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Religion in Latin America

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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African deities in Latin America

- Oshun, Yemaya and Oya



Syncretism: African Gods as Catholic Saints

African Gods

- Oshun
- Yemaya
- Ogun
- Shango
- Olofu
- Oya

Catholic Saints

- Virgin of Caridad del Cobre
- Virgin of Regla
- St Peter
- St Barbara
- Christ
- Virgin of La Candelaria

Oshun in Cuba

- River goddess in the West African Yoruba pantheon
- Identified in Cuba as the Virgin of Caridad del Cobre



Oshun takes on a human body (in Brazil)



Yemaya

- Water goddess (sea/ocean)
- Regarded as mother of all orishas (=deities)
- Identified in Brazil as Nossa Senhora dos Nevegantes e das Candeias



Yemaya in Brazil





Gender distribution among the Yoruba

- Oyèrónké Oyêwùmí describes the Yoruba language as gender-free
- -> she argues that also the deities were traditionally described without a fixed, static gender
- However: due to impact of Christianization the deities are nowadays perceived as gendered entities

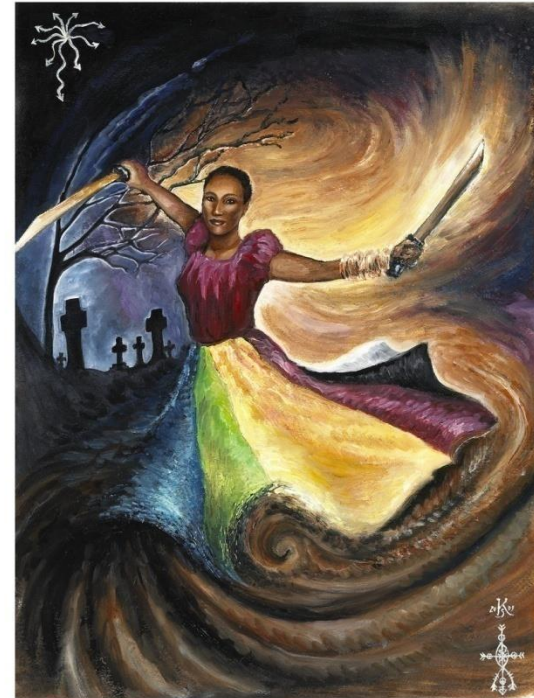
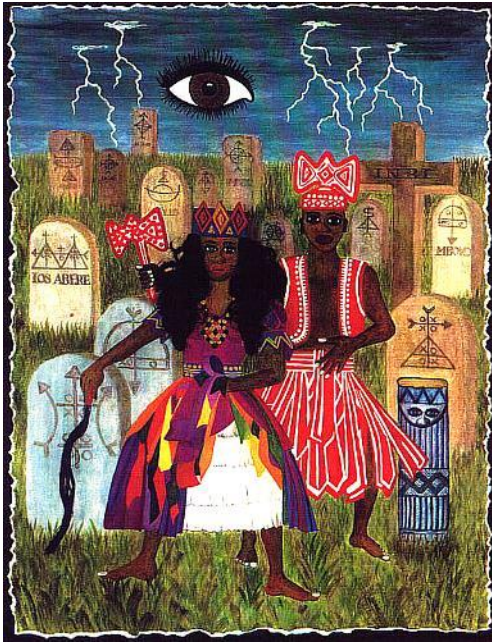
Impact of changes

- over the last centuries gender perception changed due to the influence of Islam (since the seventeenth century), Christianity (since the nineteenth century), and British colonialism (in the twentieth century).
- in particular Christian missionaries relegated women to the domestic domain
- -> as a consequence of external influences devotees today regard Orishas as gendered entities

Orishas as gender role models

- Oyeronke Olajuba states that 'the conduct and interaction of goddesses in African religious narratives provide models for female roles at the religious and social levels' (2005, p. 3401).
- But the gender construction in African indigenous religions is fluid and complex.

Oya, goddess of weather ... and cemeteries



African dichotomies

- “Visible/Invisible, male/female, the calm/the violence, the life-enhancing/the life-depleting, right hand/left hand; all phenomena partaker of such dichotomies.”
(Judith Gleason, p. 73).

Conclusion

- “Throughout the course of the history of religions, the goddess has manifested herself in numerous ways. She has been a source of creativity and destruction, a passionate lover and a pure virgin, a temptress and a repeller, beautiful and ugly, terrible and benign. She has been a vivid symbol of fertility, prosperity, and wealth, as well as a symbol of loss and death, both beckoning and repulsing the religious devotee.” (Carl Olson, p. IX)

Readings

- Gleason, Judith. *Oya: in praise of an African goddess*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco. 1992).
- Olson, Carl (ed.), *The Book of the Goddess, past and present: an introduction to her religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
 - in particular chapter 14 (on Oshun in Afro-American religions)
- Rosario, Claudia Cerqueira do. 'The Ladies Of The Water: Iemanjá, Oxum, Oiá and a Living Faith'. *Wagadu* 3 (2006): pp.142-154.