

THE APPROPRIATION OF VODÚN SONG GENRES  
FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN THE BENIN REPUBLIC

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Songs from the vodún religion are being appropriated for use in Christian worship in Benin. My research looks into how this came to be, the perceived risks involved and why some Christians are reluctant to use this music. It also looks at the repertoire and philosophy of churches which are using vodún genres and the effect this has upon their mission.

For my research, I interviewed church musicians, pastors, vodún worshippers and converts from vodún to Christianity. I also recorded examples of songs from both contexts as well as referring to appropriate literary sources.

My results show that the church versions of the songs significantly resemble the original vodún ones and that it is indeed possible to use this music in church without adverse effects. Doing so not only demystifies the vodún religion, but also brings many converts to Christianity from vodún through culturally authentic worship songs.

The research is significant as this is a current phenomenon, unresearched until now. My findings contribute to the fields of missiology and ethnomusicology by addressing issues raised in existing literature. It will also allow the Beninese church and those in similar situations worldwide to understand this phenomenon more clearly.

## Dedication

To Lois, Madelaine, Ruth and Micah.

For your patience and endurance over the past four years.

I am greatly blessed with such a wonderful family.



## Acknowledgements

Thank you Karin Barber and Allan Anderson for your invaluable expertise, understanding and adaptability and for the shared love we all have for the African continent and its amazing people.

Thank you to all the Beninese people who so willingly assisted me in my research, in particular: Mathieu Assogba, Théodore Houngbédji, 'King' Matthias, Josée Méongbé and Victorien the 'zem driver'.  
You began as assistants but ended up as good friends.





## List of Abbreviations used in the Thesis

ADC	Association des Disciples de Christ (The Association of the Disciples of Christ church).
AIC	African Indigenous Church/African Initiated Church.
CC	Christianisme Célèste (Celestial Church of Christ).
EEU	Eglise Evangélique Universelle (the Universal Evangelical Church).
MEA	Mission Evangélique des Affranchis (Evangelical Mission of the Liberated).
MEF	Mission Evangélique de la Foi (the Gospel Faith Mission church).
MIERS	Mouvement International d’Evangélisation et de Réveil Spirituel (the International Movement of Evangelism and Spiritual Awakening church).
PCM	Parole de Christ au Monde (The Word of Christ to the World church).
SIM	Originally the Sudan Interior Mission (now called SIM International).
UEEB	Union des Eglises Evangéliques au Bénin (the Union of Evangelical Churches in Benin, the denomination started by SIM).
URHC	Union de Renaissance des Hommes en Christ (Union of Rebirth of Men in Christ church).



## Glossary of Terms used in the Thesis

Adantohou	The vodún divinity of bodies of water, who governs storms at sea. (Sometimes referred to as <i>Hou</i> ).
Adept	A person who has been initiated into the vodún religion.
Aflakete	Another name for <i>Legba</i> , meaning 'I have tricked you'.
Agbocěbu	A song genre played the night before a sacrificial ceremony of <i>Sakpatá</i> is held.
Aizan	A mound of earth representing the vodún divinity <i>Sakpatá</i> .
Ajà	Small bells played in vodún ceremonies, particularly for <i>Sakpatá</i> .
Akónhún	A song genre originally played after a battle to celebrate the king's victory, where a rhythm is tapped on the chest.
Akòvodún	A tribal vodún, such as a deified ancestor who founded a tribe.
Atendegbo	The rhythm believed to call <i>Sakpatá</i> during the sacrificial ceremony. Often referred to as <i>dendengbo</i> .
Aureketε	Son of the vodún divinity <i>Hou</i> . He is agitated like his father.
Ayìdówèqó	Another name for the divinity <i>Dàn</i> .
Bokónò	The diviner, who consults <i>Fá</i> .
Cauri shells	Small, white seashells used in some musical instruments or given as offerings to vodún divinities.
Cɔn hwɛn	A non-initiated <i>vodúnsí</i> , who can participate in certain events, but not in the sacrificial rites.

Cɛngunmɛn	A song genre formerly used at funerals, in which a large gourd is hit over its opening to produce a low, hollow sound, announcing the death.
Dahomey	Former name for Benin (until 1990).
Dàn	Vodún snake divinity.
Fá	The divinity and process of divining the future.
Fòn-Gbe	Language spoken in southern Benin, in Cotonou, Allada and the surrounding area.
Gbèbǔn	A song genre played on the morning of a ceremony of <i>Sákpátá</i> , as the sun rises. The <i>ajà</i> bells are played at this point.
Gɛn-Gbe	Language related to <i>Fòn-Gbe</i> , spoken in the region west of Cotonou, around the Togolese border. Also known as <i>Mina</i> .
Gri-gri	Term used to denote the sending of curses or magic to harm someone.
Gǔ	Vodún divinity of all things metal.
Gun-Gbe	Language related to <i>Fòn-Gbe</i> , spoken in the region east of Cotonou, around Porto Novo.
Hanyè	A song genre originally for royal families, which has been used by the Catholic Church in Benin since the 1940s.
Hěnnuvodún	A family vodún, such as a deified ancestor.
Hunsó	The assistant or delegate of the <i>vodúnnò</i> , who takes part in dances or public processions on his behalf. <i>Hunsó</i> means ‘carrier of the fetish’.

Idiophone	A category of musical instrument which makes a sound through vibrating in itself (for example, a bell).
Initiation	The process through which an individual becomes a devotee of a given vodún divinity. This often takes years.
Legba	The vodún divinity of mischief, communication and fertility. The term <i>Legba</i> is now used by Christians as a translation of ‘Satan’.
Lènsúxwé	Vodún divinized members of the Royal Family of Abomey (also referred to as <i>Nè́súxwé</i> ).
Mamiwátá	Vodún divinity of Hindu origin, represented by a ‘rainbow serpent’ (similar to <i>Dàn</i> ).
Mǎwǔ	See <i>Mǎwǔ-Lisà</i> .
Mǎwǔ-Lisà	The vodún divinity believed to have created the world. The term <i>Mǎwǔ</i> is now used by Christians as a translation of ‘God’.
Membranophone	A musical instrument which has a skin which vibrates to make the sound (for example, a drum).
Naete	Wife of the vodún divinity <i>Hou</i> . She lives in calm waters.
Sakpatá	Vodún divinity of smallpox and of the earth.
Sakpatáhũn	A song genre played for the vodún divinity <i>Sakpatá</i> .
Sátó	Two very large drums, originally played by for funerals and by orphans.
Sosyó	The axe of <i>Xebyoso</i> worn by his adepts, often as a tattoo. (Sometimes spelt <i>sosio</i> ).
Tovodún	A nationally recognized vodún.

Tòxósú	Vodún spirits or monsters believed to live in water, originating from the Royal Family of Abomey.
Trance	An abnormal state of being believed to be caused by spirit possession and giving the possessed person special powers.
Vodúnnò	A priest of vodún, who carries out sacrifices and other ceremonies.
Vodúnsí	A vodún ‘adept’ or initiate; one who has undergone the initiation process and is henceforth a devotee of a given divinity.
Xébyoso	Vodún divinity of thunder and lightning.
Xwede	A song genre played for the vodún divinity <i>Xébyoso</i> .
Zángbètò	Believed to be a phantom which protects the village at night (meaning: ‘night hunter’). Not strictly a vodún.
Zenli	A song genre from Abomey, originally played at funeral ceremonies.

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# CHAPTER ONE:

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of Theme

Since the fall of Marxism in the Benin Republic (1990), churches across the southern region have begun to use songs appropriated from the vodún religion for Christian worship on a large scale. My assertion is that the association of such music with 'evil' or 'paganism' can be removed, and that it can and should be used by Beninese churches. In doing so, the church will engage in inculturated mission: evangelizing from within and in a culturally relevant manner. The missiological benefits of doing so are considerable, and this is already proving to be the case in many churches.

This, however, is by no means the opinion of all Beninese Christians or indeed of academic writers worldwide. For example, Aubert states that most traditional musics are 'linked to a cultural context, in which they have a precise place and, most of the time, a precise function'<sup>1</sup> and that 'ceremonial musics [...] including a sacred dimension require an even greater

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<sup>1</sup> Aubert, 2001, p.39 (my translation).

circumspection, as they often activate forces of which the stranger is unaware.’<sup>2</sup> If this is the case, then is it not dangerous for churches to make use of such music, as is the case in Benin? Taylor states that ‘some forms of music may have associations that discourage their subsequent connection with the church’<sup>3</sup> and Wheaton believes that churches today have ‘unknowingly embraced musical styles that can have spiritually negative effects on their listeners’ and which can easily ‘bring about uncontrollable physiological, psychological, and spiritual changes that are often in direct conflict with biblical teachings.’<sup>4</sup>

Referring to Romanian music, Barbosu states that ‘there are church instruments and worldly instruments’ and that most percussion instruments are not permitted in church ‘because they are generally thought of having voodoo or Satanic origin.’<sup>5</sup> A significant quantity of church music in southern Benin does indeed have vodún origin, so should it be permitted in church or will it have a negative effect on the Church and its mission to the world?

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<sup>2</sup> Aubert, 2001, p.130 (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, 1998, p.15

<sup>4</sup> Wheaton, 2000 p.9

<sup>5</sup> Barbosu, 2006, p.277

The following thesis will examine a range of objections to the usage of vodún music in church as well as the arguments given in its favour. It contributes to academic knowledge in the following ways: (i) It will address objections/reservations put forward in existing literature, including those mentioned above. (ii) The appropriation of vodún song genres by churches is a current and recent phenomenon in Benin and, to my knowledge, no other study of this has been written. Thus, it would appear that what I have discovered is new and uncharted territory. (iii) It is hoped that the research will provide a useful resource for Beninese Christians themselves, enabling them to see the whole picture of what is happening and thereby understand why those of differing opinion think the way they do.

(iv) Globally, I have found no academic writings which specifically investigate the transfer of vodún music to Christian worship; therefore, this thesis will also be a valuable resource for those in similar situations worldwide.

Whilst this thesis will doubtless contribute to the fields of African Studies, Anthropology and Church History, I will primarily be looking at the issues from a missiological point of view: what effect has the adoption of this music had upon the mission of the Beninese church and what are the implications

for the church's task of evangelism? This naturally also extends to overseas missions, particularly from Europe and the USA, many of which still have a significant influence upon Beninese churches.

Roberta King states that '[m]issiology and the task of doing mission would benefit greatly if the development and study of Christian music communication were taken more seriously' and that 'Christian music communication interacting within the discipline of missiology may serve as a means to fruitful investigations and development of effective mission strategies.'<sup>6</sup> The aim of my research in Benin was to carry out 'fruitful investigations' and this thesis will endeavour to suggest 'effective mission strategies' based upon the research carried out.

As the main issue at hand is that of music, the thesis will also make a significant contribution to the field of ethnomusicology, particularly (but not exclusively) in Chapter Seven, which includes extensive analyses of vodún music in church and how this compares with the 'original' versions.

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<sup>6</sup> King, 2009. p.200



## 1.2 An Overview of the Current Situation

Currently, a large number of Beninese churches, covering a range of denominations, use song genres appropriated from vodún. This began in the 1980s, increased significantly from 1990 onwards, and continues to develop and grow today. Some churches use a majority of music of vodún origin, some only a small amount. Other churches are just beginning to experiment with such music and still others have blatantly refused its usage.

The appropriation of traditional African music for Christian worship is by no means unique to Benin. However, its increase was concentrated into a shorter period in Benin due to the Marxist government, which ruled there from 1976–1990. Thus, it was only after this period that local music (including that of vodún origin) began to be used on a large scale.

### **1.3 Research Methods used**

In the following sections, I will describe the principal research methods used to gain the necessary data for this thesis (besides referring to literature).

#### **1.3.1 Interviews**

One of the primary research methods I used was that of interviewing key individuals: pastors, musicians, vodún worshippers and musical artists. As no literature exists specifically on my subject, this was the best way to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the situation. The timescale of this was roughly twelve months, from June 2007 until June 2008.

To begin with, I carried out informal interviews in order to build up a general understanding of the field of study. These interviews (in chronological order) were as follows:

- Vi-Phint, secular artist who uses vodún genres (18-06-07)
- Mathieu Assogba, Christian artist who has used vodún songs (17-10-07)
- Pastor Thomas Otti, senior pastor in the ADC denomination (18-10-07)
- Victorien, musician in the MEF Church, who uses vodún music (24-10-07)
- Théodore Houngbédji, National Pastor of the ADC Church (25-10-07)
- Dorothé, musician from the Baptist Church in Vodjé, Cotonou (26-10-07)

- Samuel Minhou, pastor in the Church of the Nazarene, Benin (17-11-07)
- Jeanne Viegbe, Christian artist who uses vodún song genres (18-11-07)
- Léonard Amoussougan, vice director of the URHC Church, Benin (10-12-07)
- King Kpákpá, of the Royal Family of Abomey (17-12-07)
- Jérôme Bonou, deputy director of the MEA Church in Benin (15-01-08)
- The King of Allada (17-01-08)
- Théodore Gandonou, pastor in the Christianisme Céleste Church (27-02-08)
- Ernest Oueounou, national pastor of the MIERS Church, Benin (16-05-08)

Based upon much of this information, I carried out further, more structured interviews, in some cases with the same candidates again, and these were recorded and later transcribed and translated into English by me. Altogether, I interviewed around thirty people, and the interviews recorded totalled over ten hours in duration. Where interviewees spoke in the local Fòn language, the recordings were transcribed in Fòn and translated into French by Josée Méongbé (Fòn/French teacher at the Peace Corps, Benin). These French transcriptions I then translated into English for the thesis.

These interview transcripts then formed a primary source of information for the thesis, giving a current view of the situation through the eyes of key Beninese individuals. The interviewees are quoted at relevant points throughout the thesis and all the transcripts are included in the appendices.

### **1.3.2 Questionnaires**

I also sent a questionnaire to around sixty churches across a range of denominations, in order to ascertain the predominant opinions of these regarding the usage of vodún genres in worship. The results have been incorporated into the thesis at relevant points.

### **1.3.3 Song Recording**

I made field recordings of a number of songs in both a vodún and church context. The lyrics of these songs were transcribed in Fòn and French (again, by Josée Méongbé) and in turn translated into English by me. Furthermore, I transcribed the entire melodies of twelve songs collected (six from each context) for analysis purposes. These can be found in the appendices to this thesis and are referred to in detail in Chapter Seven.

### **1.3.4 Rhythmic Notation**

Given the complexity of Beninese polyrhythms, it would have been virtually impossible to transcribe these from an audio recording. I therefore transcribed them whilst watching the performances take place. This enabled

me to observe each individual instrument and notate its rhythm. These are also analysed in Chapter Seven.

#### 1.4 Geographical Area Covered

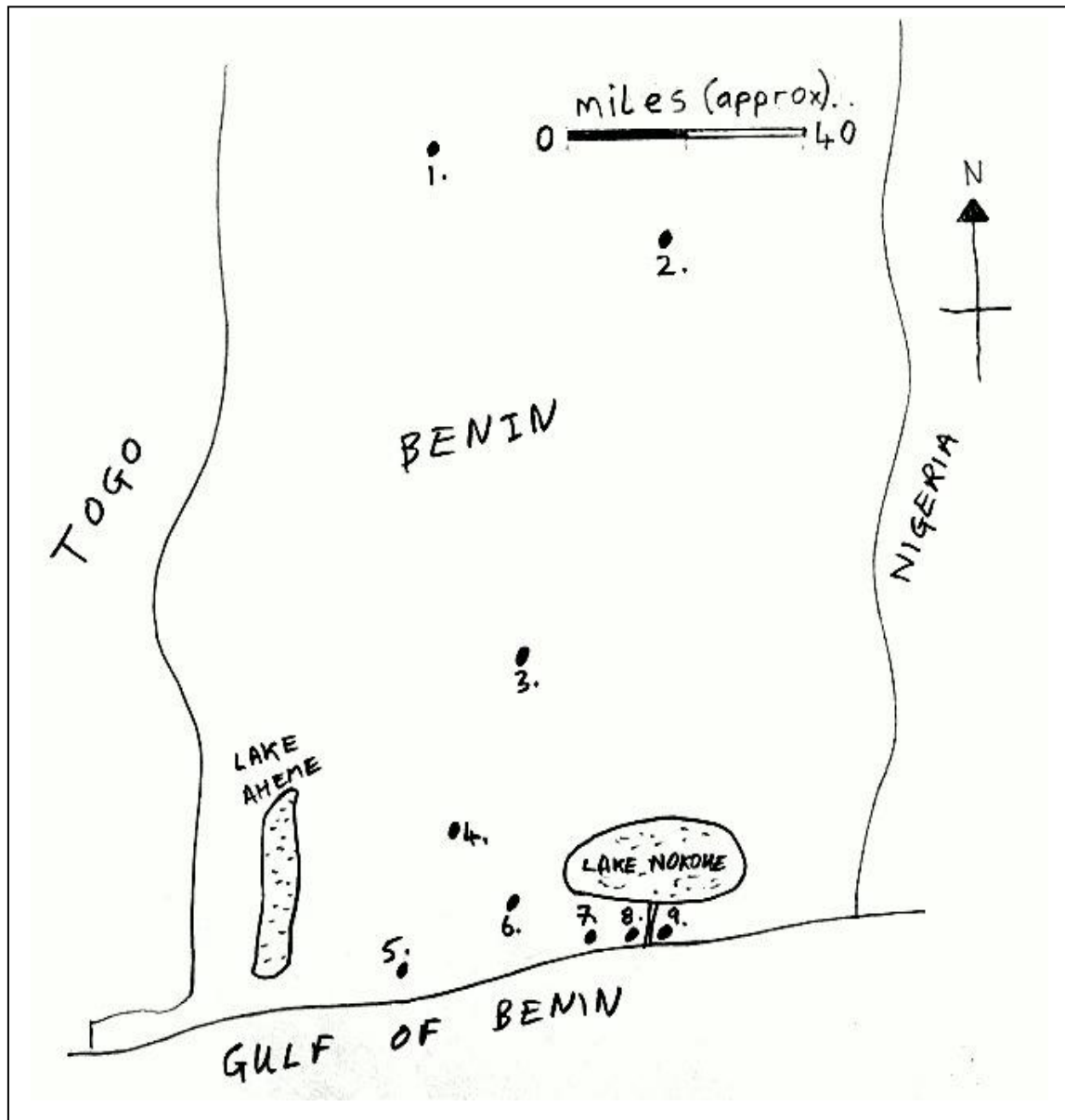
I concentrated entirely on the Fòn-speaking population in the south of Benin and predominantly in and around Cotonou, the commercial capital of the country. Although the appropriation of vodún genres is not limited to the Fòn people, they nevertheless constitute three-fifths of the entire Beninese population<sup>7</sup> and a large proportion of reclamation has taken place amongst them.

The region covered runs from Ouidah to the west as far as Akpakpa (Cotonou) to the east. The Gulf of Benin (coast) marks the southern boundary and, to the north, Abomey forms the north-western ‘corner’ of my research region with Dovi-Dovè forming the north-eastern one. Other towns and villages within this quadrilateral were also visited. See Map 1 over the page for a visual description of this area.

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<sup>7</sup> Claffey, 2007, p.29.

# Map of Principal Locations where Research was Carried Out



MAP 1

- |                    |                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Abomey/Vogobana | 6. Hèvie                           |
| 2. Dovi-Dovè       | 7. Cotonou (Akɔgbato / Agbocɔdji)  |
| 3. Allada          | 8. Cotonou (Cadjéhoun / Agɔntikɔn) |
| 4. Tori-Bossito    | 9. Cotonou (Akpakpa / Sɔnicɔg)     |
| 5. Ouidah          |                                    |

## 1.5 Description of Content

Chapter Two is a study of the vodún religion itself and, in particular, elements which have caused others to fear it. This, we will see, is at the root of many of the objections to vodún music usage in church; it is therefore necessary to understand where this fear comes from and, indeed, whether it is well-founded. Thus, I will look in detail at vodún divinities, worship and other practices, which will enable the reader to put the arguments which follow into context.

In Chapter Three, I will briefly describe the history of the development of traditional music usage in Beninese churches, in particular the usage of vodún song genres and how these came to be used in Christian worship. This will put the whole phenomenon into an historical context as well as showing why and how it has taken place.

In Chapter Four, we will look at the main reasons given for avoiding the use of vodún song genres in church, and the extent to which these are justified.



Chapter Five then examines the arguments in favour of vodún song genre usage in church and Chapter Six discusses the issue of trance, often believed to be caused by vodún music.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I will compare various aspects of vodún songs with their equivalent church versions, in order to ascertain the authenticity of the latter as well as to observe how the music has been modified during this transfer.



## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE VODÚN RELIGION

#### 2.1 What is Vodún?

‘Vodún’ says Hurbon, is ‘an invisible force, terrible and mysterious, which can meddle in human affairs at any time’<sup>1</sup> and De La Torre states that ‘the ‘vodu’ punish transgressors of laws’ and that ‘[s]ociety lives in fear of a control of the divinities.’<sup>2</sup> The following vodún song testifies to this fear factor:

‘Jhòn huzuhuzu ja eloő, Vĩnɔ lɛ ni sɛ vi dɔ, Vĩnɔ lɛ mí sɛ vi dɔ, Ahwan  
gɔnu vĩnɔ lɛ mí sɛ vi dɔ, Jhòn Huzuhuzu Ja eloő, Vĩnɔ lɛ mí sɛ vi dɔ.’<sup>3</sup>

Mothers hide your children, because a violent wind is coming, mothers hide your children, the war chief is coming, mothers hide your children, a violent wind is coming.

The origins of the fear of vodún and all things associated with it are clear to see: witchcraft, sacrifices, mystery, initiation, trance and secrecy. It is therefore not surprising that the Church would initially oppose anything

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<sup>1</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.13

<sup>2</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.75 (my translation)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Daniel from Tori Bossito, translated by Josée Méongbe. Sung to the rhythm *atendelegbo* during a ceremony for Sakpatá.

associated with this religion. Add to this the act of divining (clearly condemned in the Bible),<sup>4</sup> a snake divinity (associated in the Bible with Satan) and *Legba*, the 'mischief maker' (often seen as an incarnation of the Devil) and there is already much for the Church to object to.

Yet this religion is also described as 'a very localized form of African traditional religion' in which man 'communicates with the invisible worlds in exactly the same manner as he does with his neighbours.'<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he contacts spirits in order 'to solicit their intervention in the events of daily life.'<sup>6</sup> Vodún is, in fact, a pantheistic religion said to include between 5,000 and 6,000 divinities;<sup>7</sup> some even say they are innumerable.<sup>8</sup> These multiple Deities are believed to 'direct and channel all human action'<sup>9</sup> An inscription I found in a museum in London read as follows:

Vodún is an action plan, a spiritual and physical guide to everyday survival. For every aspect of the human condition there is 'path'. You consult the vodún priest or diviner before you commence farming or want to start a family. The vodúnsì consults the Fa (oracle). The oracle tells the priest what you should do; sacrifice a chicken or goat, abstain from sex or a particular

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<sup>4</sup> Eg in Leviticus 20:27

<sup>5</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.55-6 (my translation)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.61

<sup>8</sup> Augé, 1988, p.17

<sup>9</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.57 (my translation)

food or wear clothes of a certain colour. And most importantly to honour the almighty god, the ancestors and the particular spirit that possesses you.<sup>10</sup>

We shall now look in depth at the practices and beliefs of vodún, to learn more about this religion and the origins of the fear which it inspires in so many.

