comes along who’s more freaky than you!”. As noticed by Altglas (“Exotisme”) relying on Bourdieu, in Europe, New Age spirituality appears to be the privileged (and distinctive) form of spirituality of a “new bourgeoisie” or “cultural avant-garde”. This is a possibility that should be considered and explored also in the Cuban case.

³² I recently became aware that the few groups promoting deep ecology and veganism in Havana, which are intertwined with the spiritual circuits described here, are actually advocating for the legal prohibition of such sacrifices, accusing Afro-Cuban religion of forms of cultural savageness, not to say barbarianism (evoking a historical stigmata that had long marked their perception in Cuban society, see Argyriadis *et al.*). In this case, the exogenization of some element coming from this world clearly mobilizes thus the double dimension of fascination *and* aversion of religious exotism. This process of self-exoticization allows then precisely to neutralize some religious particularisms and to make them less disturbing.

the practice of sacrifice contradicts their vision of human relationships to the “living” and to “nature” in particular³³. However, convinced that these objects are indeed recipients of “energy”, such followers do not discard them as ritual objects that must be “fed”. And for this they have invented new techniques.



Image 6. Author ©. Creative use of pyramids aimed to “charge” Afro-Cuban ritual objects with cosmic energy

One of the *reikistas* I know has crafted small pyramids in the colors of the *orichas* and decorated them with graphemes stemming from the complex divinatory corpus of Ifá, intended to “capture” the surrounding “universal energy”. By means of their spatial orientation, the energy absorbed by the pyramids is supposed to refract on the objects and “charge” or “feed” them, replacing animal blood (**image 6**).

The suppression of this key-element of local religiosity, which leads some practitioners to freely rework material elements originating in Afro-Cuban practices, may seem, at first sight, very remote from the “traditional” practice of Afro-Cuban religion and restricted to New Age circles. Nevertheless, nothing could be further away from the truth. In the 2010s, a ritual lineage of Santería including initiates also engaged in new spiritual circuits were concerned by this idea of the negative aspect of sacrifices. The leader of this house, a respected *santero* in Havana, implemented what he called the first “*santo sin sangre*” (“saint without blood”) in his own ritual. He conceived a new ritual procedure of the highest initiation in Santería, usually called *santo* (or *kari ocha*) that sustains the reproduction of the practice by making new initiates and communities of initiates. He decided to replace the important animal sacrifices that such ritual involves (usually ten up to fifteen animals are killed, such as poultry, goats, a turtle, a hutia, etc.) by other ritual ways held to equally “give birth” to the ritual materialization of the deities. Interestingly, all the *santeros* who participated in this unprecedented initiation were then *reikistas*. It is through meditation and canalization of the energy involving reiki techniques that they attempted to give “*aché*” to the initiate as well as to the several divine objects that this person would keep and care for after the ceremony. Sacrifices were then entirely substituted and discarded, but now in the frame of a

³³ On sacrifice being the touchstone of conflicting (cosmo)visions in similar contexts, see also Juárez Huet (“Un pedacito”); Frigerio.

ritual in a well-established house of Santería. Much could be said about this case that obviously raises (micro-) political issues of contestation and legitimacy within the Afro-Cuban world³⁴. However, what is truly emblematic of how New Age practices and conceptions likely to influence – and potentially restructure – some of the most essential tenets of Afro-Cuban religion, are the innovative and reflexive ways in which the syncretic dynamics of exogenization of the New Age are unexpectedly weaved together with Afro-Cuban syncretism and its tendency to indigenize New Age thinking in a stimulating and challenging way. For now, I will limit myself to a partial conclusion on the subject. Considering that these mutual influences are linked to forms of socio-ecological militancy, it is valuable to underscore that such innovations ultimately appear – in the global context in which we live – around conflicting visions of Nature and the differential ways of their ritualization. This, in turn, opens new comparative avenues between different religious phenomena and, at the same time invites us to also explore this overlooked aspect in the study of Cuban religions³⁵ at the light of what appear to be potentially new (New Age) uses of “Nature” and of the environment.

