

## Hail to the chefs

### Black women's pedagogy, sacred kitchenspaces, and Afro-Diasporic religions

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For well over a century, Afro-Diasporic religions have been depicted as synonymous with sacrifice. Although the etymology of the word stems from the Latin term for “holy” (*sacer*), popular representations have cast life offerings to Black deities as anything but. Along with spirit possession and zombies, “voodoo” sacrifice became spectacularized when Hollywood was in its infancy. Scenes of frenzied carnage in films, travelogues, and other literary texts sought to justify repeated military occupations of Haiti by the United States and its other “interventions” throughout the Caribbean. Such tableaux exploited earlier European renderings of the 1791 Haitian Revolution not as an “unthinkably” coordinated war of decolonization but as an orgy of violence.<sup>1</sup> Generations of historians rehearsed nineteenth-century reports that the uprising commenced among maroons and enslaved participants in a Vodou ceremony at Bois Caïman, culminating in the killing of a black pig by the *mambo* Cécile Fatiman.<sup>2</sup> The nation of Haiti later reappropriated *Bwa Kayiman* as its origin myth, yet elevating this narrative had the unintended effect of reinscribing sacrifice as the focal point – the veritable *poto mitan* – of Afro-Diasporic ritual.<sup>3</sup>

Cécile Fatiman purportedly ordered those assembled before her to seal their insurrectionary pact by drinking the slain pig's blood. Captured by innumerable visual artists and writers, this parody of the Roman Catholic Eucharistic meal featured the ultimate non-kosher and non-halal substance, thus inverting the three major patriarchal religions at once. The story of *Bwa Kayiman* also enlarged existing stereotypes of Caribbean religions that are still with us today. For instance, in the United States, the criminalization of Afro-Cuban traditions such as Yorùbá-inspired Lucumí/Santería has focused on allegations of animal abuse and improper disposal of sacrificial waste. Even the 1993 Supreme Court case that established practitioners' right to perform sacrifice served to buttress its discursive placement as the axis around which Afro-Diasporic religions revolve.<sup>4</sup> Having internalized this conceptual schema, detractors as well as neophytes tend to overemphasize the frequency and centrality of ritual slaughter. A case in point: the Harlem-born rapper/singer Azealia Banks caused an uproar in late 2016 when she shared an Instagram video of a closet encrusted with the residue of dead poultry. A novice initiate in the Kongo-inspired Afro-Cuban tradition of Palo Mayombe, Banks said she was about to clean up “three years' worth of *brujería* [witchcraft].” At the end of the clip, Banks quipped, “Real witches

do real things,” inadvertently reinforcing the notion of bloodshed as the authentic core of Black Atlantic traditions.<sup>5</sup>

No accounts to date have asked what became of the pig at Bois Caïman. Had it been a Vodou rite according to contemporary precedent, the pig would have become pork. Women would have cooked it after seeing to its meticulous washing, skinning, and butchering. (By “women,” here and throughout, I mean both cisgender and transgender women – except when otherwise specified – and include all sexual orientations.) The deities (or *lwa*) would have accepted their share of the fried or roasted meat, and then, their human co-conspirators would have feasted on their favorite morsels. Sacrifice does feature in Afro-Diasporic religions, but an accurate understanding of them involves much greater attention to food preparation and the practitioners placed in charge of their kitchens. While sacrifice transpires in a matter of minutes, historians of religions have privileged its analysis due to its theological currency and normative performance by men. Cooking, on the other hand, often lasts hours, but it awaits comparable scholarly interest due principally to its association with women’s work. To inquire into what happens after the moment of slaughter, then, is to open up a scandalously delayed investigation into one obscured aspect of Black women’s religious histories.

The “real things” that Black women do in Afro-Diasporic religions are the subject of the present chapter. Women and gay men of African descent have historically governed kitchenspaces in initiatory Black Atlantic traditions. In what follows, I concentrate on their cooking to highlight an undervalued modality of racialized and gendered religious labor. I argue that in kitchenspaces, elders have disabused newcomers of their misconceptions about sacrifice and inaugurated the embodiment of sacred knowledges. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a predominantly African American community devoted to Afro-Cuban traditions, I underscore the corporeal enskillment that occurs as practices of care and deference dovetail with educational processes. I then outline the Afro-Diasporic religious pedagogy elaborated by (and largely for) Black women that has supported the worship of African deities in the twentieth century. I close by problematizing the kitchen as a site fraught with tensions, the reclamation of which must be approached with caution and several grains of salt.