### 2.1.1 The Origins of Vodún

Although first encountered in Africa amongst the Yoruba, Fòn and Ewe along the Gulf of Benin,<sup>11</sup> varieties of vodún also exist in other parts of the world, largely among the African Diaspora. It is known as *tlón* amongst the Mina of Togo, *orisha* amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria,<sup>12</sup> *santería* in Cuba, *obeayisne* in Jamaica, *shango* in Trinidad and *vodou* in Haiti.<sup>13</sup> The origin of the term vodún is uncertain. However, Alladayè obtained the following explanation from a vodún chief in Abomey: the Fòn phrase, *Yè houé vau don*, means ‘the soul has left the body and has gone away’, referring to the spirits of the dead venerated in this religion. The four words composing this phrase can be broken down as follows:

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<sup>10</sup> Horniman museum, London – unattributed.

<sup>11</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.13

<sup>12</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.61

<sup>13</sup> Hurbon, 1995 p.13

Yè = soul

Houé = to be absent/lacking

Vau = distanced/far away

Don = over there<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the latter two syllables of this phrase together form the word *vaudon*, which has become altered to vodoun, vòdu or vodún in Benin.

### 2.1.2 The Secrecy of Vodún

Vodún is surrounded by a mystery and secrecy which is earnestly perpetuated by its followers,<sup>15</sup> often described ‘as a “closed calabash”, accessible only to the *vodúnnò*, and, to a lesser extent to the *vodúnsi*.’<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, vodún worshippers are not meant to understand everything about their religion, as the following song suggests:

Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ă  
Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na agbeta awoyo aji  
Tɔ godwe mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ă.  
Sakpatá vaudoun ma nyi do ba nu dé.  
E dɔ, avunɛ nɔ ba do tɔn.  
Mi ma na mɔ ε ce

Nobody understands the depths.

Nobody can see the bottom of the ocean.

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<sup>14</sup> Alladayè, 2003, p.29 (my translation)

<sup>15</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.55 (my translation)

<sup>16</sup> Claffey, 2007, p.64

It is difficult to fathom the depths of expanses of water.  
You must not try to fathom the depths of the vodún fetish Sakpatá.  
They say it is dogs who try to understand its mysteries.  
You will not understand it.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, its devotees have to swear never to give away the secrets of the community on pain of death.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.1.3 Vodún Religious Practices

Vodún has much in common with other African traditional religions and is described by Decalo as '[v]arious ancestral and spirit cults, deities and fetishes encompassing cosmological beliefs and myths'<sup>19</sup> and by Sinou as a 'société imaginaire, double de la société humaine.'<sup>20</sup>

According to De Souza, vodún is the deification of otherwise inexplicable phenomena in nature,<sup>21</sup> in order to make 'sense' of everyday life.<sup>22</sup> De la Torre states that '[t]he cosmos is a collection of forces which one can capture, direct, exploit or neutralize through the channel of religion.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Hwede* (vodún) song, recorded in the village of Dovi-Dove.

<sup>18</sup> De la Torre, 1991, pp.57-8

<sup>19</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.363

<sup>20</sup> 'An imaginary society which replicates human society' Sinou, 1995, p.131 (my translation)

<sup>21</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.19

<sup>22</sup> See also Brand, 2000, p.15 and Alladayè, 2003, p.35

<sup>23</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.53 (my translation)

‘Once the powers of the *vodun* [were] proven effective’ says Decalo, ‘they [were] venerated and worshipped’ by the people.<sup>24</sup> Brand cites the following five different kinds of vodún:

1. Those based on the forces of nature.
2. Those based on a force of nature and on an ancestor.
3. Those based on divining powers: (known as *Fá*).
4. Those based on single events in relation to man as an individual.
5. Those based on particular events in relation to man and human activity.<sup>25</sup>

Each vodún divinity has a name and is represented by an object or combination of objects, usually composed of water, plants, trees,<sup>26</sup> rocks,<sup>27</sup> clay pots or earth.<sup>28</sup> These are often found at the roadside,<sup>29</sup> at crossroads or in markets,<sup>30</sup> but can exist anywhere. Smaller representations of divinities are found in the homes<sup>31</sup> or courtyards<sup>32</sup> of vodún worshippers. It is, says Rosenthal, a ‘made thing’ without which the spirits are not divinized.’<sup>33</sup> A *vodún*, says Herskovits, ‘is also thought of by the Dahomean as something which is localized, and that a spirit [...] must also have definite places to

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<sup>24</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.363

<sup>25</sup> Brand, 2000, p.17 (my translation)

<sup>26</sup> Augé, 1988, p.27

<sup>27</sup> Brand, 2000, p.16

<sup>28</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.130 (my translation)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Mondjannagni, 1977, p.275

<sup>31</sup> Guy Xunò interview, June 2008

<sup>32</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.130 (my translation)

<sup>33</sup> Rosenthal, 1998, pp.60–1



which it can be summoned, where it can be commanded by the proper formulae to aid its worshippers, and from which it can go forth to achieve those things desired of it.’<sup>34</sup>

The term *fetish* was first used by European explorers to West Africa<sup>35</sup> but is technically incorrect when referring to a vodún divinity. However, this term has now been accepted into vodún terminology to mean ‘deity, nature spirit, divinized ancestor or slave spirit, or guardian divinit[y] of other kings’ and refers to both ‘the “god-object” and the spirit itself.’<sup>36</sup> ‘The *Vôdun*,’ says Le Hérisse, ‘are not [...] the intermediaries of [God], but rather free and independent agents.’<sup>37</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Vodún and Witchcraft

Vodún and witchcraft are often seen as being one and the same. However, Vi-Phint told me that ‘sorcery is not part of vodún. You can ask any *vodúnnɔ̀* and he’ll tell you that witchcraft is a different matter.’<sup>38</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>34</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, pp.171–2

<sup>35</sup> Rosenthal, 1998, pp60–1

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.96 (my translation)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Vi-Phint, April 2008

‘most sorcerers are not *vodúnsi*, they’re not *vodúnnɔ*.’<sup>39</sup> Pastor Robert Foley (UEEB) points out that the village of Hèvie is the main centre for witchcraft in Benin, whereas the vodún ‘capital’ is Ouidah. Nevertheless, Foley goes on to say that: ‘Vodún is always accompanied by sorcery; if there is no sorcerer, there is no vodún.’ He continues: ‘vodún itself – the dead earth which they put there – has nothing [...] It’s the sorcerer who is behind it and who causes things to happen, so people say that this fetish is powerful.’<sup>40</sup> Pastor Didier Ajalian (Baptist) concurs, stating that ‘alongside vodún, there is witchcraft. There is gri–gri which people do. Even to go and worship vodún, you have to make sacrifices yourself; you must get protection, do gri–gri so as not to be attacked.’<sup>41</sup>

The term witchcraft is ‘not easy to define or describe’<sup>42</sup> partly due to the secrecy which surrounds it and the fear of repercussions for those who disclose information. Furthermore, the distinction between the terms ‘witchcraft’ and ‘sorcery’ is similarly unclear. For example, Middleton and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Foley, interview, June 2008

<sup>41</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07–02–08

<sup>42</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.71

Winter state that sorcery can 'be performed by anyone',<sup>43</sup> whilst Kapferer says it is 'performed by specialists in the arts of magical rite' and rather that witchcraft 'is a potential quality of everyone.'<sup>44</sup> Lagerwerf suggests the following difference: a sorcerer 'achieves his evil end by magic,' whilst a witch 'achieves hers by some mystical power inherent in her personality, a power that does not require the help of magic.'<sup>45</sup> Kapferer agrees: 'Witchcraft, unlike sorcery, often involves little in the way of overt magical or ritual practice.'<sup>46</sup>

One principal distinction seems to be that witchcraft is 'unambiguously malevolent and death-dealing'<sup>47</sup> and is 'used to harm people,'<sup>48</sup> whereas this is not always the case with sorcery. Kapferer states that the two 'are not mutually exclusive' and that their character 'is often intimately related.'<sup>49</sup> This would certainly seem to be the case in Benin. For example, King Matthias mentions people who can transform themselves into animals,<sup>50</sup> a

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<sup>43</sup> Middleton and Winter, 1963, p.3

<sup>44</sup> Kapferer, 2003, p.11

<sup>45</sup> Lagerwerf, 1987, p.5

<sup>46</sup> Kapferer, 2003, p.11

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Middleton and Winter, 1963, p.3

<sup>49</sup> Kapferer, 2003, p.12

<sup>50</sup> Interview with 'King' Matthias, May 2008

characteristic of witchcraft,<sup>51</sup> yet the mix of good and bad ‘magic’ in Benin is more in line with sorcery.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, there are clearly blurred boundaries between these two terms, even in academic circles. Marwick agrees that the two have become ‘virtually synonymous’<sup>53</sup> in everyday usage and Lagerwerf says that the two terms can be used indiscriminately.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the French language has just one word: *la sorcellerie*, for both witchcraft and sorcery, making the differentiation between the two even more difficult in my research. Given all of the above, I too will use the terms ‘witchcraft/witch’ and ‘sorcery/sorcerer’ interchangeably in this thesis.

#### **2.1.4.1 Common Elements of Vodún and Witchcraft**

Witchcraft is described by De Souza as ‘a secret society which is entered into through a rite of initiation,’<sup>55</sup> which is also the case with vodún. In fact, it is the secrecy surrounding both practices which makes it almost impossible for

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<sup>51</sup> Middleton and Winter, 1963, p.3

<sup>52</sup> Kapferer, 2003, p.11

<sup>53</sup> Marwick, 1965, p.23

<sup>54</sup> Lagerwerf, 1987, p.5

<sup>55</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.72

an outsider to analyse clearly the differences between the two. Vi-Phint,<sup>56</sup> whilst clear on the differences between the two, nevertheless agreed that there are *vodúnsi* who put curses on others, a practice also associated with witchcraft.

The fear of punishment by curse is also present in both vodún and witchcraft. De Souza states that anyone disclosing the secrets of witchcraft would be fearful of 'risking his/her life, of being chastised by the sorcerers for indiscretion.'<sup>57</sup> 'King' Matthias also links sorcery with making someone die: 'What they do is they kill. When they kill someone they can be in pork or lamb meat, and the person eats it. That's sorcery.'<sup>58</sup> Similarly, we learn that the hair and finger/toe nails of adepts are kept in the vodún temple<sup>59</sup> as a sign of submission.<sup>60</sup> Sinou explains the reason for this: 'Any breaking of the rules can thus be punished by the chief of the cult, who keeps hold of these items.'<sup>61</sup> The nails and hair could then be used to cause a supernatural intervention upon the individual concerned, in other words, a curse.

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<sup>56</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>57</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.71

<sup>58</sup> 'King' Matthias, interview, May 2008

<sup>59</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.174

<sup>60</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 123

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. (my translation)

Finally, Melville Herskovits cites the following eighteen different types of magic in Benin, namely:<sup>62</sup>

- (i) *Gbogló*: Preventative against all effects of magic sent by another.
- (ii) *Golǒ*: Protects the house and the possessions of its owner.
- (iii) *Nudɔnɔmmɛ*: Protects the fields.
- (iv) *Hlɔnhlɔngbó*: Gives power to its owner (physical or character).
- (v) *Afiyɔwhɛdjí*: Causes black magic to recoil upon the sender.
- (vi) *Sukpíkpa*: Holds danger for another.
- (vii) *Jidǒ*: Ensures longevity.
- (viii) *Gbòdudɔ*: Sends evil that kills.
- (ix) *Wayinumɛ*: Creates feelings of goodwill, affection and love.
- (x) *Yírǒ*: Helps its owner to realize his desires.
- (xi) *Hwégǒ*: Makes the owner secure in the courts.
- (xii) *Azòmgblenú*: Cures physical illness.
- (xiii) *Kasísǒ*: Preserves the hunter in the bush
- (xiv) *Vigboɛ*: Protects infants and pregnant women.
- (xv) *Xwélíli*: Guards the house.
- (xvi) *Azònmásǒ*: Guards the owner of a house against illness.
- (xvii) *Dɔklóglo*: Prevents against accidents.
- (xviii) *Kugbǒ*: Determines whether a person who is ill will die.<sup>63</sup>

From this list, one can see some clear overlaps between the intended outcomes of magic and those of vodún: protection, longevity, success, safety during pregnancy/birth. All of these are reasons why vodún worshippers offer sacrifices to their divinities and yet they are also included in sorcery.

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<sup>62</sup> Herskovits' orthography is not in line with current norms, so I have corrected these when possible. Also, some of the terms used no longer seem to be in use in the Fòn language; either that or the orthography is so different that it renders the words incomprehensible by today's Fòn.

<sup>63</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.264

It can therefore be seen that, whilst vodún and witchcraft are defined as two separate entities, there is a considerable overlap in the outcomes, if not in the methods of achieving these.

## 2.2 The Vodún Pantheon

Le Hérissé cites three sorts of vodún:

- Tovodún (a country or nation's vodún).
- Akòvodún (tribal vodún, eg. an ancestor who founded a tribe).
- Hěnnuvodún (family vodún, such as a deified ancestor).<sup>1</sup>

In Benin, 'society is organized around the ethnic group, the village, the family and kinship. Each of these groups has its own [...] *vodun*, ancestral and guardian deities.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, there are as many hěnnuvodún as branches of families.<sup>3</sup> Métraux states that '[i]n addition to the major gods of nature there is also a multitude of divine beings: ancestors of clans, gods of vassal tribes, monsters and aborted royal foeti.'<sup>4</sup>

The boundaries defining each of the above categories have become blurred over time and there are overlaps as well as divinities which cross the boundary from one category to another. For example, Agasú, although originally a vodún of the royal family of Abomey, 'may almost be regarded as a national deity' and 'is worshipped by all Dahomeans with elaborate

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<sup>1</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.100

<sup>2</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.14

<sup>3</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.130

<sup>4</sup> Métraux, 1959, p. 29



rituals.’<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the cross-fertilization of divinities took place all along the Gulf of Guinea; the Yoruba, too, were ‘quite prepared to adopt [...] extraneous deities’ and so this ‘large body of cults and traditions [...] has gradually rationalized by the development of a loose pantheon, some gods being related to others or having their identity and attributes merged.’<sup>6</sup>

Many of the *Tovodún* were introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Royal family of Abomey sought ‘to centralize voodoo by appropriating certain deities of its enemies, such as those of the Yoruba. Some spirits were eliminated, while others were imposed throughout the kingdom, becoming, in effect, public *vodun*.’<sup>7</sup> Many of these *tovodún* were, in fact, ‘deified members of the royal family,’ such as Nesuhwe and Toxossou.’<sup>8</sup> Thus ‘the monarchy [of Abomey] reordered and recreated the invisible world to suit an idealized conception of order and power as it existed, or should exist, in the visible world,’<sup>9</sup> a situation which has largely remained to this day.<sup>10</sup> This, says Sinou, was also a means for the king to ‘manifest his authority in

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<sup>5</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.165

<sup>6</sup> Peel, 1968, pp.29–30

<sup>7</sup> Hurbon, 1995, pp.15–16

<sup>8</sup> Bay, 1998, p.250

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mercier, 1962, p.103

conquered territories' through 'rituals which recall his predominance.'<sup>11</sup>

In the following sections, I will describe some of the most recognized and widely worshipped vodún divinities; gods which have become national property and are therefore household names in Benin, including the main divinities whose musical styles are now being adopted by churches and modified for Christian worship.

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<sup>11</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.119 (my translation)

### 2.2.1 Mǎwǔ–Lisà

If we try to analyse, generally speaking, the idea Dahomeans formed of the supernatural world, then we find a supreme god, of uncertain sex, Mawu, and other gods related to him, grouped in a pantheon and sometimes in hierarchies.<sup>12</sup>

Métraux

Accounts of the origins of *Mǎwǔ–Lisà* vary, but it is generally believed that the couple were brought to Dahomey by the mother of King Tegbessou,<sup>13</sup> who reigned 1728–1775.<sup>14</sup> However, the term *Mǎwǔ* had been used by Catholic missionaries to describe God prior to this.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Spanish monks are said to have noted the existence of *Mǎwǔ–Lisà* in the kingdom of Allada as early as 1660.<sup>16</sup> Brand, however believes Lisa to be of Yoruba origin,<sup>17</sup> which concurs with Decalo's assertion that it is 'of Yoruba origins – similar to that of Odudua and Obatala – introduced in ancient Dahomey at the time of King Agaja.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Métraux, 1959, p.29

<sup>13</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.127 (my translation)

<sup>14</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.103 / Pelton, 1980, p.103 / De La Torre, 1991, p.55

<sup>15</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.103

<sup>16</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.125/Cornevin (1962)

<sup>17</sup> Brand, 2000, p.19

<sup>18</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.242

*Mǎwǔ* and *Lisà* together form the one creator-god who, in vodún belief, are ‘situated at the pinnacle of the vodún hierarchy’<sup>19</sup> and are the creators the world.<sup>20</sup> *Mǎwǔ* (Mahou, Mahu, Mau) is the female element of the godhead<sup>21</sup> who resides in the East and is characterized by the moon.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, *Lisà* (Lissa) is the male element of the godhead, resides in the West and is ‘often represented by a chameleon holding the sun in its mouth.’<sup>23</sup> The two are united to each other<sup>24</sup> as inseparable<sup>25</sup> twins<sup>26</sup> and ‘[t]he part called Mawu directs night. Where the Sun is, Lisa directs the day.’<sup>27</sup> Cornevin states the more correct name for the couple as *Mahou-Adimoula*<sup>28</sup> and Herskovits states that neither *Mǎwǔ* nor *Lisà* created the world:

The world was created by one god, who is at the same time both male and female. This Creator is neither Mawǔ nor Lísa, but is named Nanǎ-Bulukǔ. In time, Nanǎ-Bulukǔ gave birth to twins, who were named Mawǔ and Lísa, and to whom eventually dominion over the realm thus created was ceded.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.125/Cornevin, 1962 (my translation)

<sup>20</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.96

<sup>21</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.125/Cornevin, 1962

<sup>22</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.125

<sup>23</sup> Brand, 2000, p.19 (my translation)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.17,18

<sup>26</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.242

<sup>27</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.125

<sup>28</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.125/Cornevin, 1962

<sup>29</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.101

It would appear that, with time, *Nana-Bulukũ* has generally been forgotten and that *Măwũ-Lisà* have replaced them as creators of the universe. Another term for the creator God is *Dada-Segbo*. The following Fòn song, from 1960, pays homage to the creator:

*‘Dada-Segbo ma wa nũ dèe é mɔ nɔ wa,  
gbè nu dèe nyi wa ma wa sɛ mɛvò’*

(If the great Lord does not allow something, we cannot do it, nothing down here can be accomplished without the will of the supreme being).<sup>30</sup>

‘The pair Mawu-Lisa’ says Hurbon, ‘are considered the masters of all vodun, whom they have assigned to the earth to serve humans.’<sup>31</sup> It is they who gave the vodúns their specific powers, which ‘they use [...] to preside over human destiny.’<sup>32</sup> Hence the Fòn saying:

*‘Vodún e nyi Măwũnu’  
(Vodún is Măwũ’s thing)*<sup>33</sup>

In fact, there is no altar to *Măwũ-Lisà* in Benin,<sup>34</sup> but rather to their offspring, the vodún themselves.

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<sup>30</sup> Alladayè, 2003, p.33 (my translation from French to English, my Fòn orthography).

<sup>31</sup> Hurbon, 1995, pp.17-18

<sup>32</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.96 (my translation)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pliya, 1972, pp.29-30

## Mawǔ–Lisà’s Offspring

Mawǔ–Lisà are believed to have given birth to a number of children. Accounts of how many differ, but the figure is somewhere between seven<sup>35</sup> and fourteen.<sup>36</sup> Each child was given a specific domain over which he/she would rule and, ultimately, they all became vodún divinities.<sup>37</sup> Although the list varies according to sources, it can generally be summed up by following nine children, from seven birth episodes:<sup>38</sup>

First: *Da Zodzi* (male) and *Nyohwè Ananu* (female), also known as the *Sakpatá* twins.<sup>39</sup>

Second: *So (Sogbo)*, god of thunder and lightning and ancestor of *Xébyoso*.<sup>40</sup>

Third: *Agbè* (male) and *Naètè* (female), twins in charge of the sea, also known as *Adontohou*.

Fourth born: *Agè* (male), in charge of hunting and hunters.

Fifth born: *Gǔ (Ogu, Ogun, Gun)* the god of iron and metal-workers (male). *Gǔ* also oversees warriors and hunters,<sup>41</sup> which may be why *Agè* is less well known nowadays.

Sixth born: *Djo*, meaning ‘air’ or ‘atmosphere’, representing the space between the earth and the heavens. *Djo* has largely been replaced by *Dan/Ayìdówhẹdó*, the snake-god.

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<sup>35</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.73

<sup>36</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.105

<sup>37</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.242

<sup>38</sup> The first six of these are also cited in Aguessy, 1970, p.92

<sup>39</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.49

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Pliya, 1972, p.13

Seventh born: *Legba*, the trickster/mischief-maker and intermediary between God and man.<sup>42</sup>

### A Masculine *Mǎwǔ*

Although most accounts agree upon the genders of *Mǎwǔ* and *Lisà*, with time and due to the influence of the one male Christian God, two changes have occurred to this divinity: (i) the *Lisà* element has been dropped more often than not and (ii) *Mǎwǔ* has often become regarded as male and not female. Indeed, Le Hérissé refers to *Mǎwǔ* as male when he says: 'Mahou a créé l'univers; il a créé en particulier les fétiches.'<sup>43</sup> Herskovits believes the masculinisation of *Mǎwǔ* to be, in part at least, due to 'a conscious association of the male task of building with a male deity.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.125

<sup>43</sup> 'Mahou created the universe, in particular, he created the fetishes.' Le Hérissé, 1911, p.96.

<sup>44</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.249 (footnotes)

### 2.2.2 Sakpatá

Generally believed to be of Yoruba origin (where he is called Shokpona),<sup>45</sup> Sakpatá<sup>46</sup> first became popular in Dahomey amongst the Mahi people<sup>47</sup> in the region of Dassa Zoumé.<sup>48</sup> Le Hérissé says Sakpatá ‘features in the heart of all vodúns’<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, ‘[i]ts cult-houses and devotees’ says Herskovits ‘are today everywhere in Dahomey, as they have been for many generations.’<sup>50</sup>

He is described by Mercier as ‘mystérieux et redoutable,’<sup>51</sup> he is a god who ‘shows his power through eruptive and contagious illnesses’ and ‘epidemics of smallpox have, for a long time, been considered as the sign of an offence towards Sakpatá.’<sup>52</sup> Le Hérissé tells of how, during the reign of King Agadja, Dahomean warriors were struck down with smallpox. Fearful of the cause of these deaths, the king sent men to Dassa, where Sakpatá was known to be

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<sup>45</sup> Mercier, 1962, p.240

<sup>46</sup> Sagbata, Sakpata, Sakpátá

<sup>47</sup> Mondjannagni, 1977, p.162

<sup>48</sup> Central Benin, roughly 200km north of Cotonou.