Bibliography

- Altglas, Véronique. "Exotisme religieux et bricolage". *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 167 (2014): 315-332.
- _____. *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at large. Cultural dimension of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Argyriadis, Kali. *La religión à La Havane. Actualité des représentations et des pratiques culturelles havanaises*. Paris: Archives contemporaines, 1999.
- _____. "Les batá deux fois sacrés. La construction de la tradition musicale et chorégraphique afro-cubaine". *Civilisations* 53 (2006): 45-74.
- _____. Argyriadis, Kali et al. *En sentido contrario: transnacionalización de religiones africanas y latinoamericanas*: Paris, IRD Éditions. 2018.
- Bastide, Roger. *Les Amériques Noires*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1967.
- Beaud, Sylvie. "What is a “good” reiki session? An auto-ethnographic approach on what reiki does to the practitioner". Paper presented at the 17th. Congress of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. Belfast, July 27. 2022.
- Blanco Pérez, Rolando. *El reiki en la Habana Vieja. Aproximaciones a la iniciación de segundo grado y sus conexiones con prácticas religiosas*. Thesis. Universidad de La Habana, 2007.
- Bonhomme, Julien y Katerina Kerestetzi. "Les signatures des dieux. Graphismes et action rituelle dans les religions

³⁴ To more “traditional” practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, these reinventions had no validity and these new ritual devices were not even understandable without any explicit explanation about their form or their aims. It is equally interesting, however, to mention that several meetings between Afro-Cuban priests and environmental activists in order to tackle this issue have also been held since then (see <https://guardabosquescuba.org/2018/06/22/babalawos-y-ambientalistas-buscan-consenso-en-la-habana/>).

³⁵ See also Castro Ramirez for a recent convergent statement.

afro-cubaines". *Gradhiva* 22 (2015): 74-105.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinction*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979.

Brown, David. *Santería enthroned: art, ritual, and innovation in an Afro-Cuban religion*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003.

Carozzi, María Julia, ed. *A Nova Era no Mercosul*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1999.

Castro Ramírez, Luis. "Habitar mundos humanos-no-humanos en el complejo santería-ifá: relacionamientos medioambientales y flujos diaspóricos Colombia-Cuba-México". *Naturaleza y Sociedad* 3 (2022):112-155.

De Almeida Cunha, Ana. "Muerte, muertos y "llanto" palero. Los funerales como reveladores de la diversidad religiosa cubana". *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 38 (2013):1-23.

De La Torre, Renée. "Religiosidades indo y afroamericanas y circuitos de espiritualidad New Age". *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*. Renée De La Torre, Cristina Gutiérrez Zuñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez Huet, eds. México: Ciesas/Colegio de Jalisco, 2013. 27-46.

De La Torre, Renée, Cristina Gutiérrez Zuñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez Huet. *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*. México: Ciesas / Colegio de Jalisco, 2013.

Espirito Santo, Diana. "Observaciones sobre la relación entre la "cosmo-lógica" y la construcción de la persona en el espiritismo cubano": *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 38 (2013): 1-22.

_____ *Developing the dead: Mediumship and selfhood in Cuban Espiritismo*. Miami: University Press of Florida, 2015.

_____ "Silent Histories. Deadly Chinos and the Memorialization of a Chinese Imaginary through Afro-Cuban Religions". *Atlantic Perspectives: Spirits, Places and Heritage*. Markus Balkenhol, Ruy Llera Blanes and Ramon Sarró, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019. 17-32.

Frigerio, Alejandro. "Lógicas y límites de la apropiación New Age: donde se detiene el sincretismo". *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*. Renée De La Torre, Cristina Gutiérrez Zuñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez Huet, eds. México: Ciesas/Colegio de Jalisco, 2013. 47-70.

Galinier, Jacques. "Endo y exo chamanismo en México. Disputas al rededor de la espiritualidad étnica". *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*. Renée De La Torre, Cristina Gutiérrez Zuñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez Huet, eds. México: Ciesas/Colegio de Jalisco, 2013. 105-116.

Gobin, Emma. *Un complexe sacerdotal cubain : les santeros, les babalaos et la réflexivité critique*. Thesis, Université Paris Nanterre. 2012.

_____ "L'intégration d'étrangers dans la *santería* et le culte d'Ifá à La Havane : enjeux sociaux et micro-politiques, dynamiques rituelles". *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 38 (2013): 1-30.

_____ "¿Un New Age afro-cubano? Creatividad ritual y apropiación de nuevas espiritualidades en Cuba". Paper presented at the colloquium *Antropología social y cultural comparada*, Instituto Cubano de Antropología, La Habana, 14-25 abril. 2014.