### **Stirring the pot: portrayal vs. praxis**

By the dawn of the twentieth century, Black Atlantic traditions that had crystallized during the transatlantic slave trade were beset on all sides. Religious practitioners fell victim to incarceration, mob violence, and other forms of white supremacist terror. Tabloids and prestigious journals alike helped to circulate rumors of child abduction and murder that endangered formerly enslaved peoples’ lives and imperiled their livelihoods. In the United States, regional varieties of conjure and rootwork endured in the South and spread North and West through the Great Migration, but the last “voodoo” communities in New Orleans had vanished in the wake of dogged legal prosecution in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>6</sup> In the Anglophone Caribbean, so-called obeah and “high science” continued to be outlawed. “Witch crazes” in Cuba saw to the arrest, lynching, and garroting of Black men and women called *brujos*. In Brazil, Candomblé temples (*terreiros*) fought to be decriminalized. The ban on Winti in Suriname held fast until 1971.

Genealogies of West and Central African religions in the Americas tend to stress their centuries-old provenance. Their roots are undoubtedly profound, some stretching into the late fifteenth century. However, the early 1900s was a crucial period of consolidation and efflorescence that would determine their future in a post-emancipatory world. In Cuba, the railroad facilitated the expansion of Lucumí beyond Havana, Regla, and Matanzas into the far hinterlands, as priests journeyed to initiate protégés in provinces dominated by Kongo-inspired religious formations

and Espiritismo; train travel increased the uniformity of these and Yorùbá-inspired practices.<sup>7</sup> In Candomblé, terreiros contended with the rise of Umbanda as a rival tradition and confronted concerns over the initiation of white Brazilians and foreigners. Vodou in Haiti – post-eman-  
cipatory since 1804 – faced the outrages of U.S. Marines and those of local Christian “anti-  
superstition” campaigners. Mail-order catalogs from such enterprises as Chicago’s De Laurence,  
Scott, and Company distributed obscure esoteric tracts and “magical” merchandise that would  
find ready niches in Black Atlantic traditions.

In this period, practitioners made common cause with scholars to collaborate in their docu-  
mentation, creating a textual “ethnographic interface” that redounded to the benefit of both  
parties.<sup>8</sup> Scholars such as Black anthropologists Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham  
obtained access to coveted information, while practitioners gained some degree of advocacy.  
To counter the hegemonic emphasis on sacrifice, informants accentuated the facets of their  
traditions that aligned them with those recognized as “world religions,” unanimously character-  
ized by the leadership of literate male clerics. Although scholars consulted informants with a  
veritable Whitman’s Sampler of racialized genders and sexual identities, heteronormative analy-  
ses based on the testimony of straight, cisgender men held sway. The politics of respectability  
demanded that these traditions be distanced from misrepresentations dripping with misogynoir.<sup>9</sup>  
Unfavorable portrayals of Black women at the stove equated them with medieval witches,  
Caribbean witch doctors, African cannibals at their cauldrons, and hoodoo doctors “laying  
tricks.” The flip side of these visual and literary tropes was the aproned figure of the pathetically  
acquiescent mammy.<sup>10</sup>

None of these caricatures projected legitimate religious authority or sacred power to the  
publics addressed by them. Consequently, cooking did not go unobserved, but it was not them-  
atized. The exceptions prove the rule; for example, the ubiquity of food and cooking in  
Ruth Landes’ 1947 *The City of Women* was undoubtedly a factor in its reception as unserious  
and steeped in petty minutiae, despite the anthropological evidence it tendered for her thesis  
that Bahian Candomblé was a matriarchate.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the hunger of Afro-Diasporic gods was  
reduced to a thin metaphor and held at arms’ length so as to attenuate their association with  
bloodlust and other crude appetites. In reality, these deities require feeding in rituals of conse-  
cration and ordination to abide within objects that function as material instantiations of their  
sovereignty. The gods also request animals (differentiated by age, size, sex, and color) through  
divination and in the oracular speech of initiates possessed by them. Yet their sacrificial remains  
must be cooked according to tradition-specific protocols, unless the deities explicitly dictate  
otherwise.