<sup>49</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.128 (my translation)

<sup>50</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.144

<sup>51</sup> ‘Mysterious and awesome’. Mercier, 1962, p.240

<sup>52</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.128 (my translation)



worshipped, and they returned to Dahomey to establish this cult.<sup>53</sup> The principal attributes of *Sakpatá* as listed by Brand are as follows:

- He governs nature and mankind, which is why he is feared and worshipped in a more ceremonial manner than the other gods.
- He is the earth itself, which is a factor of richness and fertility but also of misfortune, drought and death. Man therefore wants to be at peace with this force, because the earth gives life or death.
- He can be a force for evil, when he appears in the form of smallpox or other skin illnesses. Because smallpox often appears during dry season, it is attributed to *Sakpatá's* wind.
- He is represented by a clay pot with many holes in.
- He is chief of the other vodúns.<sup>54</sup>

To begin with, *Sakpatá* had no drum rhythms: 'The kings never held the priests of this cult in great esteem. They permitted them to play no drums.'<sup>55</sup> In fact, under kings Guezo and Glélé it was forbidden.<sup>56</sup>

Various myths exist concerning an argument between *Sakpatá* and *Xébyoso*, where the latter withholds rain needed for the former's earth to flourish.<sup>57</sup> One, told by Herskovits<sup>58</sup> tells of a chameleon (who belongs to *Lisà*) who climbed to the heavens to plead with *Xébyoso* to send rain. He agreed, but

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<sup>53</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.128

<sup>54</sup> Brand, 2000, p.19 (my translation)

<sup>55</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.128 (my translation)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.128-9

<sup>57</sup> See also De Souza, 1975, p.50-1

<sup>58</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.128-9

sent a new jar and a calabash back for *Sakpatá*. The people made a hole and put the calabash inside, then put the jar on top. They put earth over this and said, 'If someone goes for water, the first water he finds, he must throw over this mound of earth'. Before this, there was no earthen mound known as the *aizan*,<sup>59</sup> which has now become part of the worship of Sakpatá.

### Sakpatáhŭn

The music of Sakpatá is generally referred to as *Sakpatáhŭn*, meaning 'the drum/rhythm of Sakpatá.' However, this is divided into four main rhythms or song genres:<sup>60</sup>

- *Agbocěbu* – played the night before a sacrificial ceremony of Sakpatá is held, to announce the coming of the event. Originally, agbocěbu had no drums, only ajà bells (between five and ten of these).
- *Gbèbŭn* – played on the morning of a ceremony of *Sakpatá*, as the sun rises. The *ajà* bells are played at this point.<sup>61</sup>
- *Atendelebo* (*Dendengbo*) – the rhythm which actually calls Sakpatá during the sacrificial ceremony. He arrives to and possesses his adepts,<sup>62</sup> taking a goat and biting its neck.<sup>63</sup>
- The genre *ajà*, which uses the ajà bells only as accompaniment, is played when adepts of *Sakpatá* leave the vodún temple after initiation.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Genre information mainly from interviews with Anagonu Vodjo, Jeanne Viębe and Daniel from Tori Bossito.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Daniel from Tori Bossito (05-12-07)

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Jeanne Viębe (18-11-07)

<sup>63</sup> A person in costume symbolizes Sákpatá here, although vodún worshippers believe it to be an incarnation of Sákpatá himself.

### 2.2.3 Xɛbyoso

Though, of Yoruba origin,<sup>1</sup> *Xɛbyoso*<sup>2</sup> was introduced by King Tégbésou<sup>3</sup> into the village of Hɛvie in Dahomey and was promoted by King Guézo.<sup>4</sup> Hence the name, sometimes spelt *héviéssso*, meaning *thunder of Hɛvie*. Thus, *Xɛbyoso* is the ‘celestial divinity of thunder and rain’<sup>5</sup> and is feared by men because of his ability to destroy.<sup>6</sup> He has two sides to his personality: on the positive side, he sends rain and makes crops fertile; on the negative side, he sends lightning bolts which kill men and animals and can set fire to houses and crops.<sup>7</sup> Lightning is therefore never seen as happening by chance, but as divine chastisement for a misdeed.<sup>8</sup> He is symbolised by a stylized double axe in the shape of a lunar crescent, which is why his devotees always wear a *sosyɔvi*; an axe whose blade has been replaced by the head of a ram with flames or an arrow coming out of its mouth.<sup>9</sup> Xɛbyoso is closely linked to several other divinities,<sup>10</sup> including his older brother Sakpatá, as both work

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<sup>1</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.71

<sup>2</sup> Xɛbioso, Xevioso, Hebioso, Hevioso, Hévioso, Héviéssso etc.

<sup>3</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.102

<sup>4</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 123

<sup>5</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 123 (my translation)

<sup>6</sup> Brand, 2000, p.20

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 123

<sup>9</sup> Brand, 2000, p.20

<sup>10</sup> NB This differs from Yoruba culture, where he is closely linked with *Ogoun*. (Sinou, 1995, p.124)

together to make plants grow and both have the power to kill people.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, 'a quarrel between them brings about drought and hinders all fertility, even women giving birth.'<sup>12</sup> He is also closely associated to *Dàn*, the rainbow-snake divinity, as both are in the sky, and in Ouidah he is associated with *Adontohou*, the sea god.<sup>13</sup>

The song genre *Hwεdε* is used to worship the divinity *Xεbyoso*; a genre which has its origins in the region south of Abomey.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Gǔ

'Gu is all body. He has no head. Instead of a head, a great sword is found coming out of his neck. His trunk is of stone.'<sup>15</sup>

Herskovits

Again of Yoruba origin, *Gǔ*,<sup>16</sup> the fifth born of *Mǎwǔ-Lisà*, was charged with making the earth habitable to man, a work which 'he has never relinquished.'<sup>17</sup> He is the divinity of iron and of all those who work with

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<sup>11</sup> Brand, 2000, p.20

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. (my translation)

<sup>13</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.124

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Dorothé (musician), May 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.125

<sup>16</sup> Gǔ, Gou, Ogu, Ogun, Ogoun

<sup>17</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.105

metal (blacksmiths, farmers, warriors and – more recently – mechanics and chauffeurs).<sup>18</sup> Like most vodún, *Gũ* also has a negative side, this being violent: wars and knife crimes along with road traffic accidents and shootings are all signs of his chastisement. He is invoked in order to ascertain the perpetrators of a murder and is often symbolized by a mass of used parts from a car engine or other metal objects, such as sewing machines.<sup>19</sup> An effigy of *Gũ* is often seen in the courtyards of houses. Indeed ‘rare are the citizens of Cotonou who build their homes without [first] burying a few items from the village underneath, as protection.’<sup>20</sup>

### 2.2.5 Adantohou

Initially worshipped by fishermen, *Adantohou (Hou)* governs storms at sea and is the most prevalent and dominant cult in Ouidah.<sup>21</sup> ‘The death of a boatman who drowns [...] is considered as a chastisement inflicted by Hou.’<sup>22</sup> However, *Hou* is under the authority of *Xebyoso*, who causes the storms.<sup>23</sup> *Hou* has a wife called *Næte*, who represents calm waters. However, their son

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<sup>18</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 128

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mondjannagni, 1977, pp443–4, quoted by Luneau, 2002, p.148 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.127

<sup>22</sup> Le Hérissé, p.109 (my translation)

<sup>23</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.127

*Aurèkete*<sup>24</sup> is ‘terribly agitated’ like his father.<sup>25</sup> This ‘trinity’ is ‘worshipped in the temples of thunder,’<sup>26</sup> that is, of *Xebyoso*. *Hou* and *Naete* are believed to have had many other children, all of whom live in the water.<sup>27</sup> *Hou*, it would appear, is another name for *Agbe*, the third offspring of *Măwŭ-Lisà*, as Herskovits substitutes this name in his account of the couple: ‘When Agbè came down from on high to establish himself in the sea, his sister–wife Naètè came with him. Like her husband, she lives in the sea, but she has a river in which she rests [...] She is very quiet.’<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2.6 Dàn

*Ayìdówhedó daga da weke* (Fòn saying)  
(*Ayìdówhedó* encircles the earth like a meridian)<sup>29</sup>

The divinity *Dàn* or *Ayìdówhedó*<sup>30</sup> is often represented by a snake coiled in a circle and swallowing its own tail.<sup>31</sup> ‘Aido Hwedo’ says Herskovits, ‘is the god of no family group, and is the child of none of the other gods.’ Moreover ‘he is not the son of the Great Mawu, because Aido–Hwedo existed

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<sup>24</sup> Aurèkètè, Avrèkètè

<sup>25</sup> Le Hérissé, p.109 (my translation)

<sup>26</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.127 (my translation)

<sup>27</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.110

<sup>28</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.152–3

<sup>29</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.74 (my translation)

<sup>30</sup> Ayidohwedo, Aido Hwedo, Aido Hwedo etc.

<sup>31</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.119. See also Sinou, 1995, p.126

before any of the children of Mawu.’<sup>32</sup> According to Herskovits & Herskovits, the meaning of *Ayìdówhẹdó* is: ‘You were created before the earth and before the sky’ or, ‘You are both in the earth and in the sky.’<sup>33</sup> It is believed that *Dàn* carried *Mawǔ-Lisà* in his mouth during the creation of the world and that mountains are a result of the excrement of *Ayìdówhẹdó*. Hence, ‘when a man digs into a mountain slope, he finds riches.’<sup>34</sup> As *Ayìdówhẹdó* does not like heat, *Mǎwǔ* gave him water to live in, although it is not he but *Agbè*, son of *Mǎwǔ*, who commands the sea.<sup>35</sup>

Maupoil says that *Dàn* ‘makes the sun move’<sup>36</sup> and Pelton says ‘[h]e embodies that motion which draws forth the power of Mawu, and thus he sustains life and all its relationships.’<sup>37</sup> Brand describes him as ‘the source of all movement.’<sup>38</sup> More than just a snake, he is ‘a living quality expressed in all things that are flexible, sinuous and moist. The rainbow has these qualities, and smoke, and so has the umbilical cord’.<sup>39</sup> Thus, *Dàn* is often

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<sup>32</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.249–50

<sup>33</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.135

<sup>34</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.249–50

<sup>35</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.136

<sup>36</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.74 (my translation)

<sup>37</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.107

<sup>38</sup> Brand, 2000, p.21 (my translation)

<sup>39</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.248

represented by or associated with the rainbow.<sup>40</sup> He also ‘protects orphans, helps sterile women’<sup>41</sup> and ‘confers wealth upon man’<sup>42</sup> via his excrement. In fact, his descendants worshipped him ‘in the hope of acquiring his riches.’<sup>43</sup>

In his negative role, *Dàn* governs the movement of lightning from heaven to earth on behalf of *Xebyoso*<sup>44</sup> and can appear as a tall man covered in a white cloth or as a woman with one breast in the middle of her chest. Such apparitions are said to lead to death.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, earthquakes are believed to be as a result of *Dàn* ‘[w]hen he moves slightly.’<sup>46</sup>

Finally, *Sakpatá* is subject to *Dàn*’s authority concerning changes in the courses of rivers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Tall/Légonou, 1991, pp61–81

<sup>42</sup> Burton, vol ii, 1893, p.98, quoted in Herskovits, 1938b, p.247

<sup>43</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.126 (my translation)

<sup>44</sup> Brand, 2000, p.21–2

<sup>45</sup> Tall/Légonou, 1991, pp61–81

<sup>46</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.249–50

<sup>47</sup> Brand, 2000, p.21



### 2.2.6.1 The Addition of Mamiwátá

In the mid-twentieth century, *Dàn/Ayìdówhẹdó* became merged with *Mamiwátá*, who also lives in the sea and is represented by a rainbow-serpent. Claffey tells of how she was imported from Hinduism via '[a] new image of *Mamiwátá* based on a German print of an exotic female snake charmer [which] became popular at the end of the nineteenth century.'<sup>1</sup> So much so that around 1955, large quantities were reprinted in India and sent to Africa, leading to the creation of *Mamiwátá*, possibly the only vodún to directly incorporate elements of Hinduism.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, 'Mami Watta' says De la Torre 'is found the length of the Gulf of Benin' and 'brings riches and glory, but also the risk of sterility; she likes perfume, sweet things and expensive food.'<sup>3</sup> Caulder reports being told: 'There are many, many kinds of Mami Watas, including Dan spirits. Mami Wata is the spirit who has all the powers of those divinities.'<sup>4</sup> And later adds: 'Sometimes she can be a woman with a fish tail, or she can have human legs and arms and a fish head. She

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<sup>1</sup> Claffey, 2007, p.72

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.73

<sup>4</sup> Caulder, 2002, p.121

changes, and she appears as she wants to be.’<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2.7 *Legba*

‘*Legba* has long been assimilated as the Devil by missionaries’ says Maupoil, largely due to the horns present on some of his effigies, along with his malignant reputation.<sup>6</sup> Equally, his ‘seeming lawlessness and unbridled sexuality’<sup>7</sup> reinforce this opinion. In the interviews I carried out, the predominant opinion was that *Legba* caused chaos and trouble, and many pastors believed him to be synonymous with Satan. Take the following conversation with Pastor Didier Adjalian, a converted vodún adept:

**Rob:** And is *Legba* the Devil?

**Didier:** He’s the Devil

**Rob:** But the *vodúnsi* say that *Legba* is not the Devil.

**Didier:** Because they still agree with having him protect them. Would you be able to say that what you worship is a bad thing? They themselves say that *Legba* destroys things. If you were here and bad things started happening and people started fighting, they would say ‘*Legba bǐ yi é mɛ*’. It means that the Devil is entering them. You see? But at the same time they say he’s not the Devil. Sometimes they affirm it, other times they refuse it.

**Rob:** When they say ‘the Devil is entering you’, are they are talking about *Legba*?

**Didier:** They’re speaking of *Legba*.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.76 (my translation)

<sup>7</sup> Pelton, 1980, p. 87–8. See also Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, pp.150–151

Alladaye believes that 'Lègba is regularly invoked and solicited to protect against evil; but he is not there to do evil (sic.), to disturb the destiny of man.'<sup>8</sup> This is disputed by De la Torre, who describes *Legba* as 'un esprit démoniaque mais non diabolique' (a spirit which is devilish but not satanic). She goes on to say that he is cunning, intelligent, artful and evil-doing, but that he can also bring good fortune.<sup>9</sup> 'Yet' says Pelton, 'even as the Fon know that *Legba* is not the prince of darkness, they are aware of his demonic explosiveness.'<sup>10</sup> According to Maupoil, some believe that 'all that which is good comes from Fâ and the voduns, all that which is bad comes from Lègba.'<sup>11</sup>

*Legba* is also of Yoruba origins, where he is called Eshu.<sup>12</sup> His nickname in Fòn is *Aflakete*, meaning 'I have tricked you'<sup>13</sup> and is described by Herskovits as 'the divine trickster [who] pervades all Dahomean worship.'<sup>14</sup> He is the god of disorder, quarrels<sup>15</sup> and accidents<sup>16</sup> but can be 'easily appeased

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<sup>8</sup> Alladaye, 2003, p.36

<sup>9</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.69 (my translation)

<sup>10</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.88

<sup>11</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.76 (my translation)

<sup>12</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.127

<sup>13</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.72

<sup>14</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.109

<sup>15</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.139

<sup>16</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.54

through prayers and sacrifices.’<sup>17</sup> He is also ‘the messenger between Mawŭ and the vodúns’<sup>18</sup> as he knows the languages of all of his brothers<sup>19</sup> and is therefore ‘Mawu’s linguist.’<sup>20</sup> Caulder describes him as ‘the messenger between humans and the deities.’<sup>21</sup> He thus ‘opens the channel for all the other deities to reach humans’,<sup>22</sup> which is why he is invoked at the start of every vodún ceremony.<sup>23</sup> In fact, ‘[n]o offering is ever given to the great gods of the various pantheons but that a smaller offering is first given to *Legba*.’<sup>24</sup> ‘He lives where separate worlds meet’ says Pelton ‘and can move back and forth between them, yet cannot substitute one for the other.’<sup>25</sup> In doing so, he ‘mov[es] beyond the boundaries of the actual into the realm of the potential.’<sup>26</sup>

He also protects homes and buildings,<sup>27</sup> is the ‘companion of every person’<sup>28</sup> and is dexterous and versatile. The following story tells of how *Legba*

gained his supremacy:

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<sup>17</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 137 (my translation)

<sup>18</sup> De Souza, 1975, p.53

<sup>19</sup> le vodúns

<sup>20</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.126. See also Pelton, 1980, p.113

<sup>21</sup> Caulder, 2002, p.42

<sup>22</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.16–17

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Herskovits, vol 2, p.229

<sup>25</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.88

<sup>26</sup> Pelton, 1980, pp. 89–90

<sup>27</sup> Sinou, 1995, p. 129

<sup>28</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.137 (my translation)

Mawu told the gods that whoever could simultaneously play a gong, a bell, a drum, and a flute while dancing to their music would be their chief. One after another the strongest of the gods [...] tried and failed. When *Legba* tried, he succeeded and Mawu gave him a wife and made him first among the gods.<sup>29</sup> 'Mawu said to him, "Now I will give you a woman whose name is Konikoni." And Mawu said to the other gods that *Legba* was to be the first among them.<sup>30</sup>

*Legba* is represented by a statue of a man with a 'monstrous phallus,'<sup>31</sup> symbolizing 'both ordinarily and most ceremoniously, the bond between the divine and the human worlds.'<sup>32</sup> This is why he is 'the master of intercourse'<sup>33</sup> who 'enables the Fon to laugh at sex.'<sup>34</sup> Linked to this, he is also able 'to give or refuse children'<sup>35</sup> to a couple.

Maupoil lists five types of *Legba*:

Axi- *Legba* = the market *Legba*

To- *Legba* = a village/town *Legba*

Zangbetɔ- *Legba* = of night hunters, is horned and protects the Zangbetɔ

Hun- *Legba*, who guards the gate of each vodún

Fa- *Legba*, who protects the Fa.<sup>36</sup>

Another legend tells that *Legba* slept with his mother-in-law and so King Metonofi decreed that *Legba* should no longer 'be allowed to live within

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<sup>29</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.80

<sup>30</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.140

<sup>31</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.138 (my translation)

<sup>32</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.108

<sup>33</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.122

<sup>34</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.109

<sup>35</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.138-9 (my translation)

<sup>36</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.82 (my translation)

houses, but only in front of them.’ Also, *Legba* was the only person in the kingdom able to have intercourse with Metonofi’s daughter. Consequently, ‘Metonofi gave him his daughter (whom *Legba* gave to Fa)’ and ‘commanded that *Legba* be allowed to sleep with any woman he chose to [...] Thus, it is that one must go through *Legba* to approach a god or to use *Fá* and that all men and women have their own *Legba* as guardian.’<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2.8 *Fá*

From Fa came all the stories of the world, for Fa brought them from the sky. Sacrifice also come from Fa, and it has spread all over Africa [...] Now, everything that happens on earth, has happened in the sky before. So Fa and *Legba* can advise human beings, because they themselves have discovered how to meet every possible situation in the sky.<sup>38</sup>

Herskovits and Herskovits

The practice of divination through *Fá* began to gain importance during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>39</sup> and originates in the Kingdom of Oyo<sup>40</sup> (Nigeria), where it is called *Ifa*,<sup>41</sup> and was first found amongst the Nago in

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<sup>37</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.86–7. See also Herskovits, 1938b, p. 229

<sup>38</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.180

<sup>39</sup> Bay, 1998, p.250

<sup>40</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.16. Therefore of Yoruba origins – see also Maupoil, 1981, p.32

<sup>41</sup> Baudin, 1885, p.32

Dahomey. According to Hurbon, '[a]ll individuals have their own Fa, to which they are introduced in several stages: at the age of ten, at adolescence and as an adult.'<sup>42</sup>

It is unclear whether *Fá* is actually a vodún or not; Da Silva refers to 'the goddess Fa'<sup>43</sup> and Herskovits asserts that it is a vodún.<sup>44</sup> Maupoil, however, states that *Fá* is often described by most *bokónò* as 'like a vodún' and that it 'holds the middle ground between divinities and humans,'<sup>45</sup> rather like *Legba*. Another similarity is that *Fá*, like *Legba*, 'knows no special cult affiliation.'<sup>46</sup> The link between the two goes deeper: the communication of *Fá's* predictions is only possible through the great linguist himself, *Legba*. One *bokónò* told Herskovits: 'Fa is the writing of Mawu, which was turned over to *Legba* to make man.'<sup>47</sup> Divination, says Pelton, is 'a primordial language which only *Legba* remembers'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hurbon, 1995, p.16

<sup>43</sup> Da Silva, 1963 pp.115–124 (my translation)

<sup>44</sup> Herskovits & Herskovits, 1958, p.179

<sup>45</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.10 (my translation)

<sup>46</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.109

<sup>47</sup> Herskovits, vol. 2, p.203

<sup>48</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.116

*Fá* is the predominant<sup>49</sup> means by which vodún devotees learn their destiny and is consulted before any important decision including: going on a journey, fixing a wedding or funeral date, giving a name to a newly born baby and acquiring remedies to sickness as well as to establish which sacrifices to make ‘pour conjurer le malheur.’<sup>50</sup> Equally, the king would consult his *Fá* before going to war or to put an end to a public calamity. *Fá*, says Maupoil, ‘is always consulted on the nature, time, place and length of measures to be taken. All the *voduns* are in this sense under his control.’<sup>51</sup> Adolescents receive a revelation in which a young boy discovers ‘what he may eat and what he must refrain from eating, the places he may visit and the places he must not visit, and what special things he may and may not wear.’<sup>52</sup> Finally *Fá* is consulted when choosing a potential *vodúnsi* for initiation: ‘several months before the ceremony of their entry into the convent, the kinsfolk, with the agreement of the priest of the vodun concerned, consult Fa.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Augé (1988) asserts that Dan, Sákpatá and Legba are also capable of telling the future (p.23)

<sup>50</sup> ‘To conjure evil.’ Le Hérisse, 1911, p.140

<sup>51</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.69, quoted by Bay: p259 (my translation)

<sup>52</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p. 218

<sup>53</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.36



‘The Fon consult diviners throughout their lives to plot the course along which they must move to overcome obstacles and live peacefully with their ancestors, their neighbours, and their own deepest selves.’<sup>54</sup> However, not just anybody can consult the *Fá*; it is the job of the *bokónò*, always a man,<sup>55</sup> who is a highly trained specialist<sup>56</sup> and ‘ascertains the will of destiny’<sup>57</sup> using sixteen palm kernels, ‘whose eventual position on a rectangular tray is indication of the solution to a given problem.’<sup>58</sup> Hence the *Fòn* saying:

*‘Fade wε nyi zanxɔsu’*

(The palm tree of *Fá* is the king of the forest)<sup>59</sup>

In the process of divination, the *bokónò* takes 18 palm nuts and passes them from his right to his left hand, then back again to the right. If a palm nut remains in his left hand after this process is finished, the *bokónò* draws two lines on the ground. If there are two palm nuts remaining in his hand, he

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<sup>54</sup> Pelton, 1980, p.116

<sup>55</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.139

<sup>56</sup> Bay, 1998, p.256–7

<sup>57</sup> Ronen, 1975b, p.51, quoted in Herskovits, 1938b, pp.201, 202, 216.

<sup>58</sup> Ronen, 1975b, p.51

<sup>59</sup> Maupoil, 1981, p.29 (my translation)

traces only one line. This continues until eight occurrences of one or two lines have occurred. These are then engraved on a piece of gourd and the dust in which the marks were made is collected and put in a bag.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Le Herissé, 1911, p.141.

## 2.3 Vodún Worship

In this section, I will describe the principal acts carried out in vodún worship.