_____ "L'émergence du New Age dans la Cuba post-soviétique: changement social, médecines alternatives et circulations religieuses". *Autrepart* 74-75 (2015): 139-158.

- _____ "(Spi)Ritualizing Nature and Urban Environments: Mapping Cuban Permaculture". Paper presented at the 17th. Congress of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. Belfast, July 26. 2022.
- _____ "Agricultures alternatives et écoritualités émergentes: de quelques collusions entre New Age et anthropocène". *Ethnologie Française* (2022) in press.
- Gobin, Emma and Géraldine Morel. "L'ethnographie et l'anthropologie religieuses de Cuba : repères historiques et bibliographiques". *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 38 (2013) :1-27.
- Gutiérrez Zuñiga, Cristina. *Nuevos movimientos religiosos. La Nueva Era en Guadalajara*. Guadalajara: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1996.
- Holbraad, Martin. "The power of powder: Multiplicity and motion in the divinatory cosmology of Cuban Ifá (or mana, again)". *Thinking through things. Theorizing artefacts ethnographically*. Amiria Henare and Martin Holbraad, eds. Londres: Routledge: 2007. 189-225.
- _____ *Truth in motion. The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Heelas, Paul. *The New Age movement: The celebration of the self and the sacralization of modernity*. London: Blackwell, 1999.
- Houseman, Michael. "Comment comprendre l'esthétique affectée des cérémonies New Age et néopaiennes?". *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 174 (2016): 213-237.
- _____ "Afterword". *Relating with More-Than-Humans. Interbeing Rituality in a Living World*. Jean Chamel and Yael Dansac, eds. Londres: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022. in press.
- Jiménez Berrios, Sonia; Ana Perera, Maricela Perera, Aurora Aguilar et al. *Algunas tendencias y manifestaciones del movimiento de la Nueva Era en Ciudad de la Habana*. Research report, Centro de investigaciones psicológicas y sociológicas (CIPS), La Habana. 2005.
- Jolly, Éric. "Dogon virtuels et contre-cultures". *L'Homme. Revue française d'anthropologie* 211 (2014): 41-74.
- Juárez Huet, Nahayeilli. "Santería y New Age : interacciones, límites y complementariedades". *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*. Renée De La Torre, Cristina Gutiérrez Zuñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez Huet, eds. México: Ciesas/Colegio de Jalisco, 2013. 191-208.
- _____ *Un pedacito de dios en casa. Circulación transnacional, relocalización y praxis de la santería en la ciudad de México*. México DF: Ciesas, 2014.
- Karnoouh, Lorraine. "Processus de recomposition religieuse à La Havane : la religion et le New Age". *La Religion des orisha. Un champ social transnational en pleine recomposition*. Kali Argyriadis and Stefania Capone, eds. Paris: Hermann, 2011. 211-239.
- Kerestetzi, Katerina. *Vivre avec les morts à Cuba*. Paris: Karthala, 2013.
- Magnani, José G. C.. *O Brasil da Nova Era*. Río de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2000.
- Palmié, Stefan. *The cooking of history: How not to study Afro-Cuban religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

- Pike, Sarah. *New Age and neopagan religions in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Pimenova, Ksenia. "Traditions et emprunts dans un miroir chamanique. Réflexions autour d'un nouveau rituel touva". *Ethnographiques.org* 33 (2016): 1-31.
- Rodríguez Plasencia, Girardo. "Sõka Gakkai in Cuba. Building a "spiritual bridge" to local particularism, the "mystic East" and the world". *Journal of religion in Japan* 3 (2014): 198-225.
- Saldívar Arellano, Juan. "Living religion from migration, transnationalization of cuban santería in Lima, Peru, La Paz, Bolivia and Santiago, Chile (1980-2013)". *Revista Reflexiones* 94 (2015): 133-141.
- Sutcliffe, Steve. *Children of the New Age. A history of spiritual practices*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Teisenhoffer, Viola. "Umbanda, psychothérapie et New Age. Aspects de l'implantation de l'umbanda à Paris". *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 31 (2007): 1-18.
- _____. *Produire un soi spirituel: pratiques et expériences rituelles dans l'umbanda du Temple Guaracy de Paris (France)*. Thesis. Université Paris Nanterre, 2015.
- Wirtz, Kristina. "Las funciones trópicas del parentesco en la santería cubana". *Del Caribe* 32 (2000): 12-37.