Although Black women have occupied prominent positions as diviners, dancers, praise sing-  
ers, and other types of religious virtuosos, their careers as executive chefs and kitchenhands have  
been erased. This restaurant industry terminology may be anachronistic, but as trailblazing culi-  
nary historian Jessica B. Harris once said, “I work in a cuisine that (falsely) only has cooks, very  
few chefs.”<sup>12</sup> How much of their labor has been expunged from the record simply through  
an author’s choice of the passive voice (“meat was cooked,” “dishes were made,” “meals were  
prepared”)? A handful of Black Atlantic traditions have deemed kitchen managers valuable  
enough to bestow titles on them: in Lucumí, *alashé* or *cocinera/o*; in Vodou, *hounsi cuisinièr/e*; in  
Candomblé, *iya bassê*, *iabassê*, *ayabasê*, or *abassê*; and among Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad, *husie*, a  
locution that may be etymologically related to *hounsi*.<sup>13</sup> Not all such positions have been held  
by women; in the Afro-Cuban initiatory brotherhood of Abakuá, the *nkandembo* has been a cis-  
gender man (presumably heterosexual, given the tradition’s defining patriarchal masculinity). Yet  
we may confidently extrapolate that, by and large, it is women who have preserved time-tested  
recipes and introduced inestimable innovations.

## Letting it percolate and getting it right

*Kitchenspace* refers to the domestic zone of food preparation and consumption customarily demarcated by women.<sup>14</sup> Michael W. Twitty writes lyrically of ancestral African kitchenspaces:

The little hearth – located under heaven or a thatch structure or building used during the rainy season – was itself a ritual space, an altar, a face of spirits, usually a female entity representing motherhood and nurture, the pot itself a kind of womb. To be certain, many of us cooked this way in the slave quarters in our swept yards and at the edges of the fields.<sup>15</sup>

The mythologies of Afro-Diasporic religions describe the gods themselves as fixing meals, magic, and medicine in open-air kitchenspaces. Although practitioners envision most of those doing so as female, it is imperative not to essentialize the customary. Traditions of Yorùbá-inspired orisha/orixá worship cast the hypermasculine blacksmith Ogún – master of the forge, railroad track, and knife-edge – as fixing meals for himself; his erratic relations with women mean that he must know how to cook. The Lucumí Ogún's consecrated objects dwell inside a small three-legged cauldron, symbolic of the life-kindling transformation wrought by his primordial heat.

For several years, the kitchenspace at the heart of my research was to be found in Ilé Laroye, a Chicago-based Lucumí, Palo Monte, and Espiritismo community. Led since 1986 by African American diviner and praise-singer Ashabi Moseley, Ilé Laroye has a sizeable contingent of non-Black Latinx, white American, and LGBTQ “godchildren.”<sup>16</sup> It differs from Black separatist Ifá communities in maintaining and cultivating ties with Cuban elders – initiates with seniority – embraced as the inheritors of a precolonial Yorùbá tradition passed down through oral tradition. For the most part, my interlocutors had embarked on the worship of African deities after the Mariel boatlift of 1980 brought unprecedented numbers of Afro-Cuban religious practitioners to the United States. Many members of Ilé Laroye had been brought up as Roman Catholics. Some had been adherents of the Black Spiritual Church or the Black Nationalist Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, launched by theologian Albert Cleage as Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna in 1967.

One of my main interlocutors was the alashé Arlene Stevens when she ran the kitchenspace of Asabi's South Side bungalow. Arlene called herself “American African,” although she hastened to acknowledge, “the world isn't ready for that yet.”<sup>17</sup> Akissi Britton writes of her ethnographic site, a Brooklyn-based house of orisha worship,

As people worked feverishly, exhaustively, yet lovingly in the kitchen they followed the lead of women who had “come up in the movement” and who approached ocha work with the same diligence and devotion as they did with nation-building in Black Nationalist organizations ... The women leading this kitchen were/are fierce, loving, protective and very much about their business.<sup>18</sup>

Britton's description fits elders like Arlene remarkably well. On one occasion, she told me that she nearly broke down crying when she saw one of her son's new textbooks, filled with pages and pages of “positive, beautiful” images of Black folks, “and that was the *math book*.” She said she was one of those who had fought hard to get any representation of people of color in school books, that “we” had “sat on a cold stone bed in jail” to get there, and it made her choke up to see how far “we” had come.