### 2.3.1 Offerings

Vodún divinities need to be constantly worshipped so as not to be forgotten or removed<sup>1</sup> and, more importantly, to ensure good fortune and protect against harm to the worshipper. Of *Legba*, Le Hérissé says: ‘Every morning, when leaving the house, one stops before his symbol and speaks to him. Every two days, the head of the house offers him flour, water and oil.’<sup>2</sup> These offerings are generally made in the hope of something in return. De Surgy describes vodún divinities as ‘singular access roads to the universal store room of possibilities’<sup>3</sup> and De la Torre cites the following ‘duties’ of vodún gods:

- Protecting people
- Giving them children
- Making them richer
- Giving them good fortune / happiness
- Punishing their enemies
- Making their fields fertile
- Combating spells

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<sup>1</sup> De Surgy, 1995, p.216

<sup>2</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.139 (my translation)

<sup>3</sup> Surgy, 1995, p.216 (my translation)

The *axivodún* (market vodúns), for example, are given offerings every day and so watch over the markets and the market stall holders when they return home at night.<sup>4</sup> Anyone passing a statue of *Sakpatá* will ‘throw some cauri shells before his altar’<sup>5</sup> and will also do so every year and also after an epidemic.<sup>6</sup> Vodún priestess, Anagonou Vodjo, said the following on this subject:

‘Een mĩ ɲɔ...e nyi xwè lée ɔ, mĩ ɲɔ xò gbɔ, vó ɲɔ xò kokló, ata kpo vì kpo ɲɔ jɛji bɔ mĩ ɲɔ yì vodùn ɔ gɛn bó ɲɔ byɔ ɔagbè ‘comme’ ɔée e hèn mĩ kaká bɔ xwè ɔ fó e ɔ, mĩ ɲɔ you byɔ ɔagbè ɔò finɛ.’

Which means:

‘At the start of each year, we buy goat, chickens, cola nuts and pepper, then we go to the vodùn to offer him all these things and to ask him for blessings. As he has kept us safe and sound into a new year, until the end of the year, we go to him to ask for blessing.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mondjannagni p.275

<sup>5</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.128

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Anagonou Vodjo, interview, 06-02-10

### 2.3.2 Sacrifices

Sacrifices differ from offerings in that they always involve the shedding of blood and therefore the death of an animal or person. However, these are generally made for the same reasons as offerings, but usually in proportion to the size of the request. In 1849, Forbes wrote the following:

If an African sickens he makes a sacrifice – first a small one of some palm-oil food. [...] If the gods are not propitiated, fowls, ducks, goats and bullocks are sacrificed; and if the invalid be a man of rank, he prays the king to permit him to sacrifice one or more slaves, paying a fee for each.<sup>8</sup>

However, sacrifices can also be made retrospectively, where vodún worshippers will make specific requests of a divinity with a promise of a certain sacrifice after the prayer has been answered.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Forbes, vol.1, p.174–5

<sup>9</sup> De Surgy, 1995, p. 217–8

### 2.3.3 The Vodún Temple

The vodún temple is the place of worship and initiation. Referred to in French as *le couven*, it is sometimes referred to in English as a ‘convent’, ‘coven’ or ‘cult-house’,<sup>10</sup> and is ‘the unifying centre of the cult-group.’<sup>11</sup> However, as the vodún temple also contains the hair and nail-clippings of all the initiated, it is the ‘locale of a group of people who are attached to it both by reasons of religious emotion and by supernatural control.’<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3.4 The Vodúnnò

The *vodúnnò* is the priest who administers sacrifices, carries out the instruction for initiation and consults *Fá*. He is also known as the *hungăn*, that is ‘the master of the fetish’<sup>13</sup> or ‘master of the god’ and is said to ‘possess the fetish’.<sup>14</sup> However, the *vodúnnò* does not take part in dances or public processions, but is represented by the *hunsó*, who is ‘in a sense, his assistant, his delegate.’<sup>15</sup> Thus it is the *hunsó* who dances in ceremonies,

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<sup>10</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.174

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Métraux, 1959, p.27

<sup>14</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.130 (my translation)

<sup>15</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.131 (my translation)

carrying on his shoulders animals to be sacrificed, and it is on him that the divinity descends, hence the name *hunsɔ́*,<sup>16</sup> meaning ‘carrier of the fetish’.

Not to be confused with the *vodúnnò*, the *vodúnsì* are those initiated into vodún; a subject to be treated in the following section.

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<sup>16</sup> Le Hérisse, 1911, p.131

## 2.4 Initiation

‘Each divinity is also served by its *vodû-si* [...] who have been consecrated to that divinity and initiated in a “convent.” They dance for the *vodû*, are possessed by him, wear his colours and look after his sanctuary.’<sup>17</sup>

Métraux

The term *vodun wa nu xε:* is used to ‘convey that the person in question believes himself to have received a warning from the fetish that he has been personally selected to enter the fetish’s service.’<sup>18</sup> However, in practice it is more often the family who will decide on their child’s behalf. Those to be initiated are sometimes chosen through inheritance,<sup>19</sup> but also for other reasons. For example, Herskovits cites the case where a mother whose child dies will ask *vodún* ‘to protect her next child so that it may live, with the understanding that this child is to be vowed to the service of that god.’<sup>20</sup> Once chosen, the individual – sometimes as young as ten years old – will enter the *vodún* temple in order to ‘learn the language of the fetish [...] his special dances, his litanies and his public prayers.’<sup>21</sup> The duration of initiation varies greatly, but was generally much longer in times past.

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<sup>17</sup> Métraux, 1959, p. 30

<sup>18</sup> Segurola & Rassinoux, 2000 (my translation)

<sup>19</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.178

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.179

<sup>21</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.134 (my translation)



Herskovits (in 1938) cited an initiation of eight years,<sup>22</sup> Rouget (in 1975) mentions a two year initiation occurring<sup>23</sup> and Guy Xunò told me two or three years.<sup>24</sup> Nowadays, however, the duration tends to be months rather than years.

During this time, says Verger, the initiate 'appears to have lost his reason and is plunged into a state of hebetude and mental torpor.'<sup>25</sup> Rouget also states that:

During their period of reclusion, the vodun's new recruits are in a state of partial death, since, although they remain quite alive all the while, as each one can see, they nevertheless display behavior associated with death, such as eating with their left hands, for example, or going through doorways backwards.<sup>26</sup>

What else exactly happens at this time is not entirely clear because 'the very word initiation almost inevitably implies secrecy. This is why we are, as a rule, badly informed about it.'<sup>27</sup> However, there is sufficient documentation to be able to cite the main occurrences, if not the detailed events of what happens in the vodún temple at this time.

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<sup>22</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.181

<sup>23</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.50

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Guy Xunò, June 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Verger Pierre, 1954, p.227 (my translation)

<sup>26</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.42

<sup>27</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.46

#### 2.4.1 An Irreversible Change of State

Initiation, says Rouget, is ‘the discovery of a new state of consciousness and an apprenticeship in the various ways of reaching and then leaving it.’<sup>28</sup> Thus, the initiate will become sensitised to his/her divinity and will, henceforth, always respond to it. Initiation is ‘the moment at which the adept undergoes his or her apprenticeship in possession, and at which music and trance establish within him their tightest relationship.’<sup>29</sup> It is also worth noting that initiation is both a once in a lifetime event and that, once undergone, ‘the modification is permanent.’<sup>30</sup> Guy Xunò confirmed to me: ‘There are things which are done to you (and) when you hear the drum, you will say: ‘Ah! Really, that drum!’<sup>31</sup>

As a sign of this irreversibility, and as identification, the vodún priest ‘tattoos’ the initiates with the marks of his fetish.<sup>32</sup> Former *Sakpatási*, Daniel, showed me his markings, saying, ‘It’s what we call *sosyó*, the axe of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Guy xunò, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Le Herissé, 1911 p.135

Xɛbyoso.<sup>33</sup> That's the metal object which we brandish and which is symbolised (marked) on our bodies with scars.'<sup>34</sup>

#### 2.4.2 A New Name

Vodún initiates are also given a new name before leaving the vodún temple. Le Hérissé states that 'The great priest gives each of them a name, by which everyone must know him from now on.' Furthermore, it would constitute 'a great failure to Dahomean customs to intentionally call a "vôdunsi" by the name he had prior to his consecration.'<sup>35</sup>

#### 2.4.3 The Vodún Language

*'É nɔ se hungbé gbɛnɔ būdò mɛ ă'*

(You cannot be taught the language of vodún and then it is as though you have learnt nothing in your life).<sup>36</sup>

Initiates are also taught a new language, often referred to as *la langue vodún*.<sup>37</sup> However, there are many vodún languages and each one is, in fact

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<sup>33</sup> *Sosyɔví* means thunder axe: 'the vodúnsi use it for their ritual dances in honour of the genie of thunder. The axe of thunder recreates the shape of ram's horns, because Lènsú, the ram, is one of the names of the genie of thunder.' Segurola & Rassinoux, 2000, p.423.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Daniel from Tori Bossito, 05-12-07

<sup>35</sup> Le Hérissé, 1911, p.136 (my translation)

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Guy Xunò, June 2008.

‘the old dialect of the tribe where the divinity came into being.’<sup>38</sup> Former

*Sakpatási*, Daniel, explained this to me as follows:

The languages spoken in the vodún religion are of several types. Thus, if they are in Aja country,<sup>39</sup> they can speak in Fòn so that the non-initiated cannot understand. If they are in a Fòn region, they can speak Bariba<sup>40</sup> [...] to say that it’s the vodún language, because the majority do not understand this language. This is how the vodún languages vary depending on the location.’<sup>41</sup>

Daniel went on to say that, whichever the ‘source language’, it is still modified somewhat before becoming a ‘vodún language.’ ‘They speak in their throat to deform the original language’ he told me, and also gave the following example of how *Fòn* could be altered for vodún usage: ‘To transform Fòn a phrase such as “Yawu” – hurry up, they could say “Ce yayayawu, yayawu e yayayawu.”’

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<sup>37</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.183

<sup>38</sup> Le Hérissé pp.131–2 (my translation)

<sup>39</sup> The ethnic group Aja, not to be confused with the vodún rhythm/bells called ajà.

<sup>40</sup> Language from central Benin, around Parakou.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Daniel from Tori-Bossito, 05–12–07

#### 2.4.4 Coming out of Initiation

Tidjani refers to the coming out of new adepts as 'la renaissance' and as 'the re-awakening to life of the new féticheuses.'<sup>42</sup> The day this happens is a great occasion in vodún; one in which the new adepts are ritually 'presented' to those present.<sup>43</sup> This includes a procession of the sacred cortege, music and dancing and – as proof of this rebirth – 'the incarnation of the god in those chosen by him,'<sup>44</sup> in other words possession and trance. Sinou also mentions meals, which are prepared, carried and eaten in honour of the ancestors and goats, which are also sacrificed<sup>45</sup> as a sign of thanksgiving.<sup>46</sup>

In the following extract, Herskovits describes a ceremony where a newly-initiated adept of *Xébyoso* leaves the vodún temple:

As the drums were playing tunes the men who stooped over the pot at the center of the court-yard were engaged in killing a chicken, letting the blood run from the severed neck over the pot and stones in the same manner as palm-oil had been poured over them [...] As the drummers began to play the *Xévioso* rhythm, a series of cries could be heard from an inner court-yard

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<sup>42</sup> 'Rebirth', Tidjani, 1951, (Abstract 545)

<sup>43</sup> Mondjannagni, 1977, p.275

<sup>44</sup> Tidjani, 1951, (Abstract 545)

<sup>45</sup> Sinou, 1995, p.122

<sup>46</sup> Tidjani, 1950

from whence, after a time, a procession issued composed of several women cult-followers accompanied by the candidate.<sup>47</sup>

This initiate, he says, carried an axe in her right hand – the symbol of *Xebioso* and ‘wisps of dried grass’ in the left – symbolizing *Ayìdówheḍó*, the rainbow serpent. Possession takes place as follows: ‘The others throw kolás in front of her and kneel down before her and implore the god to ‘come into her head’<sup>48</sup> which he does. After this, ‘she gets up and dances then others join in.’<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.4.5 Non-initiated *Vodúnsì*

Musician Vi-Phint is a *cɔn hwɛn*, which means he is a non-initiated *vodúnsì* of Sakpatá, but can still take part in vodún ceremonies. One can become a *cɔn hwɛn* of any vodún. Vi-Phint has not learned the dance steps and does not speak the vodún language. Furthermore, he is not allowed to dress in

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<sup>47</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.162–166. Herskovits also notes that, in the Xebioso ceremony, each adept emerges separately, rather than in a group (which is the case for Sakpatá).

<sup>48</sup> Possess her

<sup>49</sup> Herskovits, 1938b, p.162–166

exactly the same way as initiated *vodúnsi*. For example, he is not allowed to wear earrings like a *Sakpatási* would.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, 18-06-07

## 2.5 Conclusion

Whilst there are clearly practices in vodún which contradict Christian doctrine, it is difficult to write off all aspects of this religion as purely 'evil'. Rather, vodún is a structured system with rules, rituals and hierarchies to maintain order in African society. Furthermore, the belief in an omnipotent creator God is already a common doctrine with Christianity. Some practices are aimed at gaining prosperity or health, not purely at destroying and many of the divinities worshipped are linked to natural phenomena or occurrences in everyday life (earthquakes, lightning, storms etc). These divinities are offered gifts in exchange for good things happening. Indeed, all divinities have both a good and a bad side to them, so cannot be considered as entirely malevolent. And yet there is fear present; fear that a given divinity, if not satisfied has the ability to punish, destroy and maim. In addition, its close links with witchcraft add to this fear. Whilst vodún is little more than another name for African traditional religion, the latter is less frequently feared or overtly demonized in the same way.



## 2.6 An Organology of the Main Instruments used in Vodún Worship

Below are listed the main musical instruments commonly used in vodún worship. These, it can be seen, are limited to membranophones and ideophones.

### 2.6.1 The Hundǎxo (Ohun daxo/ Ɖugba)

Meaning ‘large drum’, this is the largest of the drums used in vodún music and is played with both hands:



### 2.6.2 The Huntő (Gbeyina/Mile)

Medium-sized drum played with both hands:



### 2.6.3 Hunvř (Axlevi/Alekle)

Meaning ‘small drum’ or ‘child drum’, this is the smallest of the three drums used, and is normally played with one stick and one hand:



#### 2.6.4 The Găn

Găn simply means ‘bell’. Always a large, forged metal bell without a clanger in the middle. It is held with one hand and struck with a wooden stick:



#### 2.6.5 The Ganpànvĩ

Meaning ‘bell with a baby on its back’, this is the double bell. The smaller bell sounds – on average – a perfect 5<sup>th</sup> higher than the lower one.



### 2.6.6 The Asogwe

A gourd covered by a net containing numerous *cauri* shells, seeds or metal disks. Other names include the *hanyego* (when it is small) and the *agbeká* (a larger version of the instrument).



### 2.6.7 The Ajà

Two small bells with a central clanger, held one in each hand and hit together (see photo). The vodún genre ajà is named after this instrument and the music is played when adepts come out of the vodún temple.



### CHAPTER THREE:

## A HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC USAGE IN THE CHURCHES OF SOUTHERN BENIN

‘The encounter between Christianity and indigenous beliefs’ says Gray ‘involved a massive and continuous process of interpretation and reassessment,’<sup>1</sup> one in which ‘Africa’s distinctive characteristics and contributions have become ever increasingly prominent.’<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we will study how these distinctive characteristics – including the usage of vodún song genres – came into Beninese churches. To do so, we will trace the history of these churches to see how and when they began using local music in worship.

This study will cover two categories of church: (i) mission churches; those founded by overseas mission organizations and (ii) African indigenous churches; founded and run by local people. I will not include church denominations where there is no usage of vodún song genres<sup>3</sup> or those who

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, 1990, p.81

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.83–4

<sup>3</sup> Such as the Nigerian founded ‘Foi Apostolique’ denomination, which refuses to use any African instruments.

use little or no Beninese music in worship and will concentrate on Protestant churches.

### 3.1 Mission Churches

Christianity first came to Dahomey in 1486, when King John II of Portugal sent Catholic fathers there.<sup>4</sup> Their mission failed, largely because the local king, 'attached to his vodún beliefs, did not want to allow baptism.'<sup>5</sup> Then in 1660, monks from Normandy<sup>6</sup> arrived in Allada 'and were cordially received.'<sup>7</sup>

In terms of Protestantism, the first Methodist church was founded in Ouidah in 1854 by Thomas Birch Freeman,<sup>8</sup> who also founded churches in Agoué and Grand-Popo.<sup>9</sup> In 1862, Marhall founded the *Mission Protestante de Porto-Novo*.<sup>10</sup>

It was not until 1946 that Pastor Wilson (Assemblies of God) arrived in Natitingou<sup>11</sup> and started a church there and then in other northern Beninese towns. A year later, the Sudan Interior Mission arrived and founded

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<sup>4</sup> Ronen, 1975a, p.25

<sup>5</sup> Adoukonou, 1980, p.91 (my translation).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.91-2

<sup>7</sup> Ronen, 1975a, p.25

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.26

<sup>9</sup> Cf Dupuis, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Ronen, 1975a, p.26

<sup>11</sup> Northern Benin

churches in Nikki and Kande, also in the north.<sup>12</sup> These two missions worked in demarcated ‘zones of action’ until 1949, when these boundaries were removed. Both missions moved southwards as far as the coast in later years.<sup>13</sup> The Baptist Church followed around this time.<sup>14</sup>

From the outset, these churches sang Western hymns, but often with the words translated into the local language. For example, Joseph Rhodes arrived in Porto Novo in 1870 and translated 200 hymns and some scripture into the Gun-gbe<sup>15</sup> language.<sup>16</sup> As the Bible had already been translated into Gun-gbe, this became the predominant language in southern Beninese churches at that time.

The idea of using local music in worship was not high on the agenda of these early missionaries; rather, Western culture became imposed upon African converts,<sup>17</sup> and so Western hymns were used for several decades. Founder of the ADC denomination in Benin, Houngbédji, says ‘[T]he

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<sup>12</sup> Cornevin, 1981, p.455

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.453–5

<sup>14</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, 25–10–07

<sup>15</sup> Language spoken in and around Porto–Novo and closely related to Fɔ̀n

<sup>16</sup> Cornevin, 1981, p.453

<sup>17</sup> Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997, p.24



missionaries came with their rhythms and everything, and so from the start of their Christian lives [the African Christians] were used to a different rhythm. Then when we wanted to bring in [local rhythms] they said: 'No, no, no!'<sup>18</sup> 'Missionaries,' says Kidula, 'initially banned almost all African instruments because they were considered pagan or associated with pagan rituals' and also because they 'did not know how to play these instruments to recommend their use.'<sup>19</sup> This happened across Africa and beyond at this time and not only due to a lack of understanding of African music but also the perception<sup>20</sup> that all African culture was inherently 'heathen and immoral [...] without trying to understand [it].'<sup>21</sup> Most of them, says Udeani, 'intended, consciously or unconsciously, to destroy what was given in the African cultural world so as to implant that which is considered, in their view, human, civilised, worthy and valuable'.<sup>22</sup>

'The failure of Christian missionaries' says Bénézet, was that they did not 'distinguish between the positive and negative elements in the culture'<sup>23</sup> but

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<sup>18</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>19</sup> Kidula, 2008, pp.108–109

<sup>20</sup> Cf Aragon, 1996, pp.414–419

<sup>21</sup> A. J. Temu, 1972, p. 155, quoted by King, 2008, p.139

<sup>22</sup> Udeani, 2007, p.91

<sup>23</sup> Bénézet, 1992, p.48

instead ‘came with the spirit of their age, holding African music and culture in low esteem and bringing with them Western hymnody.’<sup>24</sup> Moreover, says Bosch ‘there was a total absence of even the suggestion that the perceptions of others must or could be consulted; they were simply not taken seriously.’<sup>25</sup> This was largely due to an inherent feeling of superiority of colonizing Westerners, including missionaries. ‘The entire Western missionary movement of the past three centuries emerged from the matrix of the Enlightenment’ says Bosch, and this ‘gave birth to Western superiority feelings and prejudice.’ After all, ‘[i]t was the gospel which had made the Western nations strong and great; it would do the same for other nations’ and so ‘[c]ulturally impoverished peoples would, in this way, be elevated to a higher level.’<sup>26</sup>

This phenomenon was by no means limited to Africa; as far afield as New Zealand, missionaries believed ‘that British education, technology, and civil polity – that they called “civilization” – were closely associated with Christianity’.<sup>27</sup> This was not a deliberate choice on their part; they were

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<sup>24</sup> Krabill, 2008, p.59.

<sup>25</sup> Bosch 1991, p.228

<sup>26</sup> Bosch 1991, p.344

<sup>27</sup> Walls, 2002. p.21

‘unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally conditioned’ and therefore ‘simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid.’<sup>28</sup> Thus, in passing on Western music and culture, missionaries believed they would actually be doing the local people a ‘favour’.

Weman says: ‘Western civilization has marched into Africa like a conqueror in triumph. Western thoughts and habits have everywhere brought about a change, which is in process of conquering not only African society but the African himself.’<sup>29</sup> All of this led to ‘An inferiority complex’ in Africa ‘which obliged it to consider its culture as inferior,’<sup>30</sup> feelings ‘that anything that was really good and worthwhile was something that originated in the colonizing country and that what was in the colony was sketchy, of poor quality, only an imitation of the real thing’.<sup>31</sup> And so, ‘[f]or many generations’ says Ela, ‘Christianity would be a religion of whites. It would propagate a manner of being Christian that was foreign to local cultures.’<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bosch 1991, p.448

<sup>29</sup> Weman, 1960, p.127

<sup>30</sup> Monsia, 2003, pp.11–12 (my translation)

<sup>31</sup> Bevans, 1992, p.11

<sup>32</sup> Ela, 1986, p.22

Thus the Beninese Christians, along with those across the African continent and beyond, accepted foreign church music, believing what they had been taught; that it was the 'right' way to worship even though 'hymns which the missionaries brought with them [...] had no obvious attraction, either rhythmically or melodically, for the African congregation.'<sup>33</sup> This was no easy feat to begin with, as the Western music system bears little resemblance to African music; the former concentrating on harmony, melody and performance, the latter being centred around rhythm, dance and community spirit. Joyce Scott sums up the attitude of many Africans at the time as follows: 'This difficult music must be Christian music, so we had better learn it, even if it's hard. Our music cannot be used to praise the God we are now encouraged to believe in.' She goes on to say that 'dancing too was out of line with the new cultural package that their faith was wrapped in. They were expected to stand still when they sang, a very difficult adjustment.'<sup>34</sup> Weman adds that 'the ponderous measures of the chorales left no room for polyrhythmical improvisation, and concepts of major and minor stood in contrast to what the Africans understood by tonality.'<sup>35</sup> This would have

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<sup>33</sup> Weman, 1960, p.134

<sup>34</sup> Scott Joyce, 2000, p.71

<sup>35</sup> Weman, 1960, p.135

been the case with virtually all mission churches in the mid Twentieth Century and – in some cases – is still the case today.<sup>36</sup> Let us now look more specifically at some of the main mission churches founded in Benin.

### 3.1.1 The Baptist Church

Present in Benin since the 1940s, the Baptist Church began by using Western hymns in worship. The introduction of traditional genres and instruments seems to have been a gradual process, and so an exact date does not appear to exist and there was no specific event which brought it in.<sup>37</sup> However, the use of local song genres by the Baptists seems to have become more common from the 1980s onwards. Head of the Baptist Church in Benin, Pastor Seraphin Lokono, told me that ‘when the missionaries arrived, we began evangelization. Little by little, we beat the drums [...] because we were already used to the [African] drums, so we used them [in church].’<sup>38</sup> Thus, many Baptist churches in Benin have begun to use traditional genres, including vodún rhythms such as the ubiquitous *agbocěbu*. Pastor Lokono

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<sup>36</sup> The issue of acculturation is looked at in further detail in section 5.4

<sup>37</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 3–5–08

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

told me they do this ‘tentatively’<sup>39</sup> and that ‘there are several churches where you won’t see it [at all].’<sup>40</sup> Also, some Baptists still prefer to use Western music ‘because it’s what [they] see regularly’<sup>41</sup> and also ‘because it is new.’<sup>42</sup> Thus, to date, there is mostly a co-existence of Western and local music in Baptist churches. However, in rural areas<sup>43</sup> Western music is much rarer, although Pastor Lokono puts this down to financial reasons rather than a cultural choice: ‘since they don’t have much money, they don’t do the *yovo*<sup>44</sup> music.’<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1.2 The Assemblies of God Church

The Assemblies of God church came to Benin in 1947 and used entirely Western hymns to begin with, sung in French and later in local languages.<sup>46</sup> Traditional Beninese music was used from around 1967,<sup>47</sup> although the use of genres specifically linked to vodún is still in its early stages today. ‘Everything which is being done at the moment for the glory of vodún, now

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<sup>39</sup> timidement

<sup>40</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 3–5–08

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Such as Vɔgbana near Allada, where I collected some agbocěbu songs.