Arlene added that she had been riding the bus recently and overheard two young women dismiss the Black Panthers as a street gang. She let them go back and forth, then interrupted

them and delivered a brief history lesson before exiting the bus. In the same discussion, Arlene excoriated “snooty,” “Blacker-than-thou,” “*Black*,” ostentatiously Afrocentric “upper middle class” types at her son’s elementary school whose “mixed metaphor” idea of Black nationalism had them reciting libations that started in Swahili and ended in Yorùbá. She blasted the laminated posters of Kemetic gods at her son’s school as promoting a “blended, homogenous-ized” view of Africa without regard to “structure or tradition,” an anachronistic pastiche rooted in an ideology that inculcates pride at the expense of history and geography. Sporting twisted silver locs, spiral-carved bone earrings, and elegant bogolan caftans, she bemoaned the fact that her acquaintances could embrace Africa culturally but not religiously thanks to everything that the phrase “Dark Continent” connoted.

Arlene availed herself of these critical registers to verbalize her relationship with Africanity, yet her bond with it materialized most vibrantly in kitchenspaces. She and other elders approached food preparation as one of the most tangible connections with the Afro-Cuban past that engendered Lucumí and considered Yorùbá recipes tailored to the deities’ tastes a sociocultural archive. They spared no pains in schooling their juniors on the obligation to handle sacred cuisine with fidelity to hallowed convention. Their education to this effect socialized outsiders into the community once they proceeded to offer assistance for ceremonies instead of simply turning up for scheduled divination sessions and celebratory drum rituals. Arlene put newcomers to work on such “inglorious and unglamorous” tasks as chopping onions, steaming banana leaves, boiling grits, cracking coconuts, and plucking poultry.<sup>19</sup> Her apprentices acquired the expertise to systematically butcher birds and occasionally, quarter ram and goat.<sup>20</sup> Dependable regulars attained proficiency in the intricacies of braising.

Elders defined practitioners’ moral and material nourishment as dependent upon the alimination of their spiritual patrons. They classified portions of the blood, sacred viscera, and extremities of sacrifices as *inálés* or *ashés* (plural), meaning “food for the gods.” Sensorily and affectively demanding, the rigors of “taking out” or “pulling” *ashés* furnished the opportunity to learn Lucumí from the inside out – beginning with the fact that blood sacrifice (*ebó eyé* or *ebó woní*) belongs to a much larger category of cleansing and curative ritual endeavor called *ebó*. Practitioners understand more than a few *ebó* to be a feeding of different entities, from the orishas to the ancestral dead (*egún*) to the deity of one’s own head (*Orí*). Most often, they receive fruit, honey, desserts, and savory dishes heavy on vegetables, legumes, and grains. Elders validated newcomers’ squeamishness toward *ashés* but insisted that involuntary emotions like disgust arise from sociocultural conditioning. Such reflexes had to be un-learned in order for the orishas to get fed. Elders taught that orishas need *ashés* to render their own primordial substance and vital energy (*aché*) communally accessible for the purposes of individual healing and institutional reproduction.

Yet the gastronomic pleasure of the gods was not merely about good intentions or surface appeal. Food had to be right: correctly cleaned, cut, and cooked. Elders coached newcomers to remove feathers from fowl and excise excess flesh from *ashés* as if an orisha might possess an initiate’s body at any moment and wish to consume the immolated offerings. For elders, the health, safety, and satisfaction of a real person was at stake. This stringent standard of care entailed submission to the religious hierarchy as well as the performance of deference, conceptualized as “a set of practices that has ceremonialized elders’ privilege as teachers.”<sup>21</sup> Ideally, the anticipation of elders’ judgments would lead to discernment of the orishas’ desires. If newcomers internalized this ethos of care, they would graduate from clients of Ilé Laroye’s ritual specialists to servants of the orishas (who would have become “real persons” in their own right). Such practitioners would eventually become initiates.

## A pedagogy of kitchenspace

Pedagogies of the Sacred are pedagogies of Crossing.