<sup>44</sup> Yovo = fɛn term for anyone from Europe or the West.

<sup>45</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview 3–5–08

<sup>46</sup> David Mensah, interview, 04–04–08.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

the Christians are taking it for the glory of God' the National Pastor told me and 'we have found some [song genres] which are good and there's no problem with them.'<sup>48</sup> The church is reflecting on which genres can and cannot be used and displays a willingness to study and find out which genres are appropriate: 'I think that the moment has come where we must really study such things and adopt what we can for the glory of the Lord.'<sup>49</sup>

### 3.1.3 The UEEB (SIM) Church

The Union des Eglises Evangéliques du Bénin was started by the then Sudan Interior Mission<sup>50</sup> in the 1940s and used Western hymns from the outset. The reason for this, says Robert Foley,<sup>51</sup> is that 'at the start...you see, we were trained by missionaries.'<sup>52</sup> However, more recently, the UEEB has begun to add local music to services, whilst maintaining Western music at the same time. Foley went on to say that 'with time, with the evolution of the church,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Now known as SIM International

<sup>51</sup> One of the early pastors of the denomination.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Foley, interview, 09-06-08

there were local people who started thinking and started to change the rhythm [...] To enter into the tradition.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> le traditional (local Beninese) music.



### 3.2 African Indigenous Churches (AICs)

‘One of the most noticed features of modern Christian history in Africa’ says Andrew Walls ‘has been the emergence of churches that owe little to Western models of how a church should operate, and much to African readings of Scripture’.<sup>1</sup> These African Indigenous Churches, or AICs, are ‘Christian communities that have been able to integrate African culture, customs, and worldview to Christianity’ and whose ‘form of Christianity is more culturally connected to the pre-Christian religious experience of Africans.’<sup>2</sup> Partly due to ‘[t]he hostile attitude toward other cultures [...] still prevalent among some missionaries in Africa’<sup>3</sup> these churches were ‘founded by Africans in protest at some feature of the Christianity of the missionary societies.’<sup>4</sup> And so, says Shank, ‘AICs have rejected domination by foreign Christians tied to foreign power and funding.’<sup>5</sup> And so ‘Africans “Africanized” Christianity [...] incorporating music and even in many cases certain beliefs from local culture into their Sunday services.’<sup>6</sup> ‘In contrast to the “foreignness” of some of the Western-planted churches’ says Shank, these seem ‘quite syncretistic

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<sup>1</sup> Walls, 2002. p.17

<sup>2</sup> Oduro, 2008, p.87

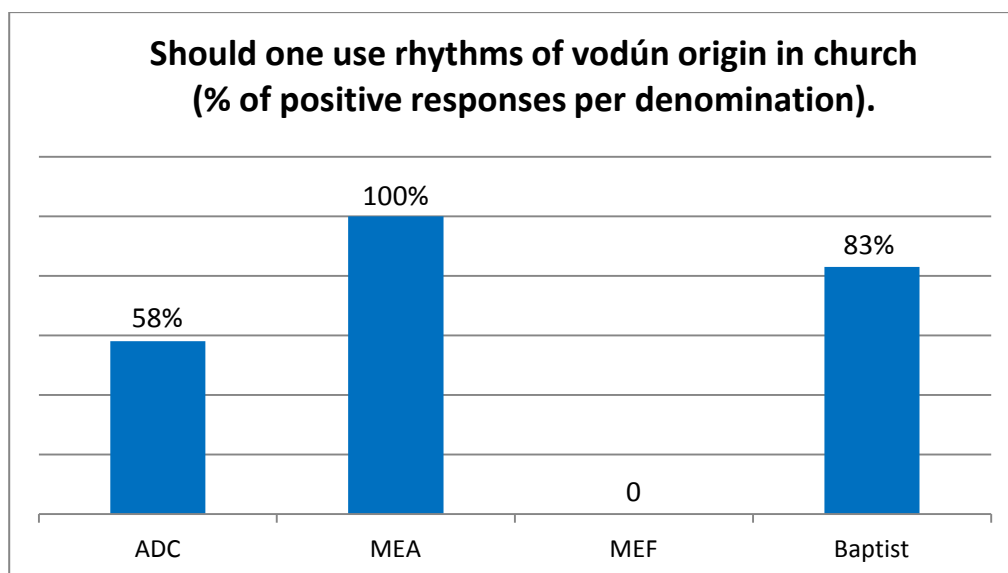
<sup>3</sup> Sindima, 1999, p.62

<sup>4</sup> Peel, 1968, p.1

<sup>5</sup> Shank, 2000, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Reed, 2005, p.358

in their adaptive use of local ethnic music, dance, ritual and symbol'.<sup>7</sup> This is the case in Benin, particularly in the early AICs, as we shall see in the next section. When I asked a number of Beninese churches whether rhythms of vodún origin should be used in church, the positive responses per denomination were as follows:



The above shows how the AICs (ADC and MEA) are more open to using local forms of music, whilst in the MEF (a mission-founded church), all responses were negative. It is interesting to note a high positive response from the Baptists; pastors such as Didier Adjalian (a former vodún adept) have doubtless helped in this.

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<sup>7</sup> Shank, 2000, p.2

African Independent churches, say Pope-Levison and Levison 'are African in leadership and constituency and in music, liturgy and spirit. African characteristics predominate' and these include 'an emphasis on community; worship with drums, dance and indigenous music.'<sup>8</sup> This is certainly the case in most Beninese AICs, as Houngbédji told me: 'Most of the independent churches from here would find it hard to say that they're not going to use African rhythms.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the 'use of genuine African music' means that 'worship becomes an extremely important tool for forging their life together as a community of faith, a vital and effective instrument for the formation and education of the people.'<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to Knighton's observations that 'in East Africa adherence to AICs is declining'<sup>11</sup> this does not seem to be the case in Benin, where churches such as the MEA and MIERS have grown dramatically in the past decade.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Benin has more independent churches than those started by overseas missionaries.<sup>13</sup> Such churches have many advantages over mission

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<sup>8</sup> Pope-Levison & Levison, 1992, p.94

<sup>9</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>10</sup> Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998, p.26

<sup>11</sup> Knighton, 2007, p.66

<sup>12</sup> Cf interviews with Daniel from Tori Bossito, Bossou Benoît and Pasteur Cheton

<sup>13</sup> Houngbédji, 1990. Avant-propos.

churches in terms of how they communicate the Gospel in contextualized ways. One testimony to this is the acceptance of AICs in areas where mission churches did not succeed. Houngbédji states that: 'The churches established by missionaries do not cover the whole country, due to difficulties they encounter(ed) on the field.' Moreover, '[s]till today, the independent churches work in regions where missions were not able to reach.'<sup>14</sup>

However, many of the AICs have been prone to splits and factions of various kinds, giving rise to the foundation of churches. 'Missionary practice' says Sindima 'destroyed African life and thought and today African Churches face many problems arising from this destruction'.<sup>15</sup> Somewhat ironically, it is these church splits which, in part, have led to an increase in the use of local song genres in Benin, as we will see in the forthcoming sections.

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<sup>14</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, p.41 (my translation)

<sup>15</sup> Sindima, 1999, p.117

### 3.2.1 The Christianisme Céleste Church

The first indigenous church to be founded in Benin, was the *Christianisme Céleste* church,<sup>16</sup> founded by Samuel Biléou Oschoffa in 1947 and ‘did not emerge within the context of any church.’<sup>17</sup> Oschoffa had been educated by a catechist and was choir master in a Methodist Church.<sup>18</sup> He had also attended two Nigerian Churches: ‘The Cherubim and Seraphim’ and also ‘The Primitive Church.’ In 1947, Oschoffa became stranded in a forest and consequently spent three months alone there, eating honey and drinking stream water. During this time he is said to have received a vision from Jesus during a solar eclipse. ‘He emerged from the bush empowered’ says Crumbley, ‘healing, prophesying and raising the dead,’<sup>19</sup> leading to the foundation of the *Christianisme Céleste* church in the same year.

The entire CC denomination was under the authority of Oschoffa himself and decisions regarding the church were often made following visions. In the church rules of the CC, it is written: ‘Visions are a light which allows our

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<sup>16</sup> Known in English as *The Celestial Church of Christ*.

<sup>17</sup> Ayegbodyin & Ishola, 1997, p.21f

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Crumbley, 2008, p.53

church and all its members to move forward with assurance of faith.’<sup>20</sup>

Many of Oschoffa’s doctrines are said to be drawn from the *Cherubim and Seraphim* church, the Catholic Church and from animism and include:

- The worship of angels, especially the Archangel Michael.
- The compulsory wearing of white robes, as a sign of purity and holiness.
- The use of holy water, incense and candles to purify and banish evil spirits.
- Sacrifices for healing and protection.
- Polygamy.
- No footwear within the church compound.
- Women who are menstruating may not attend church.
- A man who has had sexual intercourse within 24 hours may not attend church.<sup>21</sup>

From the outset, the CC used local song genres in worship – the first ever occurrence of this kind in a Beninese church.<sup>22</sup> The genre used to begin with was *Ahwangbahun*, a *Gũn* rhythm used for expelling evil spirits. In addition, many other traditional genres have also been used, including *zenli*, *adjahun*, *tɔba*, *agbalehun* and *akòhun*. The CC also uses *kákáhun*, which is a song genre linked more directly to vodún worship.<sup>23</sup> When I asked why the CC used local music, I was told it was because it is a Beninese church and other

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<sup>20</sup> Adetona A, 1972, p.66

<sup>21</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, pp.10–11

<sup>22</sup> Michel Dossou, interview, March 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Théodore Gandonou, interview, 27–01–08

churches came from the West.<sup>24</sup> However, it is interesting to note that, whilst the CC uses song genres of vodún origin, they no longer call them this but rather believe that ‘there is no Sakpatá or vodún music.’<sup>25</sup> Even when I insisted that it was surely still a vodún genre, regardless of the name given to it, Pastor Gandonou continued: ‘We do not play Vodún rhythms in church [...] We, men, have created the rhythm and said it belongs to *Sakpatá*.’<sup>26</sup> This ties in with Apolinaire Soglo’s comments (in Section 6.4.2) that it only becomes a vodún rhythm with the inspiration of vodún.

Thus, the *Christianisme Céleste* Church set the trend of using traditional Beninese music in worship and even acted as a catalyst in the propagation of this music. Pastor Gandonou told me: ‘It is after the arrival of the Celestial Church of Christ that the [other] churches started to play traditional music.’<sup>27</sup>

More recently, Westernized music has been used in the CC, largely due to the influence of Nigeria. However, this was not before numerous individuals

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Dossou, interview, March 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Théodore Gandonou, interview, 27-01-08

<sup>26</sup> Théodore Gandonou, interview, 27-01-08

<sup>27</sup> ‘C’est après l’arrivée de l’Eglise Christianisme Céleste que les [autres] Eglises ont commencé à jouer la musique traditionnelle.’ Théodore Gandonou, interview, 17-02-08

had left the CC, taking with them the tradition of using local music in church.

### 3.2.2 Factions within the CC leading to the Formation of New AICs

From as early on as 1967, dissidents left the CC church to form new churches, largely due to a conviction that the doctrines outlined above were unbiblical. The first to leave was Appolinaire Chabi 1967, who formed a church which no longer exists today. Then in 1979, Michel Dossou, who held an important rôle in the church, left the CC and founded the *Eglise Evangélique Universelle* (EEU). At around the same time, in 1968, Paul Sɔnounamɛɔ left the CC, and was joined shortly afterwards by three others: Justin Kostoko, Raphaël Aïkou and Pierre Loukoya. Together, these four founded the church *La Parole de Christ au Monde* (PCM).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, pp.14–16



### 3.2.3 The Eglise Evangélique Universelle

Michel Dossou, founder of the EEU church, had been a Catholic for a number of years before joining the CC in 1965. He says he joined the CC ‘not knowing the Lord’<sup>29</sup> but became convicted regarding what he perceived as unbiblical doctrines in the denomination and so ‘started [a] “battle” with the founder.’<sup>30</sup> Regarding Oschoffa, Michel Dossou went on to say: ‘He wanted to worship God, but didn’t want to follow what the Bible says. That’s what gave me the opportunity and I left in 1970.’<sup>31</sup>

Although the EEU church was based on Biblical teaching of ‘truth’ from the outset, Dossou made the decision, at this point, to use no traditional Beninese music. He felt it was an obstacle to the spiritual growth of his church members, as he noticed that ‘people love the music but they don’t want to love the Lord.’<sup>32</sup> So, for 24 years, the EEU church sang Africanized versions of Western hymns with nothing but hand claps and castanets<sup>33</sup> as

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<sup>29</sup> Dossou Michel, interview, May 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Small metal instrument where two pieces are tapped together.

accompaniment. These were sung in *Gun*, *Fòn*, *Yoruba* and other African languages, as well as in French.<sup>34</sup>

Twenty five years later, around 1995, the EEU church began to use drums in worship, but somewhat reluctantly. He says: ‘During the moments when we didn’t use the drums we were very spiritual.’<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, ‘when [...] the drums are played, everybody is happy, but when the drum playing stops to begin the sermon, the whole church starts to fall asleep!’<sup>36</sup>

It was popular Christian artist, Mathieu Assogba, who first introduced local music into the church, when he told Pastor Dossou: ‘Either you let me sing in my language or I’ll leave the church.’ Pastor Dossou agreed to this, but the first time Mathieu sung this music, local Vodún worshippers wanted to kill him, using *gri-gri*.<sup>37</sup> He didn’t die, and as a result, many vodún followers became Christians.<sup>38</sup> Mathieu particularly used the song genre *cɛngunmɛn*. Nowadays, the EEU uses a mixture of local and Western music: ‘We use traditional music [and] it works in church,’ Pastor Dossou told me. However,

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<sup>34</sup> Dossou Michel, interview, May 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Curses. See Section 2.1.4 for more details about curses and Section 4.7.3 for Mathieu’s testimony.

<sup>38</sup> Mathieu Assogba, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

'[t]here is a separate group for Western music and a separate group for music from here.'<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2.4 The Parole de Christ au Monde Church

The *Parole de Christ au Monde* Church claimed to be founded upon the word of God, but nevertheless had doctrines which were not in line with Evangelical belief, namely:

- No baptism or taking of Holy Communion.
- The wearing of blue robes (clearly based on the white ones of the CC).
- Salvation by works.
- Polygamy.

The above meant that the PCM church was also viewed as a sect by some,<sup>40</sup> and at this point, Pastor Michel Dossou of the EEU church witnessed to and sought to influence Kostoko and his colleagues for the better. 'But, at the moment when Paul founded the Parole de Christ au Monde, it was a sect; a church which doesn't know the Word of God well. Then I preached to

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<sup>39</sup> Extract from my conversation with Michel Dossou in 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, pp16–18

Kostoko and the others; I evangelized them and they accepted Christ and were baptized by me.’<sup>41</sup>

The PCM church did not use traditional Beninese music from the outset; in fact, it is only in recent years that this denomination has begun to use local song genres in worship.

In 1973, a split occurred in the PCM church, largely due to Sɔnɔunamɛtɔ’s doctrine of communal living, as taught in Acts chapters 2 and 4, but where the belongings were not shared equitably and Sɔnɔunamɛtɔ kept a larger part for himself.<sup>42</sup> So, Justin Kostoko (himself a convert of Sɔnɔunamɛtɔ), Raphaël Aïkou and Pierre Loukoya left the PCM church and formed, with others, a group called *Etudes Bibliques*.<sup>43</sup> On this, Kostoko says: ‘After refusing Dossou Michel numerous times, we accepted him. And I can tell you that we almost joined the brothers at the EEU.’<sup>44</sup> However, instead, Kostoko founded his own church.

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<sup>41</sup> Michel Dossou, interview, 27-01-08

<sup>42</sup> Hounghédji, 1990, p.17

<sup>43</sup> Biblical studies.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Après avoir à plusieurs reprises repoussé Dossou Michel, nous l’avons accepté. Et je puis vous dire que nous avons failli nous associer aux frères de l’A.E.U. D’ailleurs, c’est Dossou Michel qui nous a baptisés’. From Justin Kostoko’s confession on cassette from 1985, included in Hounghédji, 1990, p.20

### 3.2.5 The Union Renaissance d'Hommes en Christ Church

Because Renaissance had split and split several times, those who left Renaissance to join other churches brought that music into their churches. This has led to lots of Evangelical churches today using traditional songs.

Mathieu Assogba<sup>45</sup>

The *Etudes Bibliques church*, under Justin Kostoko, was renamed *Union Renaissance d'Hommes en Christ* in 1976 and became officially recognized as a denomination by Beninese authorities in 1982.<sup>46</sup> In 1978, Kostoko began by planting churches in the outlying villages around Cotonou, travelling hundreds of miles to carry out open air evangelization campaigns. However after an 'occurrence'<sup>47</sup> during such a gathering, he was forbidden from carrying out open air meetings and so was obliged to carry out door to door visits instead; a method he had learned during an earlier eight month membership of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The first church founded was in the village of Agontikon.

Whilst their zeal in evangelism was commendable, the URHC church still had very little in terms of structure or doctrine, factors which would ultimately

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<sup>45</sup> Assogba, UCAB interview, 29-11-07.

<sup>46</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, p.19

<sup>47</sup> Mentioned by Houngbédji, 1990, p.22. No data on what this was.

lead to further break-ups in this denomination. Kostoko himself confessed:

‘When we were with Paul,<sup>48</sup> we knew nothing, and when we separated from there to form a church, we started by just getting by however we could.’<sup>49</sup>

The church also had no written statement of faith and it was only in May 1985, when obliged to do so by the Ministry of the Interior, that the URHC church came up with the following summary of its beliefs:

- The inspiration and authority of the holy scriptures (the Bible).
- One God in three persons.
- Baptism of water by immersion.

In many of the villages where URHC churches were planted, Beninese music was prevalent and so local song genres were used from the outset,<sup>50</sup> including many vodún genres. Léonard Amoussougan<sup>51</sup> (current deputy to Kostoko) believes that the reason why other churches do not use rhythms of vodún origin in worship is because the Christians are frightened of having a curse put on them. This has happened to members of the URHC church, but when the spells were cast on them, they didn’t die. Rather, those casting the

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Sounonameto, PCM church

<sup>49</sup> ‘Lorsque nous étions chez Paul nous ne savions rien, et lorsque nous nous sommes séparés pour se constituer en une église, nous avons commencé par nous débrouilles comme nous pouvions.’ From Kostoko’s confession on cassette from 1985, as noted in Houngbédji, 1990, pp.19–20

<sup>50</sup> From as early as 1973, according to Léonard Amoussougan.

<sup>51</sup> Léonard Amoussougan, interview, 10–12–07

spells died, which then led to further conversions from vodún to Christianity due to their fear of death, and therefore the growth of the church.

The URHC church suffered its first big split in 1986 during what is now often referred to as *La Première Hérésie de Kostoko*.<sup>52</sup> The main content of this 'heresy' was to do with magic: believers would fall back on the ground and lose consciousness. Whilst in this state, the individual would confess their sins out loud to all present. The main exception to this doctrine was that magic is clearly condemned in the Bible. Kostoko asked for a cassette recorder and some blank cassettes on which he recorded a confession. Many left the church at this point, also over a disagreement regarding the secrecy of Kostoko's recordings, which were circulated to the public without his agreement. In fact, 'certain people returned to paganism, others to different churches and still others got together [...] to try and bring about reconciliation and another solution to the problem at hand.'<sup>53</sup>

It was at this point that Théodore Houngbédji, Thomas Otti, Polycarpe Dossou and others left the URHC church. Initially they met in homes, but

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<sup>52</sup> Kostoko's first heresy

<sup>53</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, pp29–30 (my translation)

this became difficult when Kostoko accused them of being *anti-revolutionaries*<sup>54</sup> in the current Marxist regime. The government became aware of these allegations and so they were obliged to become part of an 'official' church. To begin with, they joined the Four Square church, a denomination of Californian origin and newly-introduced to Benin, although existent in Nigeria for some years.<sup>55</sup> However, this affiliation did not last long, as, once again, there was dissatisfaction with the doctrines and systems present within this denomination, which included: legalism imposed upon its members, the veneration of the tomb of its founder as well as alleged 'crooked' behaviour due to 'a thirst for riches amongst the leadership.'<sup>56</sup> So, Houngbédji and colleagues set out to start their own denomination, which became known as the *Association des Disciples du Christ* (ADC).

The second 'heresy' in the URHC church came in the year 2000, and is known by local Christians as the *Trouble d'Amour* heresy,<sup>57</sup> which seems to have included the idea that a man could have a dream or *vision* telling him

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<sup>54</sup> Counter revolutionaries

<sup>55</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, p.31

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. (my translation)

<sup>57</sup> Love trouble.



to go and sleep with another man's wife.<sup>58</sup> This too caused a split in the URHC church, which led to the *Mission Evangélique des Affranchis* denomination, being formed in 2002.

Today, the URHC is still seen by many Evangelicals as having sectarian beliefs and some say that its members love Kostoko more than Christ. That said, the influence of this denomination in the early days of traditional music usage in church cannot be underrated. Arguably, had URHC not existed, much of the traditional music in use today would not have developed.

### **3.2.6 The Association des Disciples du Christ Church**

If in numerous contexts some AICs seem to be nothing more than a stage in a movement away from traditional African religions, in many others their passion, obedience and zeal have become a provoking challenge for churches planted by Western missions.<sup>59</sup>

If the EEU was the first AIC to be viewed by Evangelicals as a 'true' church rather than a 'sect', then the ADC could be considered as the first Evangelical church to combine solid biblical teaching/doctrines with the use

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<sup>58</sup> Informal interview with B Mitton, SIM.

<sup>59</sup> Krabill, 2000, p.17

of traditional Beninese music (including several vodún genres). One of the principal founders, Théodore Houngbédji, studied at the Bible Institute in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, before returning to Benin to start the ADC church. The denomination's doctrines include:

- The Bible as the inspired word of God.
- The Trinity.
- The fall of man.
- The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus as a free gift through faith.
- The return of Christ, as foretold in the scriptures.<sup>60</sup>

Due to much evangelism, the ADC church grew to 3,000 members and 30 churches within three years.<sup>61</sup> However, in some cases, whole URHC churches shut down after the 1986 split, which certainly gave the ADC a useful boost to begin with. Since 1989, the ADC church has continued to grow and, from the outset, has used traditional Beninese music in worship, including the following genres of vodún origin: *agbocěbu*, *mamiwatahun* (modified), *hwedę* and even *Sakpatáhűn*. In Cotonou there are some ADC churches which now also have a Western music group. However, in no cases I have encountered has this meant that local music has ceased to be played; rather the two cohabit.