—M. Jacqui Alexander<sup>22</sup>

Within kitchenspaces, elders have not only wedded the aesthetics of sacred cuisine to a code of ethics. They have deconstructed and reassembled the corporeal sensoria of the uninitiated. By teaching cooking, elders have ingrained the proper postures of action to assume in engaging with deities, ancestors, and other entities. In so doing, they have equipped practitioners with synaesthetic training integral to the survival of Black Atlantic traditions in the midst of extraordinary external pressures. For these reasons, I submit that many of the mundane micro-practices sustaining African deities in Diaspora have been culinary. This may sound like a bold claim, but I would go further and state that the religious pedagogy of Afro-Diasporic kitchenspaces has prioritized Black women as both teachers and students. Their methodologies have emphasized embodied memorization; scaffolding and sensorimotor emulation (learning-by-doing); dialogic learning among peers; somatic and emotional discipline; and the translation of “Diaspora Literacy” (as coined by VèVè Amasasa Clark) into what Joyce E. King calls “Heritage Knowledge (group memory).”<sup>23</sup>

Black women’s pedagogy enabled Afro-Diasporic religions to emerge from the Middle Passage and cross over the borders of nation-states and other artificial boundaries into the twenty-first century. Key to their “teaching *through* culture” has been a reliance on Black Atlantic idioms and allusions to interpret religious experience.<sup>24</sup> For example, Ashabi’s godchild Oshunleye once said that it was hypocritical for Christians to brand orisha worship “black magic” when as soon as Pope John Paul II died, she heard a woman on television saying that she’d lit a candle and was already praying to him. “He’s gonna be workin’!” Oshunleye exclaimed, using the word *work* in the sense of achieving transformative results, especially through liturgical action. “Straight up *egún* worship,” she shrugged.<sup>25</sup> While globalizing and transnational Afro-Diasporic religions have admitted racially and ethnically diverse practitioners, Black women have instructed them using verbal locutions and physical gestures that speak to those endowed with either diasporic literacy or Heritage Knowledge. Others have gotten it, or they haven’t.

Oshunleye’s words may seem like idle conversation, yet such undertheorized activities as cracking jokes and swapping anecdotes have effectively seasoned individuals into gendered and racialized forms of religious subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> “Chewing the fat” while cooking has tutored green-horns and old heads alike on the deities’ routine manifestation in everyday life. To cite perhaps the most consequential example, elders have tended to talk about their initiations in kitchenspaces. They have almost invariably narrated entry into the priesthood as an “unchosen choice,” made solely to save their lives or those of family members, in the absence of any desire whatsoever to affiliate with the religion(s) in question. In Black Atlantic traditions, this speech genre has not just reported on experience; it has persuaded participants of the deities’ phenomenal reality and their power over affliction.<sup>27</sup> Initiation stories have conveyed intersubjective frames of reference that interpellate (or “hail”) listeners, sparking responses that herald the realization of themselves as religious subjects.

Among these subjects have been countless LGBTQ people. After her “retirement” from the kitchen, Arlene was succeeded as *alashé* by a tall, white, multiply tattooed and pierced gay man in his twenties with a slight Southern drawl and a Master of Fine Arts. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to do more than suggest the contributions of LGBTQ people in transmitting Black Atlantic traditions, but my archival and ethnographic research reveals that the sacred kitchen has been a queer space in which embattled religious formations have been re-membered and

reproduced. The rapport between older women and more youthful gay men has flourished in the intensity and intimacy of kitchenspaces. The familial atmosphere of those far beyond Ilé Laroye's has recalled the "queer world-making" of urban "house culture" with adoptive mothers who feed, shelter, and perform publicly alongside their LGBTQ children.<sup>28</sup> This analogy is particularly apt given gay men's renown as possession mounts in drumming rituals and the importance of dance as a mode of worship, which lends itself to comparison with the sacred kitchen's complex choreographies.

## Kindred kitchenspaces

In her kitchenspace ministry, Arlene followed in the footsteps of her Mississippi-born "she-ro" grandmother M'dear, the assistant pastor of a Black Spiritual Church and cook for the wealthy scion of a Chicago business dynasty. Arlene relished the parallels between their religious trajectories, replete with Diasporic linkages worthy of Ntozake Shange's 1998 gastronomic memoir *If I Can Cook/You Know God Can*. The sacred cuisines of Black Atlantic traditions share signature elements with those prized within Afro-Protestant denominations, from culinary techniques to table manners. Instead of measuring ingredients exactly, for example, elders "cook by 'vibration,'" as Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor puts it.<sup>29</sup> In Christian churches, as in Afro-Diasporic religions, Black women have been the chief organizers and unpaid caterers for the overwhelming majority of potlucks, cookouts, after-service repasts, and funeral "repasses"; similar statements may be made about food provisioning in the Nation of Islam and other Muslim groups.<sup>30</sup> Converting basements and backyards into kitchenspaces, Black women have made fellowship flavorful.