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<sup>60</sup> Houngbédji, 1990, pp33–34 (my translation)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.32

### 3.2.7 The Mission Evangélique des Affranchis Church (MEA)

After the second ‘heresy’ of Kostoko, Benoît Bossou left the URHC church and formed the MEA church in 2002. As with the ADC church, many followed and, in some cases, the MEA took over whole churches<sup>62</sup> which had formerly been URHC churches. From these beginnings in 2002, the MEA denomination grew rapidly until, in 2008, it had over 400,000 members throughout Benin. These churches used traditional Beninese music from the very beginning, and particularly genres of vodún origin, including *agbocěbu*, *gbòn*, and *hwedè*. Pastor Bossou attributes the rapid growth of his church denomination to the work of God, but also admitted that the church’s usage of traditional song genres had contributed to this.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.2.8 The Mission Evangélique de la Foi Church (MEF)

The *Mission Evangélique de la Foi* began in Benin on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1980, but had existed in Nigeria for 50 years prior to this, under the English equivalent name of the *Gospel Faith Mission*. Much like the EEU church, the MEF did not favour traditional music usage to begin with. One of the founder

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<sup>62</sup> Benoît Bossou and MEA musicians, interview, 04-03-08.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

members in Benin, the now National Pastor, Augustin Sossou, had come from a denomination called the *Eglise Apostolique*, where he had seen the effects of dance and drumming and had not liked what he saw. He made the same comment as Michel Dossou (EEU): that the church members at the *Eglise Apostolique* would dance to the drums but would sleep during the message.<sup>64</sup> Thus, from the outset, the MEF church in Benin sang purely Western hymns. In 1984, there was an attempt at starting a local music choir, but this was unsuccessful, due to jealousy issues.<sup>65</sup> However, from around 1992, the MEF church understood the need for local music in worship, because with Western music Pastor Sossa would ‘see the people singing, but without understanding the meaning.’<sup>66</sup> However, he has realized that ‘it is also good to sing in our local language’ and ‘that is why we now have our local traditional music, and they sing songs of God to praise the Lord with local rhythms.’ Not only so, but dance has also been incorporated: ‘The people are happy and they dance to praise the Lord. There was the dance they danced to worship wood and fetishes [...] but

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<sup>64</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, April 2008

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

today they no longer dance for the fetishes, now they dance for God.’<sup>67</sup>

However, the MEF church, and Pastor Sossa in particular, are not in favour of using many of the genres of vodún origin; the use of the rhythm *kuvitɔhun* was banned in their Ouidah church because it resembled the vodún version so closely. Pastor Sossa told me that, ‘One cannot have the same rhythms for the Devil and for God.’<sup>68</sup> At present, the main traditional genres played at the MEF church are: *akɔnhùn*, *hanyè*, *mằsègɔhùn* and *agbaja*, none of which are directly linked to vodún worship ceremonies.

### 3.2.9 The Mouvement International d’Evangélisation et de Réveil Spirituel Church (MIERS)

But with time also, the Christians have understood that, what God created and the Devil took, can now be taken back to show God’s glory.<sup>69</sup>

Pastor Cheton, MIERS

The MIERS denomination was founded in 1989 by Pastor Ernest Oueounou.

Although Beninese, he’d spent a large part of his adult life in Côte d’Ivoire

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> ‘On ne peut pas avoir les mêmes rythms pour le Diable et pour Dieu’. Pasteur Sossa, interview, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Cheton, interview, 05–08

and Germany before starting the church. When it began, Pastor Oueounou used Western music in worship because that was what he knew.<sup>70</sup> However, he later realized the need for local music because, 'the Beninese want Beninese music.'<sup>71</sup> So, a group was formed in his church to create traditional music for worship. Today, the MIERS church uses both Western and local music. Pastor Cheton told me, 'the musical instruments and the amplified sound system attract a certain category of person [...] However, we must admit that [...] we give a bigger place to traditional music.'<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pastor Oueounou, interview, April 2008

<sup>71</sup> Oueounou, interview, April 08

<sup>72</sup> Tcheton, interview, May 2008.

### 3.3 Survey Results

Below are some results of the survey I carried out concerning vodún song genre usage by churches. I sent out around sixty such surveys and received thirty returns from the following denominations:

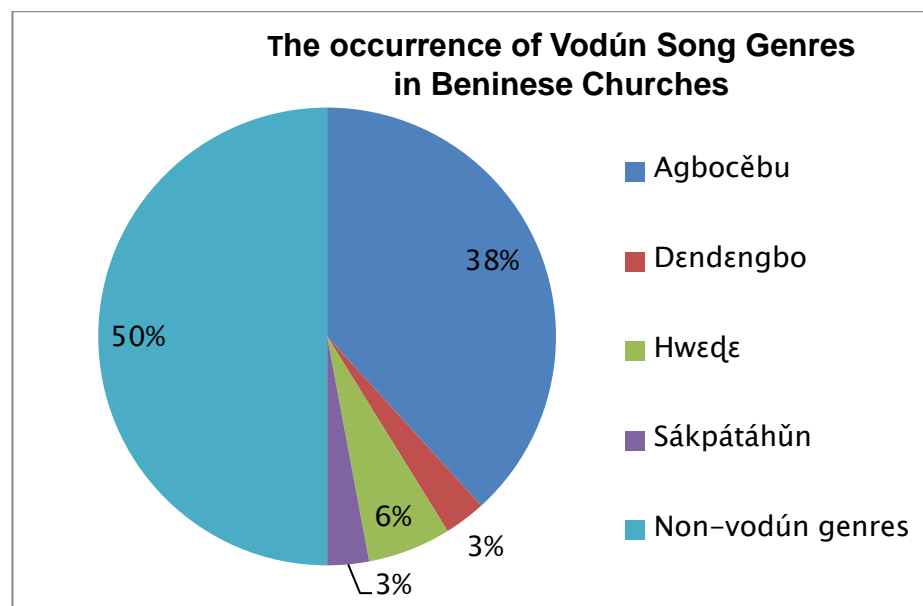
Baptist:7

MEF:6

ADC:12

MEA:5

The first chart shows the percentage of vodún genres used in the churches which responded.



From this it can be seen that a total of 50% of local song genres used are of vodún extraction and that, amongst these, *agbocěbu* is by far the most

common. The other 50% are traditional Beninese genres not directly associated with vodún worship rituals. No Western music is included in these percentages.

The following table shows which genres are used by which denominations and the year in which they were introduced:

Table showing which vodún song genres were added when		
Genre	Number of churches (Out of 30 responses)	Year introduced
<i>Agbocěbu</i>	Baptist 3 MEA 5 ADC 4	2007 2002/3 2006/earlier
Dɛndɛngbo	ADC 1	1984
Gbɔn	ADC 1	No data
Hwɛɖɛ	MEA 2	2002
Sákpátáhǔn	ADC 1	1996
Table 1		



### **3.4 Contributory Factors in the Growth of Vodún Song Genre Usage by Churches**

In addition to the fragmentation of AICs, there are several other factors which have contributed to or acted as a catalyst in the rapid growth of vodún song usage in churches. These we will now examine.

#### **3.4.1 Conversions from Vodún to Christianity**

During the past few decades, many have left the vodún religion and turned to Christianity, a phenomenon which has invariably led to the large amount of vodún genre usage we see in Beninese churches today. Pastor Foley told me: ‘When the adepts of the fetish are converted, the majority want to transform what is done with the fetish. And the majority transform the song – the music – to worship God. They say to themselves “I served that fetish with this (music) [...] Now that I’m serving the true God, I can use it to worship Him.”’<sup>1</sup> We will now look at the main factors which have led to these conversions.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Foley, interview, 09-06-08

### 3.4.1.1 The Communist Revolution (1976–1990)

Dahomey gained its independence from France on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1960. However, Benin's transition to autonomy was far from smooth, and a twelve year period of unrest was to follow. In 1970, a *gouvernement à trois têtes*<sup>2</sup> was put in place 'as an emergency measure reluctantly accepted.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, Benin was governed by *Maga* (northern region), *Axomandegbe* (central region) and *Apithy* (the south). Each had a 'mutual suspicion and mistrust'<sup>4</sup> for the other two and sought to gain power of the whole country through *coups d'états*. Then on 26 October 1972, Major Mathieu Kérékou staged a military coup and became President of Dahomey, bringing in a Marxist regime and declaring, in 1974: '*Le socialisme notre voie! Le Marxisme-Léninisme notre guide! Tout le pouvoir au peuple!*'<sup>5</sup> Dahomey was then declared a secular state and the country's name was changed to Bénin, largely due to the vodún association of the name Dahomey (*Dan xo me* means 'in the belly of the snake.') <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Three-headed government.

<sup>3</sup> Ronen, 1975a, p.217

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.218

<sup>5</sup> 'Socialisme is our path! Marxism-Leninism is our guide! All power to the people!' David, 1998, p.60

<sup>6</sup> See section 2.2.6 on the divinity *Dàn*

Marxist philosophy was in favour of all citizens working for the progress of the country and believed that *la religion est l'opium du peuple*.<sup>7</sup> 'At the time' says Houngbédji, 'they started to shut down churches', but most were allowed to remain open. It was the vodún religion, which was targeted much more than Christianity because it was seen to hinder the aims of the revolution. For example, in spending months or years inside the vodún temple, vodún initiates would not be working for the advancement of the country. In addition, the witchcraft which is associated with vodún was not favoured by the communist regime. And so vodún temples were destroyed in great number<sup>8</sup> and no further initiations were permitted to take place.

Decalo states:

The government of Kérékou went to great lengths to limit or destroy the role of féticheurs in Benin [...] It utilized both educational campaigns and force to drive sorcerers into disgrace; it destroyed and uprooted 'sacred' trees and/or boulders, imprisoned (on charges of fraud) recalcitrant *féticheurs*, and depicted them over the channels of communication as national traitors.<sup>9</sup>

All of the above measures had two main effects on religion in Benin:

- (i) The number of people practising vodún was reduced.
- (ii) There were many conversions to Christianity.

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<sup>7</sup> Religion is the opium of the masses. Houngbédji, interview, 2008

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.167

Christianity grew due to evangelistic campaigns run by Beninese churches (particularly the AICs)<sup>10</sup> but also due to the Marxist oppression of vodún: because many *vodúnsi* were no longer able to carry out the sacrifices necessary to satisfy their vodún, they feared repercussions from not being able to ‘appease’ it in this way. As seen in Chapter Two, this could result in lack of success in general, but also in illness or even death. Thus, many *vodúnsi* (and even *vodúnnɔ̀*) left vodún and joined churches,<sup>11</sup> where – once convinced of the Gospel message – they felt secure from any harm their vodún might cause them.<sup>12</sup>

Houngbédji states:

They hung on to [vodún] for their salvation, for their protection. And when people came and destroyed it, it is as though they were in a void. We presented the Gospel and Jesus to them and they said [...]: ‘Okay, if it’s like that we’ll give ourselves to the Lord’. It helped evangelisation very much.<sup>13</sup>

The Marxist rule continued until 1990, when, on 19<sup>th</sup> February, the *Conférence des Forces Vives de la Nation* was held in Cotonou,<sup>14</sup> where

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<sup>10</sup> Houngbédji, interview, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cf Peel, 2000, p.258f

<sup>13</sup> Houngbédji, interview, June 2008

<sup>14</sup> David, 1998, p.69

various individuals from political and economic backgrounds agreed to '*une transition douce et viable*.'<sup>15</sup> Democracy was adopted and the new Beninese constitution (1990) stated that everyone now had the freedom to worship his 'god' in whichever way he/she wished. Although some vodún song genres had already begun to be used in church, it was after this point that they became more widely used there, a process which has continued to grow from then until the present day.

#### 3.4.1.2 Dissatisfaction with Vodún

They do all that for happiness and for other reasons, and in the end they don't manage to have this happiness, they don't manage to obtain this healing. And when you come to the Lord, there is healing [...] So they give themselves wholly [to the Lord]. That's why the camp of the Devil is emptying.<sup>16</sup>

Houngbédji

Whereas during Communism *vodúnsi* were unable to make sufficient offerings to their divinities, dissatisfaction occurs when such sacrifices *are* made, but where the result is not the desired one. A recurring factor I encountered when interviewing converts was that of death of a family

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<sup>15</sup> 'A calm and viable transition', David, 1998, p.70

<sup>16</sup> Houngbédji, interview, 2008

member, usually one or more children. At least four converted *vodúnsi* I interviewed gave this reason,<sup>17</sup> including Pastor Didier Adjalien:

My first daughter fell ill and we tried everything – we even went to the vodúns – but it didn't work. [...] Normally, you'd think the divinity which protects me should be able to prevent this. [...] I said to myself, 'He<sup>18</sup> has no power.' [...] The day my daughter died I said to myself [...] 'I will no longer worship vodún.' Then I started to pray. [...] As the people had already told me the Gospel, I started to say that it was the truth and I started to ask the Lord to save me.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.4.1.3 Backfired Curses

In some cases, *vodúnsi* have cursed Christians, and, when these curses fail to have their desired effect, the *vodúnsi* often convert to Christianity. Edmond Djossou speaks of a Christian who 'started singing our songs, which we sing in the vodún temple.' He goes on to say: 'I attacked him several times [...] and then I fell sick and God revealed himself to me and it's because of this that I accepted Jesus.' He continues: 'They send missiles; satanic arrows, but most of that doesn't have any effect, but through this the

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<sup>17</sup> They were: Anne-Marie Toyisé, Daniel from Tori, Didier Adjalien and Victorien from the MEF church.

<sup>18</sup> ie the vodún

<sup>19</sup> Didier Ajalian, interview, 07-02-08

Lord reveals himself to lots of people, they come, they are converted and it is they who come and confess.’<sup>20</sup>

#### 3.4.1.4 The Need for a Replacement Religion

It would be almost out of the question for a Beninese person to leave vodún and not choose another religion with which to replace it. In doing so, he would be leaving himself in a very vulnerable position, spiritually speaking. Without the ‘protection’ of a replacement religion, the curses (*gri-gri*) frequently performed on those who leave vodún, could have their full effect on the person concerned. Speaking of Hévie, the main witchcraft centre in Benin, Robert Foley said: ‘[i]f you are not in the Lord you are in danger of not living a long time here.’<sup>21</sup> Thus, Christianity is often chosen by those leaving vodún and still seeking protection, as is seen in an interview I held with Edouard Ayékoro:

**Rob:** So, when you left vodún, it had to be replaced with something spiritual?

**Edouard:** That’s right.

**Rob:** Wouldn’t it have been possible to leave vodún and not have a religion?

**Edouard:** That’s dangerous.

**Rob:** Why?

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<sup>20</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>21</sup> Living in the literal sense, not merely ‘dwelling’.

**Edouard:** They will curse you and you'll die. There has to be something which replaces it [...] as protection.<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.4.1.5 A Pre-existent Respect for Christ

Conversions from vodún to Christianity are helped by a reverence towards Jesus Christ which already exists in vodún practice. According to vodún worshipper, Koffi, the knowledge of Christ was present even prior to the arrival of missionaries: 'We knew Jesus before the missionaries came with the Bible [...] when they came to bring us this message we said, "Listen, Jesus is something which is here."' <sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Christ's power is also recognized by those in vodún: 'We recognize that, beyond Jesus' human situation, [he] has a power which was given to him by the father, by God.'<sup>24</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé told me that 'if a *vodúnnɔ̀* gets up today, no matter what he wants to do, he invokes the great living God, the Lord Jesus'<sup>25</sup> and King Matthias backed this up, asserting that 'you cannot find a *feticheur* today who makes sacrifices on Fridays. Because they say that the biggest sacrifice was made on a Friday [...] because Jesus was on the cross on a Friday.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Edouard Ayékoro, interview, May 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Koffi (ASPAM), interview, January 2007

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

<sup>26</sup> King Matthias, interview, May 2008



The transfer of belief from faith in vodún to faith in Christ may therefore be easier than we think. According to Anne-Marie Toyissè, it is merely a question of understanding the superiority of Christ's power: 'We had the good fortune of knowing the Lord; we learned lots of things. And at that moment we understood that there is a power which surpasses all the forces we believed in at the time.'<sup>27</sup>

### 3.4.2      **Converted *Vodúnsi* Bringing their Music into Church**

In chapter Two, we saw how a *vodúnsi*, once initiated, becomes a devotee of their vodún and that this is seen as being an irreversible process.<sup>28</sup> Thus, during initiation and thereafter, he/she will only play/sing the song genres which belong to that vodún and this, very often, with great skill and dexterity. We have seen how, in the past, many missionaries and church leaders did little to encourage the transfer of this music to church, but in recent years some converted *vodúnsi* have retained their talent and used it in Christian worship. This has meant that more churches have ended up with a worship repertoire which is African in origin and therefore culturally more

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<sup>27</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008

<sup>28</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.32

relevant to most worshippers. ‘They transferred that music’ said Edmond Djossou, ‘because the people had received the Lord. They were *vodúnsi*, they were *Sakpatási*, they were *Xɛbyososi*, they were converted in Christ and now they have transferred that music in Christ to glorify the Lord.’<sup>29</sup> Augustin (ADC Church, Akɔgbato), though never an adept of vodún himself, told me that he: ‘used to play the drums with them and the devotees of the fetish danced. When I arrived here, they started to play *agbocěbu* in this church thanks to me.’<sup>30</sup>

### 3.4.3 The Revaluing of Local Culture

Beninese culture has never ceased to be valued by the Beninese, but received a considerable blow during colonial times. In recent years, however, more and more Beninese have realized the value of their own indigenous music, both culturally and in the church context. Edmond Djossou told me that ‘the Beninese put more importance on traditional music than on imported music because we play it – lots of people do it [...] they are more attached to

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<sup>29</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>30</sup> Augustin, (ADC Akɔgbato), Interview, 29-12-07

their traditional music.’<sup>31</sup> This reaffirmation of local cultural arts is also seen in the attitudes of many Christians and church leaders, and is one of the reasons for the rapid growth in vodún genre usage in churches. For example, Anne-Marie Toyissé states that vodún rhythms are rhythms ‘which our ancestors played, [...] so we can use those rhythms to worship the Lord.’<sup>32</sup>

#### 3.4.4 The Rôle of the Beninese Media

The media in Benin has done much to promote local culture. Television and radio are full of African music and music videos, and in Benin, much of this is using traditional – even vodún – genres. Pastor Cheton & Ange (MIERS) mention the Gèdèngè Brothers, a well-known group who appear on television and whose videos are ‘even shown outside of Benin<sup>33</sup> and yet who ‘play lots of music from the vodún temple’<sup>34</sup>

In addition, *Radio Maranatha* is the local Christian radio station, based in Cotonou, which began in 1998. It was cited by several interviewees<sup>35</sup> as a

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<sup>31</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>32</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

<sup>33</sup> Ange (MIERS), interview, May 2008

<sup>34</sup> Cheton (MIERS), interview, May 2008

catalyst in the propagation of Beninese traditional music in worship. A Musician from Dorothé's music group was initially condemned for playing vodún genre *agbocěbu*, even by, he says 'presenters on our Evangelical radio stations.' However, 'although they condemned me for a long time' he said, 'later on they accepted it.'<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Christian artist Anne-Marie Toyissé told me that 'there are lots of people who play *agbocěbu* today, not just me. If you ask the people at [Radio] Maranatha, there are lots of people who play *agbocěbu* there.'<sup>37</sup> Dorothé told me that this radio station also helped to 'cross-fertilize' musical repertoires by enabling a large number of listeners to hear what was being played/sung in other churches.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Namely: Houngbédji, Anne-Marie Toyissé and members of Dorothé's music group

<sup>36</sup> Dorothé's music group, interview, May 2008

<sup>37</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

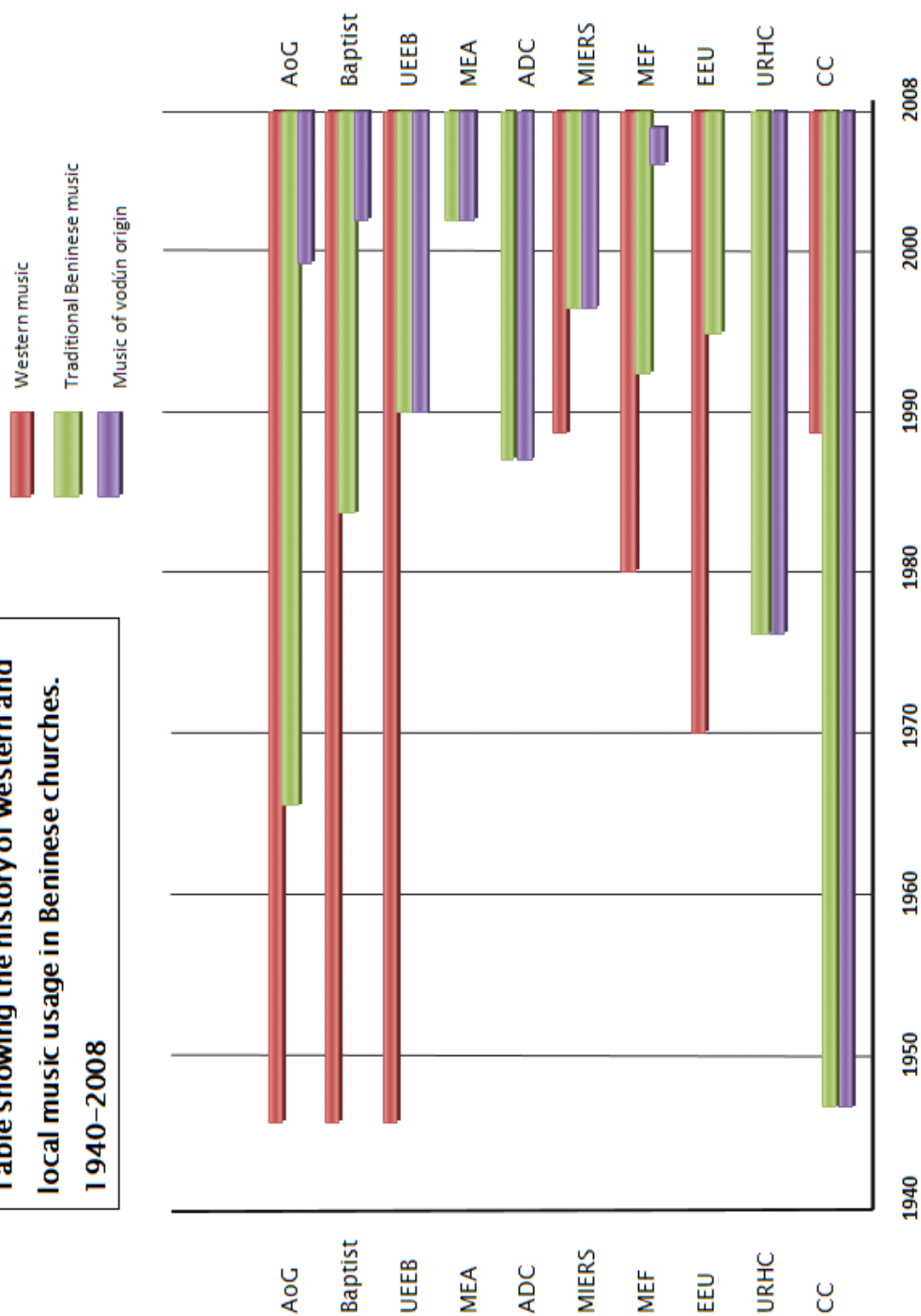
<sup>38</sup> Dorothé, interview, 26-10-07

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how the evolution of AICs has lead to an increased usage of traditional Beninese song genres and also a gradual movement towards a more 'mainstream' Evangelical theology as splits occurred.

The difference between AICs and mission churches in terms of attitudes towards the music used in worship is clear: those formed by overseas missions were – and still are – slower to adopt contextualized forms of worship, preferring to use their own imported Western music. Even this is changing, though, and has been particularly noticeable in the past ten to twenty years. The movement to indigenize worship has taken hold across southern Benin and is bringing about changes in most denominations.

**Table showing the history of western and local music usage in Beninese churches. 1940–2008**



**Table 2**

## The Interrelations between AICs founded in Benin 1947–2002

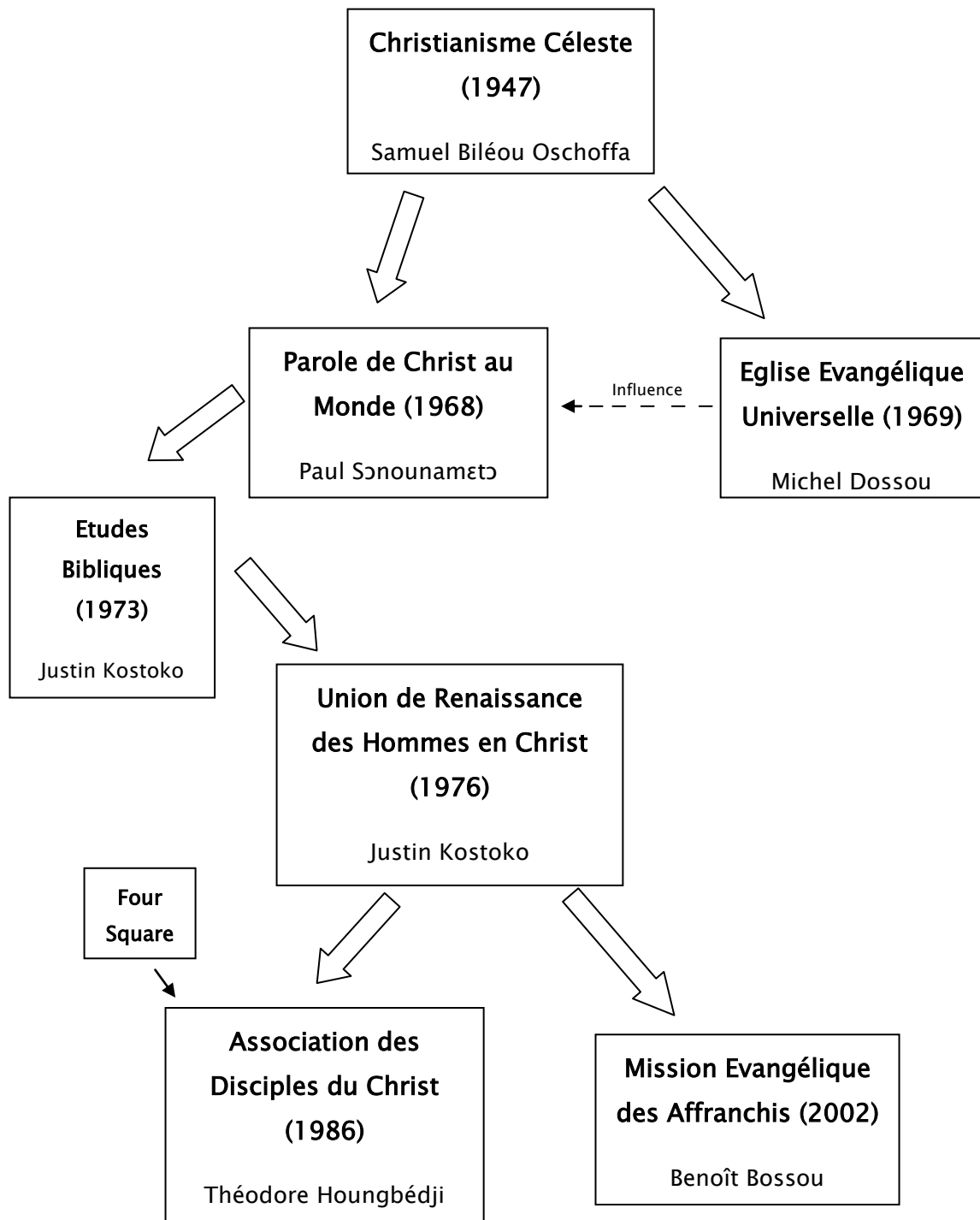


Table 2a





## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE USE OF VODÚN SONG GENRES IN CHURCH**

In a survey amongst Beninese Christians, I asked the question: Should one use rhythms of vodún origin in church?' Thirty two percent said 'no', giving the following reasons:

- It awakens/attracts evil spirits.
- They will think we are worshipping the same God [as them].
- It could put people into a trance.
- So as not to confuse the world with Christianity.
- It has nothing to do with our God.

In this chapter, we will look at such issues in detail to ascertain why these opinions are held and whether they are founded.

#### **4.1 The Music is Considered to be Evil**

The concept of certain music being inherently 'evil' is still held by some church leaders and musicians, in Benin and worldwide. Wheaton believes that '[f]or unknown spiritual reasons, certain rhythms will instantly attract

demonic forces.’<sup>1</sup> If this is true, would it make the music itself ‘evil’ or is this, again, an idea introduced and propagated by Western missionaries? Monsia states that: ‘European missionaries were the most ferocious in demonizing [the vodún] religion’<sup>2</sup> and Meyer speaks of missionaries in Togo who ‘in an effort to convince the Ewe to convert, preached that the Devil was the power behind the gods and ghosts hitherto worshipped by them. The translation of the Christian message into the vernacular thus went along with the diabolization of the old pantheon.’<sup>3</sup> And so, as a result, both the religion and its musical practices were deemed ‘evil’ and ‘[w]hat were once mainstream performances associated with precolonial religious rites’ says Aragon ‘have become largely taboo for reasons pertaining to contemporary religious doctrines’.<sup>4</sup>

This attitude is still present amongst some Beninese pastors: Augustin Sossa spoke to me of rhythms and songs ‘which are pure fetishistic [...] idolatry’ and believed that Christians ‘should avoid going this far, so as not to

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<sup>1</sup> Wheaton, 2000, p.29

<sup>2</sup> Monsia, 2003, p.18, (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> Meyer, 1994, p.63

<sup>4</sup> Aragon, 1996, p.413

provoke these spirits to manifest themselves or to approach us.’<sup>5</sup> For Pastor Lokono, the concept of ‘evil’ rhythms is more an historical issue than a spiritual one: ‘Perhaps a rhythm was born to do evil, then if we want to avoid it we say: “No, we won’t use it because it has a history”.’<sup>6</sup>

However, Pastor Houngbédji believes there is no inherently evil rhythm, but that: ‘when this rhythm is played and one invokes the spirits, it becomes evil.’<sup>7</sup> Weman adds: ‘The drum is not in itself a ‘heathen’ instrument, but because it is used in many pagan contexts it has justifiably been regarded with suspicion.’<sup>8</sup> Ed Lapis backs this up: ‘In serving pagan gods, art has been misused by ungodly men in idolatrous rituals and lifestyles for thousands of years. But this does not mean that it is evil or demonic.’<sup>9</sup> Lapis goes on to make the following common sense statement on the subject: ‘How can music be sacred or evil? Music is nothing but sound waves. It is a non-living thing. Non-living things are incapable of morality

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<sup>5</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, Feb 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 03-05-08

<sup>7</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>8</sup> Weman, 1960, p.199

<sup>9</sup> Lapis, 2010, p.57

or immorality. What will give morality to music? The heart of the musician, the object of worship.’<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, most Christians interviewed believed that there is no such thing as ‘evil’ music or an ‘evil’ rhythm; this included Augustin (ADC): ‘Absolutely any drum rhythm can be used to praise God’<sup>11</sup> and John Migan: ‘The rhythms from where we live here, the traditional rhythms: I can say that it’s not something which is evil. Music comes from God, only it’s often the inspiration which is different.’<sup>12</sup>

Even those who acknowledged the existence of so-called ‘evil’ music believed that it could nevertheless be ‘redeemed’ for church use. Edmond Djossou believes that ‘you can take a satanic melody and transfer it for God’<sup>13</sup> and that ‘[w]e have the power to transform them.’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lapid, 2010, p.67

<sup>11</sup> Augustin & Abel, interview, 29-12-07

<sup>12</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>13</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>14</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

Finally, Ange (MIERS) sums up why the concept of 'evil' music is not founded:

What is Christian music? In my opinion, all music – even slows, reggae...all of this was conceived by someone. [...] Now, if we think that there is a certain Christian music; those who say that are people who are used to opposing our local music. But if we oppose our music, then we'll only be left with Western music, and that too was created by someone. So, in my opinion, saying that traditional music, music from here is pagan, that's not true.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ange (MIERS), interview, May 2008

## 4.2 The Need to Leave all Things Vodún Behind

Many *vodúnsi* – and some Christians – have the same opinion as Anagonu Vodjo,<sup>16</sup> who says that ‘[i]f those people abandon the religion of our ancestors, they should do so completely.’<sup>17</sup> This would mean giving up all vodún traditions, including its music, dance, costumes and song lyrics. Pastor Didier Adjalian agrees that such practices are ‘not good, because you have refused it. [...] There are costumes, there are ways of speaking and you take them with you [into the church]?’<sup>18</sup> John Migan believes that: ‘[w]hen we accept the Lord, we have new songs. It’s not what we used to sing to glorify false gods that we will sing.’<sup>19</sup>

According to vodún priestess Anagonou Vodjo, the reason Christians should give up every aspect of vodún culture is, because ‘[i]f you renounce something, if there is something which you hate, [...] you hate that person from head to toe. You don’t detest someone and then you continue to sing his songs.’<sup>20</sup> Some Christians may indeed hate vodún or at least some of its

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<sup>16</sup> Anagonu Vodjo, interview, April 2008

<sup>17</sup> radically

<sup>18</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>19</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>20</sup> Anagonu Vodjo, interview, April 2008

practices. However, most of them do not hate Beninese culture, and that includes its songs.

There is also the fear of a continued association with vodún: '[i]t is as though you have not abandoned vodún worship [...] if you take away [with you] a tiny part of vodún worship, it's as though you were still part of the *vodúnsi*.'<sup>21</sup> If this is the case, then can Christians truly continue to use vodún genres in worship? Augustin Sossa, fears that '[i]f there is no difference, and if we unite with them, then the world will enter into the church and the church will enter into the world.'<sup>22</sup> Koffi (ASPAM) believes that vodún is an irremovable presence in every person, even Christians: 'I really believe in Jesus, but to say at the same time that vodún is not in me – no! Vodún is in me. We can't do anything about it, because I was born here.'<sup>23</sup>

The above attitude depends upon the belief that vodún has greater power than Christianity; a power which cannot be removed or conquered by faith in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Augustin Sossa, , interview, April 2008

<sup>23</sup> Koffi, ASPAM, interview, November 2007

Christ. However, many Christians did not feel this way; for example, John Migan states that 'If someone accepts and serves [Jesus], those musical genres which were rotten [and] even the person who composed it [...] become new creations'<sup>24</sup> showing the possibility for redeeming aspects of vodún culture for church usage. Edmond Djossou added: 'We can sanctify all things through the Word of God.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>25</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07



### 4.3 Syncretism and Thoughts of One's Former Life

Krabill states that '[m]any first-generation Christians in Africa have resisted using indigenous tunes, languages, and instruments in worship because of the emotional and spiritual associations these tend to conger up of their former lives.'<sup>26</sup> Such 'pagan' routines, says Knighton, are believed by some Christians 'to lead backwards to Satan'.<sup>27</sup> So can a converted *vodúnsi* use vodún song genres without having thoughts of his previous life? Koffi (ASPAM) does not think so, because '[t]he rhythm is already a vodún rhythm and is already embedded in his subconscious and so in whatever way he plays for Jesus, it's still the vodún rhythm which he is expressing.' Even if the words are changed, he felt that: 'the vodún realities are still present, because [...] he was born into a vodún culture.'<sup>28</sup> This means that, according to Koffi, vodún music used in church cannot cease to be vodún music, nor can the vodún adept cease to be linked to his/her fetish. Hence the Fòn saying:

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<sup>26</sup> Krabill, 2008, p.74

<sup>27</sup> Knighton, 2007, p.66

<sup>28</sup> Koffi, ASPAM, interview, November 2007

‘É nɔ se hungbé gbɛnɔ bǔdò mɛ ǎ.’<sup>29</sup>

(You cannot be taught the language of vodún and then  
it is as though you have learned nothing in your life.)

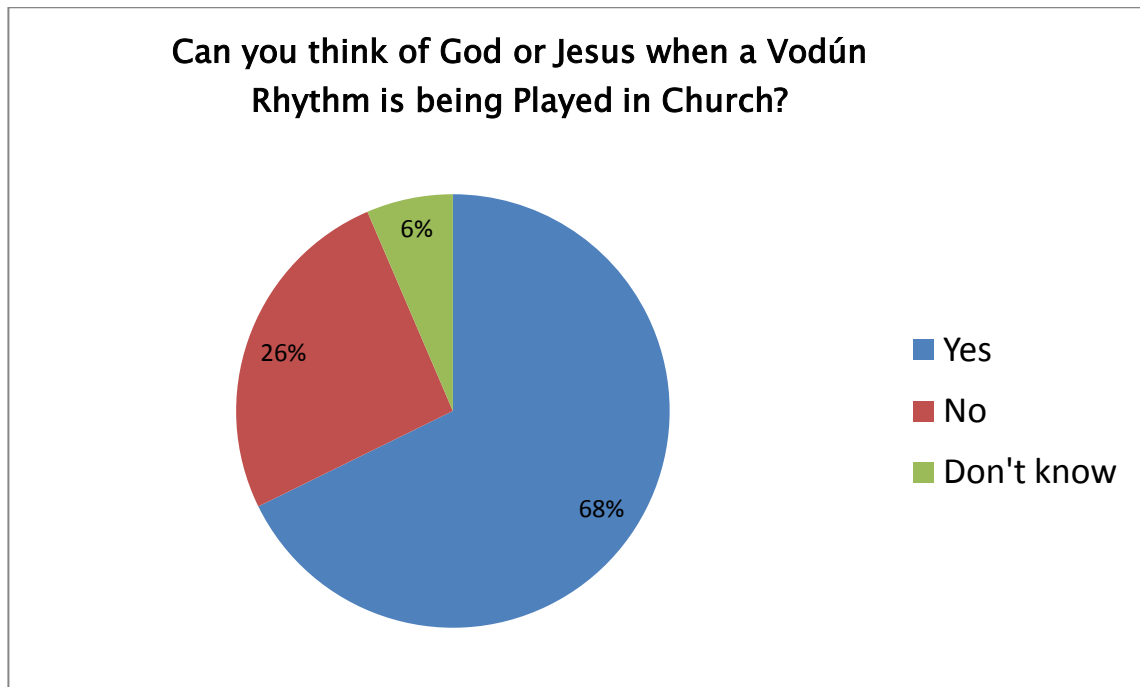
For this reason, Vi-Phint would prefer that a former *sakpatási* avoid playing – or even hearing – Sakpatá genres, because ‘it will take him back into his past’. Man, he says, ‘has a memory, which stores things’ and so, ‘if someone starts playing the same things he used to listen to, it takes him back into his past.’<sup>30</sup>

If this is true, then can such a convert to Christianity truly worship Jesus with this music, or will the worship be hindered by unavoidable thoughts of vodún? In a survey of thirty Christians from four denominations, I asked the question: ‘Can you think of God when a vodún rhythm is being played in church?’ Responses are primarily positive, but by no means unanimously so:

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<sup>29</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



Samuel Minhou was concerned that, when someone hears *Sakpatáhũn*, their thoughts would go towards *Sakpatá* more easily than Jesus which, he feels is dangerous for believers. Furthermore, he states that those who are not mature in their faith could ‘fall back’ into vodún ways.<sup>31</sup> Augustin Sossa believes that ‘even if you say you’re not worshipping the fetish, in your subconscious you will say “It’s what I used to dance when I was over there.”’ and so ‘if we play vodún rhythms in church, then little by little they will all return to the vodún temple.’<sup>32</sup> However, this has certainly not been the experience of church denominations such as ADC or MEA, where music of this kind has had quite the opposite effect!

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Minhou, interview, 27-11-07

<sup>32</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview April 2008

The majority of Christians interviewed disagreed with the above opinions,<sup>33</sup> provided the song words are modified:<sup>34</sup> Benoit Bossou felt that ‘if it were just the songs which they sung previously which they continued to sing here, they could have other thoughts. But as they are songs addressed to God, they no longer have thoughts in that direction.’<sup>35</sup> Asamoah backs this idea up, saying: ‘We should adopt a new approach to the social heritage of the African. What is needed is not a destruction of the old forms, but to fill them with new contents.’<sup>36</sup> It is important for an African to retain as many of these forms as possible, as they form part of his cultural heritage and his very identity. As Bediako states: ‘Now the Empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us – without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are.’<sup>37</sup> Robert Baum states that ‘[t]he convert does not forget older explanatory ideas but enters into an internal dialogue between two conceptual systems which overlap in some way, but diverge in many others.’<sup>38</sup> This ‘internal

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<sup>33</sup> Cf Seraphin Lokono, interview, 03-05-08

<sup>34</sup> Cf Théodore Houngbédji interview, April 2008, where he says we should focus on ‘what the song says.’

<sup>35</sup> Bossou Benoît, interview, 04-03-08

<sup>36</sup> Asamoah, 1955, p.293 (quoted by Weman, 1960, p.149)

<sup>37</sup> Bediako, 2004, p.52

<sup>38</sup> Baum, 1990, p.375

dialogue' leaves the possibility for retaining vodún traditions which do not conflict with Christian beliefs – such as much of its music and dance – whilst discarding those which do – such as the worship of other gods, sacrifices and cursing. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 5.4: 'The need for inculturation'.

### The Risk of Syncretism

Syncretism, say Pobee & Ositelu II 'is most frequently identified in the use of African music.'<sup>39</sup> If syncretism is defined as 'the combination of different forms of belief or practice'<sup>40</sup> then using vodún music in church is certainly syncretistic in terms of practice, but not necessarily in terms of belief. Combining the beliefs of vodún and Christianity is much more contentious, though is certainly a reality in Benin and therefore a risk for converts from vodún. Decalo states that in Ouidah the vodún temple of *Dangbé*, 'stands exactly across from the modern cathedral, and many worshipers cross from one site to the other on Sundays.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Pobee & Ositelu II, 1998, p. 27

<sup>40</sup> Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary

<sup>41</sup> Decalo, 1995, p.134

The majority of Evangelical, Protestant Christians I interviewed held the view that, ‘someone who comes to the Lord and continues to practise vodún has not yet known the Lord.’<sup>42</sup> Emmanuel Akpan believes that anyone attempting to practise both religions simultaneously ‘will not stay long, because with prayer he will be obliged to leave. [...] He either needs to stay with us and leave what he has there or he must go.’<sup>43</sup>

‘The new convert’ says Baum ‘moves into a world where two conflicting modes of explanation compete within his consciousness, a Christian mode and one deriving from his traditional religion. The convert attempts to resolve these conflicts in a permanent way.’<sup>44</sup> Many Christians interviewed believed that ‘if the person has given themselves entirely to the Lord, he should no longer have this kind of distraction’<sup>45</sup> and that a believer who ‘entirely accepts Jesus as saviour, even if a vodún rhythm is played, cannot think<sup>46</sup> about vodún.’<sup>47</sup> However, ‘if the person is not yet at that stage, then maybe he will do things out of ignorance, like he used to do them in

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<sup>42</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008

<sup>43</sup> Emmanuel Akpan, interview, March 2008

<sup>44</sup> Baum, 1990, p.375

<sup>45</sup> David Mensah, interview, 04-04-08

<sup>46</sup> Literally: ‘his spirit cannot be fixed upon the vodún’.

<sup>47</sup> Augustin & Abel (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

vodún.’<sup>48</sup> This highlights the need for spiritual maturity and solid biblical teaching amongst converts from vodún, in order to safeguard against risks of this kind but is not, in itself, a valid reason for avoiding all vodún song genres in church.

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<sup>48</sup> Didier Adjalán, interview, 07-02-08

#### 4.4 Fear of Using Vodún Music in Church

As we have already seen, one of the main reasons why some Beninese churches are reticent to use vodún genres in worship is that of fear; a fear tied in with many aspects of the vodún religion, as seen in Chapter Two. This, combined with the legacy of missionaries who demonized all things vodún, has lead to a fear of ‘evil’ in the music or the drumbeat, as discussed in Section 4.1. This in turn leads to a fear of that such ‘evil rhythms’ may call demons or evil spirits into the church. Augustin Sossa feels that ‘there are rhythms of songs which attract these demons’<sup>1</sup> and so Christians should ‘not to provoke these spirits to manifest themselves or to approach us.’<sup>2</sup> If the music is able to attract such spirits, then there is the added fear of possession and even trance occurring in church, a phenomenon studied in depth in Chapter Six.

Finally, there is the fear of a negative human reaction: that those in vodún may react with violence or send curses to harm the Christians.<sup>3</sup> Didier

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<sup>1</sup> Augustin Sossa, 04–08.

<sup>2</sup> Augustin Sossa, 04–08.

<sup>3</sup> Covered in Sections 4.6 and 4.7



Adjalian is 'worried about it, because it is what I used to do over there.<sup>4</sup> I'm frightened to...I don't want people to see me and say "he did that with us and now he wants to do it over there."' <sup>5</sup>

To counteract such fears, many Christians believe they are protected by God and cannot be harmed by the music: 'The Devil has no power over us,' says Bossou Benoît. 'Any evil force which they send upon us has no power over us and that is why we are scared of nobody.'<sup>6</sup> Augustin (ADC) questions the faith of those who are fearful: 'It is as though they have faith in vodún, they are frightened of vodún. If someone is frightened of the demon,<sup>7</sup> it's because he believes in the power which it possesses.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the vodún temple.

<sup>5</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>6</sup> Bossou Benoît interview, 04-03-08

<sup>7</sup> Or the Devil

<sup>8</sup> Augustin (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

#### 4.5 Vodún Rhythms Leading to Disorder and Moral Decline in Church

‘Certain rhythms’ says Wheaton ‘trigger aggressive behavior, and destroy moral codes’<sup>9</sup> and Pastor Sossa concurs: ‘if the person in charge is not vigilant [and] does not have the spirit of discernment [...] then these drum rhythms could bring lots of disorder into the church.’<sup>10</sup> Pastor Michel Dossou believes that churches using vodún genres ‘are not able to practise a life of sanctification’ and that this makes it ‘very easy for the boys to start getting the girls pregnant in the church [...] It is very frequent that such a thing happens in the churches which do everything in an ad hoc way.’<sup>11</sup> Thus, for Pastor Dossou vodún genres lead to physical chaos which then leads to a lowering of moral standards. He conceded, however, that vodún genres could be played with positive results on one condition:

**Rob:** If it’s used with the fear of God and with spiritual maturity, then can absolutely any rhythm be played?

**Michel:** It can be played, but with the fear of God, so that it results in good things rather than bad things.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wheaton, 2000, p.29

<sup>10</sup> Sossa Augustin, interview, February 2008

<sup>11</sup> Dossou Michel, interview, May '08

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

As with many of the objections given in this chapter, it depends upon the level of spiritual maturity of the believers in a given church along with the quality of leadership and Bible teaching given. There is no reason that a rhythm alone should trigger off immoral behaviour or that it has to be played in an ad hoc way; it all depends upon the association of the rhythm and the attitude of those playing it.

#### 4.6 Provocation of the Vodúnsì

‘We, the Christians, need to be very careful that we don’t enter the realms of provocation.’