In seeking to honor their labor, caution must be exercised so as not to romanticize it. Even in Afro-Diasporic religions labeled "female normative," negative stereotypes cling to cooking, and gendered divisions of labor pose obstacles to equitable participation in disparate arenas.<sup>31</sup> Within houses of worship that restrict plucking poultry and cooking to cisgender women, their sequestration in kitchenspaces has blocked access to roles requiring apprenticeships to male elders. Tracey E. Hucks quoted one "senior priestess" in an African American house of worship as saying,

I've been trying to get the odus [Ifá divination verses] and get the women to study the odus, but the men keep us busy cooking goat and STUFF and STUFF and STUFF. Women doing anything beyond the menial jobs is not encouraged in Ifa [the African American practice of Yorùbá traditional religion, also known as *Isese*]. Just sit up and look good, look cute.<sup>32</sup>

While I have argued here and elsewhere that this toil is hardly menial, its back-breaking quality cannot be denied, either now or in previous eras. Born in 1908, the Lucumí elder Pampa Patrocinia Reyes remembered her religious mentor's requests when he would incorporate Ogún in possession during multi-day drum feasts: "Ogún would come and say, 'Make food, make food, the party isn't over' ... And we were tired, tired of plucking chicken and cooking those huge cauldrons of food, and cooking, and cooking, and serving food."<sup>33</sup>

Neither feminist nor Womanist approaches to Black women's identities in Afro-Diasporic religions can ignore the injustice of unwilling self-sacrifice. Not everyone who can take the heat in the kitchen will thrive in it. Bearing in mind the intersectionality of Black women's oppressions, we can deduce that even sacred kitchenspaces have harbored abuse and sexual harassment as well as "microaggressions" ranging from subtle denigration to the misgendering of nonbinary

or transgender practitioners. Despite the argument advanced here concerning the indispensability of sensorimotor enskillment through cooking, Black Atlantic traditions hold out myriad paths to serving the spirits, gods, and ancestors. In every religious office Black women have held, they have found means of instilling content (“the knowledge tradition and alternative vision of society that Diaspora Literacy reveals as Heritage Knowledge”) and method (an epistemology, nothing less than a way of knowing).<sup>34</sup>

Scholars understand too little about the contributions of Black women to the sacred cuisines of the African Diaspora. We remain ignorant about their precise impact on rituals characterized by multitudinous plates of food, such as Afro-Cuban *agban* (or *awán*) for the orishas Olokún and Babalú Ayé. We are acquainted with too few of the women who have commanded religious kitchenspaces, like Luz Barroso, who cooked in the ceremonies mounted by lineage founder Edmunda “Munda la grande” Rivero, initiated into Lucumí in 1896.<sup>35</sup> We know even less about the nonbinary people and gay men whose perceived proximity to women – due to gender presentation or sexual orientation alone – afforded them not only admission to kitchenspaces, but stewardship of them. While accolades during their lifetimes brought them no lasting fame, their names are embedded within lineages that practitioners may yet discover, excavate, and revitalize. The next generation stands ready to step into the fire.

## Notes

- 1 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995).
- 2 See Mintz and Trouillot 1995.
- 3 A *poto mitan* is the tall vertical post at the center of a *peristil* (a large ceremonial space adjacent to or inside a Vodou temple) around which practitioners dance and perform rituals.
- 4 Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520 (1993).
- 5 Colin Stutz, “Has Azealia Banks been sacrificing chickens in her closet?” *Billboard*, December 30. [www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7640587/azealia-banks-sacrificing-chickens-in-closet-video](http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7640587/azealia-banks-sacrificing-chickens-in-closet-video) (accessed June 26, 2019).
- 6 Ina Johanna Fandrich, “Defiant African Sisterhoods: The Voodoo Arrests of the 1850s and 1860s in New Orleans,” in Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, ed., *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 187–207. This is the era of “voodoo queen” Marie Laveau (ca. 1801–81), who appears to have escaped prosecution entirely, perhaps due to her close relationships with Roman Catholic clergy and members of the New Orleans elite. Laveau seems to have retired from her duties as a Vodou ritual specialist in 1869 and spent the rest of her life performing acts of charity among condemned prisoners and the infirm. See Carolyn Morrow Long, “New Orleans Voodoo” in *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2001), 37–62; 270–9.
- 7 Jorge Luís Sánchez, *Los Alagbas* (unpublished manuscript, ca. 2004), 45–6.
- 8 See Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
- 9 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Moya Bailey, “They aren’t talking about me ...” *Crunk Feminist Collective*, March 14, 2010, [www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/](http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/) (accessed October 15, 2013); Moya Bailey and Trudy, “On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, and Plagiarism,” *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 762–8.
- 10 This is not to deny subversive literary, artistic, and scholarly appropriations of the mammy figure, especially by African American women. In North American versions, she is desexualized, while Caribbean and Latin American instantiations endow the mammy with a ribald sense of humor and depict her smoking a cigar (as shown in different genres of blackface minstrelsy); in both contexts, it has been up to women of African descent to invest the mammy figure with dignity, power, and even Afro-Diasporic divinity. See Elizabeth Pérez, “Nobody’s Mammy: Yemayá as Fierce Foremother in Afro-Cuban Religions,” in Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, eds., *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1–20.
- 11 J. Lorand Matory, “Gendered Agendas: The Secrets Scholars Keep about Yoruba Atlantic Religion,” *Gender and History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 409–39.



- 12 Baltasar Fra Molinero, Charles Isidore Nero, and Jessica B. Harris, "When Food Tastes Cosmopolitan: The Creole Fusion of Diaspora Cuisine: An Interview with Jessica B. Harris," *Callaloo* 30, no. 1 (2007): 293.
- 13 Kenneth Anthony Lum, *Praising His Name in the Dance: Spirit Possession in the Spiritual Baptist Faith and Orisha Work in Trinidad, West Indies* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 119.
- 14 Maria Elisa Christie, "Kitchenspace: Gendered Territory in Central Mexico," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13, no. 6 (2006): 653–61.
- 15 *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 13.
- 16 These names and that of Arlene Stevens are pseudonyms.
- 17 Personal communication, February 5, 2005.
- 18 "Lucumi and the Children of Cotton: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Mapping of a Black Atlantic Politics of Religion" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2016), 6.
- 19 Frances Short, *Kitchen Secrets: The Meaning of Cooking in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 69.
- 20 In this community, men and women initiated to male orishas generally assumed the responsibility of removing *ĩnalés* from four-legged animals, reflecting gendered constructions of both animals and butchering.
- 21 Michael D. McNally, "Honoring Elders: Practices of Sagacity and Deference in Ojibwe Christianity," in Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, eds., *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630–1965* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 80.
- 22 M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 329.
- 23 "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," in Hortense Spillers, ed., *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 40–60; Joyce E. King, "'If Justice Is Our Objective': Diaspora Literacy, Heritage Knowledge, and the Praxis of Critical Studyin' for Human Freedom," *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 105, no. 2 (2006): 337–60.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 344.
- 25 Personal communication, May 7, 2005.
- 26 The resonance of "seasoning" is discussed at length in Pérez (2016).
- 27 The initiation story "is rhetorical in the sense that it is an *argument* about the transformation of self that lost souls must undergo, and a *method* of bringing about change in those who listen to it" (emphasis in the original). Susan F. Harding, "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion," *American Ethnologist* 4 (1987): 167.
- 28 I am indebted to Janell Hobson for insightful prompting on this point and many others throughout this chapter.
- 29 *Vibration Cooking: Or, the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), xxxvii.
- 30 See Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "'There Is Nothing Like Church Food': Food and the US Afro-Christian Tradition: Re-memembering Community and Feeding the Embodied S/spirit(s)," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 519–38; Jessica B. Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); and Rafia Zafar, *Recipes for Respect: African American Meals and Meaning* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019).
- 31 Mary Ann Clark, *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).
- 32 *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 315.
- 33 The translation is mine. Silvia Testa, *Como una memoria que dura: cabildos, sociedades y religiones afrocubanas de Sagua la Grande* (La Habana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2004), 104.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 348.
- 35 Sánchez, *Los Alagbas*, 94.

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