Pastor Augustin Sossa<sup>13</sup>

Many *vodúnsì* are no longer strongly opposed to Christians using ‘their’ rhythms or genres, provided this it is done in a sensitive and non-provocative manner. The King of Allada<sup>14</sup> spoke of a ‘peaceful cohabitation’ between Christians, Muslims and vodún worshippers, and a member of the ‘Afripercuss’ group told me: ‘I’m in vodún, but I am still in agreement [with Christians using vodún music]’. He adds, however, that ‘those Christians cannot come to us, to where our fetish is, to provoke us.’<sup>15</sup>

Those interviewed listed several forms provocation towards vodún, namely:

- (i) Playing Christian music in front of the vodún temple.
- (ii) Playing vodún rhythms in church without any words.
- (iii) Singing songs which insult vodún.
- (iv) Taking vodún song words and using them in a virtually unchanged state.
- (v) Taking vodún drums and directly using them in church.

We will now look briefly at each of these.

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<sup>13</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, April 2008

<sup>14</sup> The King of Allada, interview, 17-01-08

<sup>15</sup> Afripercuss, interview, June 2008

#### 4.6.1 Playing Christian Music in Front of the Vodún Temple

Ange and Cheton (MIERS) gave the following account of a time when they deliberately sang in front of a vodún temple:

**Ange:** We sang in front of the vodún temple. We were surrounded by the vodún temple. We showed people that vodún does not pay.

**Cheton:** The traditional chief and the king were there.

**Rob:** And did you sing songs of vodún origin?

**Cheton:** Yes.

**Ange:** Of course.

**Rob:** Vodún songs in front of the vodún temple?

**Ange:** In front of the vodún temple.

**Rob:** And what was their reaction?

**Ange:** Those who could stand it stayed and those who could not went into their homes.<sup>16</sup>

This situation was clearly not tolerable to all present, as some had to leave.

Although their motives were – to them – positive (with the goal of evangelisation), caution and tact should nevertheless be exercised in such circumstances, out of respect for the beliefs of others if nothing else.

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<sup>16</sup> Ange & Cheton (MIERS), 06–08

#### 4.6.2 Playing Vodún Rhythms in Church without any Words

On the risks of playing vodún rhythms without any words, Houngbédji said: 'if you simply take the rhythm to provoke, that's what is not good. [...] If we play a rhythm in church which invokes fetishes, what is the goal we are trying to achieve?' Houngbédji continued: 'When you really beat a rhythm which is invocative, but without a song and people come and see you doing it, they will say it's a profanation.'<sup>17</sup> This kind of provocation, he says, can be avoided by always singing words with the musical accompaniment.

#### 4.6.3 Singing Songs which Insult Vodún

'We sing melodies of vodún origin at the church to mock<sup>18</sup> them'<sup>19</sup> said Daniel from Tori-Bossito. There are numerous examples of Christian songs which challenge, deny and even mock vodún beliefs. In some ways this is to be expected from those who have turned away from that religion and now see it as erroneous. However, it is unlikely to create a positive relationship between the two religions. Here is an extract from such a song:

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<sup>17</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>18</sup> *Bó nɔ do ko yě*. Literally, to laugh them.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel from Tori Bossito, interview, 5-12-07

*Legba* do xɔ ɖe me agbantɔn ni tɔn  
Xɔxayatoɖɛ ma nɔ do xɔnɔgbe.  
Bɔ agbantowe je henken.

If *Legba* is in this place he should leave.  
The tenant does not speak in the same way as the landlord.  
And your luggage is outside.<sup>20</sup>

This example is likely to annoy *vodúnsi*, as it both insults and demonizes, *Legba*. Here is another less direct example, but one which still defies and challenges vodún practices:

Bokónò, wa yĩ dekwin towe  
Má gbɔje  
Nyɛ kó yí Jezu sè  
Bokónò, wa yĩ dekwin towe  
Má gbɔje.

Bokónò, come and take your palm nuts  
So I can be in peace.  
I already believe in Jesus  
Bokónò, come and take your palm nuts  
So I can be in peace.<sup>21</sup>

A member of the secular music group *Afripercuss* told me: ‘They must not sing and insult those vodúns. They must not mock those vodúns [...] if the *vodúnnò* and the *vodúnsi* are there, they will not accept it. [...] God has not said to insult *Legba*. God said if you love me, come to me.’ However, on the

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<sup>20</sup> From the MEF church in Sonicog Cotonou, with Victorien.

<sup>21</sup> From the MEA Church, Cadjéhoun.

subject of saying that Jesus is more powerful than *Legba*, the same person said: ‘Even the *vodúnnò* say that Jesus is powerful. [...] But you must not insult others.’<sup>22</sup> Other examples of phrases used in such songs include: ‘This is your drum which we have taken to glorify God! What are you going to do about it? Come here and we’ll see’ or ‘You’re a demon.’<sup>23</sup>

Such behaviour amongst some Christians is made all the more shameful by the following statement from the same group: ‘The *vodúnnò* never insult the Christians.’<sup>24</sup> There is no *vodúnnò* who will do his *vodún* and tell people to insult the Christians. Never!’<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.6.4 Taking Vodún Song Words and Using them in a Virtually Unchanged State

There are several cases where *vodún* songs which have been transposed word for word into church songs, changing nothing more than the essential elements pertaining to *vodún*. For example, a well-known *vodún* song which includes the phrase:

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<sup>22</sup> Afripercuss, interview, June 2008

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> cf: Onyeji, 2004: pp.66–71 for an example of traditional songs which directly criticize Churches in Igboland, Nigeria.

<sup>25</sup> Afripercuss, interview, June 2008



*A mɔ me kléjé, vodún a mɔ.*<sup>26</sup>

(If you see me as a weak person, look at the vodún inside me).

This has been modified to create the following Christian song:<sup>27</sup>

*A mɔ me kléjé, Jezu a mɔ.*

(If you see me as a weak person, look at Jesus inside me).

If the Christians are seeking to maintain Beninese culture in their music without retaining vodún beliefs, then songs of this kind are a natural result. Such songs are nevertheless likely to cause provocation and, possibly, adverse reactions from the *vodúnsi*. As John Migan says: 'It annoys them because they are not yet converted [...] You take their song and you put Jesus in it – they're annoyed! That's why the *féticheur* wants to kill him.'<sup>28</sup>

Here is a further example of song words in this category:

*'Xele mi aliděe mĩ na gbɔn, mĩ xwè nu xogbè.'*

(Show me the path we should take, we are going to play music).

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<sup>26</sup> Literally: You see me small, you are seeing vodún.

<sup>27</sup> By Matthieu Assogba, cf Section 4.7.3 for his testimony of a negative reaction to this song.

<sup>28</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

Which has become:

*‘Xɛɛ mi aliqěe mĩ na gbɔn, mĩ xwè Jezu gɔn.’<sup>29</sup>*

(Show me the path we should take, we are going to the house of Jesus).

This is potentially less offensive than the first example, as there is not a direct substitution of one divine being for another. The *vodúnsi* recognize and respect Jesus and so it is less likely to offend, though the fact that it was originally a vodún song could nevertheless cause offence.

When I sang: *‘Xɛɛ mi aliqěe mĩ na gbɔn, mĩ xwè Jezu gɔn’* to vodún priestess Anagonou Vodjo, she responded with vehement opposition: ‘That’s not a song of Jesus. They should compose their own songs. They are violating the pact, they are violating life. Taking a bit from one side, taking a bit from the other side; Jesus does not want this!’<sup>30</sup> In addition to such provocation, John Migan also feels that Christians should not be plagiaristic with their new songs, but rather should ‘sing a new song to the Lord [...] If you’ve got no

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<sup>29</sup> From the MEF church, Sonicog, Cotonou.

<sup>30</sup> Anagonu Vodjo, interview, April 2008

inspiration, [then] you take that melody to put the name of God in it. My conviction is that it's not normal.'<sup>31</sup>

Not all vodún worshippers are opposed to such songs – one young musician from 'Afripercuss' thought it was a good thing and, interestingly, a similar phenomenon exists in the opposite direction:

**Musician:** The vodún people sometimes remove things of Jesus and replace it with...

**Rob:** Really?

**Musician:** It's not too provocative.

**Rob:** The *vodúnsì* take Christian songs?

**Musician:** Yes!

**Rob:** They remove the word 'Jesus' to replace it with 'vodún'?

**Musician:** Yes, sometimes.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.6.5 Using Vodún Drums Directly in Church

The fifth and final issue in terms of provocation is that of taking vodún instruments and playing them in church. Such drums are deemed sacred and therefore not to be played in any other context. However, identical instruments can be constructed and used without fear of the above taking place:

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<sup>31</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>32</sup> 'Afripercuss' group, interview, June 2008

To play those drums, there are rituals before bringing out those drums. These are the drums which cannot be taken and played elsewhere. But if you want the same rhythm, you can have the same [kind of] drums and play your rhythms elsewhere. But a Christian cannot come and say to the priest of *Tlòn*, “Give me your sacred drum, so I can play it!” That’s provocation!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Afripercuss’ group, interview, June 2008

## 4.6 Negative Reactions from Vodún

In a survey, I asked the question: In your opinion, what do the *vodúnsi* and *vodúnnɔ̀* think if they hear vodún rhythms in church? Negative answers included:

- They say that if we leave vodún, we should leave their rhythms too.
- They could mock us.
- They could forbid the church from playing this music.
- They become angry.
- They will say the church is stealing their rhythms.
- They will be confused.
- They will think we are worshipping their fetish in the church.

All of the provocations studied in Section 4.6 can – and sometimes do – cause negative reactions amongst the *vodúnsi*. Another reason for adverse reactions is that the *vodúnsi* fear that a convert to Christianity ‘will give away all the secrets of the vodún temple’<sup>34</sup> to those at the church; that ‘he will tell everyone what he used to do with those people in the vodún temple.’<sup>35</sup> Abel (ADC)<sup>36</sup> confirmed that negative reactions on the part of vodún are not isolated to cases of this kind; it can also be sparked off by the

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<sup>34</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, 04-08, also mentioned by Edouard Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08 and Augustin (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

<sup>35</sup> Augustin (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

<sup>36</sup> Abel (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

music itself, or by a combination of the music and the fact that they have left vodún for Christianity:<sup>37</sup> ‘Those who do not believe in Jesus are astonished when they see the sons of God<sup>38</sup> playing *agbocěbu*. They shake their heads and say: “such audacity on their part!”’<sup>39</sup> This happens, in part, because, ‘it is the adepts of that fetish who play [vodún music]; not just anybody plays it, it’s not a music for everyone’.<sup>40</sup> A Baptist musician in Vɔgbana added: ‘They are not very happy, because they could think that it is *their* thing and that we have stolen it.’<sup>41</sup>

In the following section we will take a more detailed look at these negative reactions.

#### 4.6.1 Anger

‘They get angry’ Houngbédji told me ‘because they think we are profaning things of their gods, or their vodúns.’<sup>42</sup> Guy Xunò added: ‘It’s our rhythm; the rhythms of the vodúns. That’s what they are taking into church! [...] it’s

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<sup>37</sup> Cf Didier Adjalien, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>38</sup> Christians

<sup>39</sup> Abel, interview, 29-12-07

<sup>40</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 03-05-08

<sup>41</sup> Vɔgbana Baptist church music group, interview, June 08. Also stated by John Mican, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>42</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

not good. [...] It is the adepts who taught them how to play these drumbeats.’<sup>43</sup> Guy goes on to give the following testimony:

**Guy:** I have a friend [...] We were having a drink (together) and the people from the church came and started playing *ajà*.

**Rob:** *Ajà*, with the bells?

**Guy:** Yes. They were doing this to support their friends.

**Rob:** Which friends?

**Guy:** Those who were taking communion. I looked and I said ‘What you’re doing at the church there is not good!’ And they said ‘Let’s do the dance of *Sakpatá!*’ [...] They were doing it for the Lord. And I said ‘It would have been better if you had stayed at home. You’re beating that rhythm over there! And if you beat that rhythm, am I going to dance *sakpatáhũn* for you?’<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.7.2 Physical Aggression

Sometimes the anger seen in the previous section escalates to actual physical aggression from *vodúnsi* towards the Christians. Although less common these days, Houngbédji still told me: ‘The adepts of *vodún* get angry [...] They can come and attack the churches. It often happens.’<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Pastor Foley told me the following story:

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<sup>43</sup> Guy Xunɔ, interview, June 2008

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

Once the *zángbètò* encircled this church and forbade anyone from entering [...] They didn't want the church to continue [...] because it disturbs them – the presence of the church disturbs them. They placed the vodún itself at the door; that means you cannot go inside. If you go inside, you have provoked the whole village.<sup>46</sup>

### 4.7.3 Curses

Guy Xunò quoted me the following Fòn proverb:

*'Nu a ze dunu ă, na yi awontínli ă.'*

(What you do not eat, shouldn't go towards your nostrils)

I asked him what this meant:

**Guy:** If you are already initiated into vodún and then you get converted and you go to church, what you are doing could cause you to die; even your children.

**Rob:** Because people will curse them?

**Guy:** Yes. They know they are doing us wrong.<sup>47</sup>

The fear of being cursed by those in vodún is a real deterrent to using vodún song genres for some Beninese Christians. Augustin Sossa believes that, if he plays this music in church, then 'they will hate me<sup>48</sup> and if they have the chance to eliminate me, they will do so [...] with *gri-gri*, with sorcery also.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Foley, interview, 09-06-08

<sup>47</sup> Guy Xunò, interview, June 2008

<sup>48</sup> For playing 'their' music

<sup>49</sup> Augustin Sossa interview, April 2008



Cursing is one of the supernatural phenomena brought about through sorcery<sup>50</sup> and is believed, by Christians to be caused by ‘satanic spirits, who have the power of evil.’<sup>51</sup> Matthias continued: ‘After the incantations, [the spirits] arrive, they receive their commands and then they will accomplish their mission.’ As well as causing death, curses can also ‘give someone diarrhoea’ or ‘make someone have an accident.’<sup>52</sup> Ernest Oueounou (MIERS) told me that, when he was a boy, some spectators of a vodún ceremony were mocking those taking part. The *vodúnsi* realized this and sent a curse on the mockers and they went into a trance.<sup>53</sup>

However, almost every Christian questioned felt that curses were without effect on born again Christians: ‘They send “missiles”; satanic arrows, but most of that doesn’t have any effect.’<sup>54</sup> In a survey covering a range of churches, I asked: Is there a danger of curses being put on Christians who play music of vodún origin in church? Here are the results:

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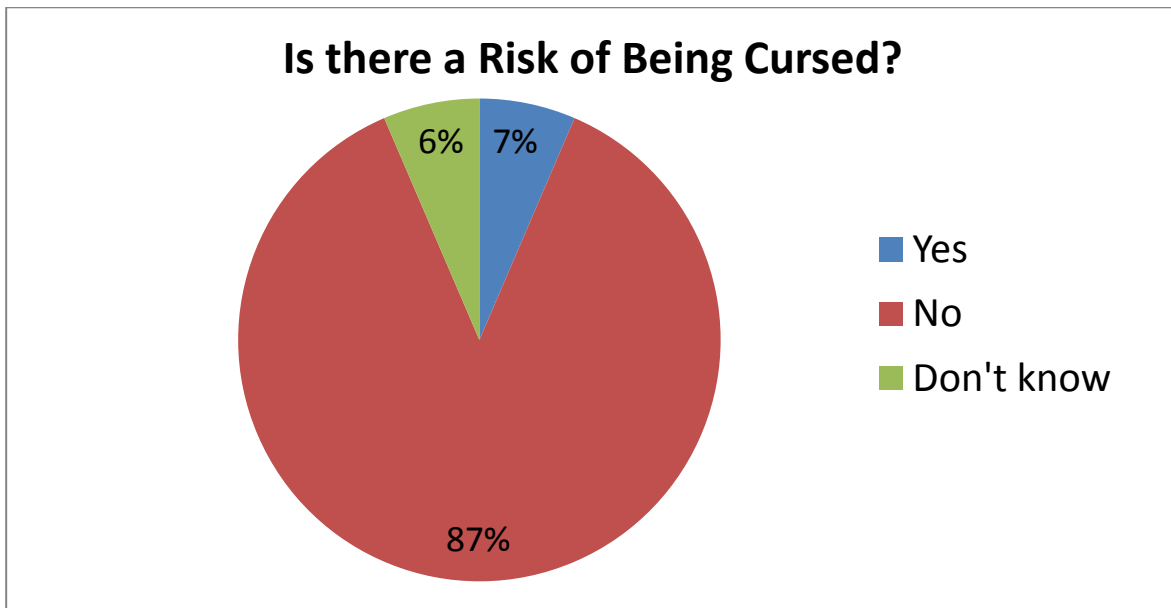
<sup>50</sup> See section 2.1.4

<sup>51</sup> King Matthias, interview, 05-08

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ernest Oueounou, interview, 16-05-08

<sup>54</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB, 29-11-07



The response amongst Christians is overwhelmingly that there is no risk.

Reasons given include:

- The Christians are protected by God.
- Because most *vodúnsi* recognize the power of God.
- The rhythms belong to our God.
- Because we died with Christ.
- The Devil's power can never harm the power of Christ.
- The message communicated through the vodún music in church will cancel the effects of the curse.

Meanwhile, reasons given that there is a risk of being cursed are as follows:

- Because the forces of evil could seize this opportunity to attack.
- Because the vodúns could be unhappy about it.
- It could happen if the person comes to church but is not converted.

Didier Adjalian was threatened when he came to faith but, he says, 'the person to whom I gave my life is more powerful than all that. And in the end

the vodún chief saw that there was nothing he could do<sup>55</sup> and he came and told me that I was free now.’<sup>56</sup> Emmanuel Akpan feels there is no need to ‘be afraid and say that when we play a certain rhythm we will be attacked by people from over there,’<sup>57</sup> and Ange (MIERS) added: ‘we consecrate ourselves and God protects us [...] Up until now, God has not failed us. No, no, no. There’s no risk.’<sup>58</sup>

However, it was generally felt that those who are not truly ‘born again’ or do not remain close to God are still at risk from such curses. ‘If the others curse him,’ says Augustin, ‘then it could work if the person does not have God in their life’<sup>59</sup> and Abel adds, ‘if he’s not given himself to Jesus, he’s as good as gone.’<sup>60</sup> Finally, a syncretistic existence would not serve to protect from curses: ‘If he lives a life of hypocrisy with God – one foot in, one foot out, then he’ll be affected.’<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf Section 3.4.1.3: ‘Backfired Curses’

<sup>56</sup> Didier Adjalian, 07–02–08

<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel Akpan, 03–08

<sup>58</sup> Ange (MIERS) 05–08

<sup>59</sup> Augustin, ADC Akogbato, interview, 29–12–07

<sup>60</sup> Abel, ADC Akogbato, interview, 29–12–07

<sup>61</sup> Edmond, UCAB interview, 29–11–07

To end this section, three short case studies, all of which serve to consolidate and clarify the above arguments. Firstly, ADC musician, Augustin, tells a story of a ‘Christian’ who died from being cursed:

In my town, there is someone who was a *tɔxɔsi*<sup>62</sup> [...] People came to do an evangelistic campaign in the town and crowds gathered. They chose the square where vodún music and dance takes place for their evangelization. However, this man was newly converted. He went up on the stage and started explaining what happens in the vodún temple, what he did, how he did it, how he ate and also that it is to do with mystification.<sup>63</sup> He was native to the town and he started giving away all the secrets from that place. Later, we learned that he died shortly after the evangelization campaign. We don’t know what he died of but all those who heard of his death put it down to the fact that he had given away the secrets of the vodún temple.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, artist Mathieu Assogba tells the following story of how he risked death upon conversion to Christianity:

There’s a *féticheur* in my village – an important *féticheur*. One day I sang in my village. Everyone was scared of him. There was a song which people sang in the vodún temple, which says ‘*A mɔ mi kléjé, vodoun a mɔ.*’<sup>65</sup> I transformed it and said: ‘*A mɔ mi kléjé, Jesu a mɔ.*’<sup>66</sup> And [...] he went to see my grandmother to say: ‘Be careful – your young one here will die’. And my grandmother started crying. She called me to her and said, ‘Be careful! People want to kill you, eh? They want to kill you’. Three years later, my grandmother called me and she said, ‘From today you must stay

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<sup>62</sup> An adept of vodún divinity, *tɔxɔsu*.

<sup>63</sup> ie that it is the person themselves who wants the vodún to take possession of him.

<sup>64</sup> Augustin (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

<sup>65</sup> Though you see me as a small child, it’s vodún you see.

<sup>66</sup> Though you see me as a small child, it’s Jesus you see.

close to your Jesus. The day you leave Jesus, they will eliminate you.’ The guy there, who wanted me to die said ‘Truly, that guy. If Jesus wasn’t with him, he would have died.’ So, I knew that, according to what he said to my grandmother, he had pursued<sup>67</sup> me, but he wasn’t able to do anything to me.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, a conversation on curses and ‘backfiring curses’ with Pastor Foley and Edouard Ayékoro:

**Rob:** So, when they put curses like that on you, what happens?

**Foley:** It doesn’t happen.

**Edouard:** It doesn’t happen, it is they themselves who come and say it. They tell us that ‘we cursed you but it didn’t have any effect.’

**Rob:** I even heard an example where a *vodúnsi* cursed a pastor or someone in the church and nothing happened to him – to the pastor – but the *vodúnsi* himself died. Does that happen too?

**Edouard:** Yes

**Foley:** It happens.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> ie put a curse on him

<sup>68</sup> Mathieu Assogba, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>69</sup> Recorded interview with Pastor Robert Foley and Edouard, Ayékoro 09-06-08

#### 4.8 The Potential for Misunderstanding

If someone hears a vodún genre being played in a church, there is the risk that they could misinterpret this as vodún rituals being carried out in the church: 'As soon as they hear the vodún drums, before having heard the song, they'll say "Ah, it's vodún people are playing."' <sup>70</sup> Such misunderstandings are more likely when there are no words to the songs as this 'creates confusion,' <sup>71</sup> whereas with lyrics, says Houngbédji, 'when people approach they see the difference. They see that we are in the process of praising God.' <sup>72</sup>

Another way to avoid such confusion and the potential ensuing annoyance is to modify the rhythm enough for it no longer to be recognizable as a vodún genre, whilst retaining its essential characteristics.

**Théodore:** Sometimes there are some rhythms which are modified.

**Rob:** And if they are not modified, nothing will happen so...

**Théodore:** Nothing will happen, but it will bring about confusion.

**Rob:** Confusion?

**Théodore:** Those who know the rhythm and hear it, there will be great confusion in their minds. <sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Raoul Adamo, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>71</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

## 4.9 Conclusion

So sum up, the fears associated with the usage of vodún song genres in church are believed by the majority of Christians to be unfounded, or that these can be removed by true faith in Christ and through claiming his protection. In addition, any fear of hostility associated with using vodún song genres can be minimized by taking a few simple measures, notably:

- Avoiding the use of vodún music in church where there are no Christian lyrics accompanying it.
- Instruments should not be taken directly from a vodún context, but rather should be built especially for church usage.
- Songs which blatantly insult, challenge or demean vodún should be avoided.
- Evangelism directly in front of a vodún temple should be avoided.
- A vodún song genre could be slightly modified,<sup>74</sup> whilst retaining its defining characteristics wherever possible.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> 'We can draw inspiration from it and create rhythms here, modifying it slightly' (Emmanuel Akpan, interview, March 2008)

<sup>75</sup> 'The rhythms must resemble each other; the songs should resemble each other.' (Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008)

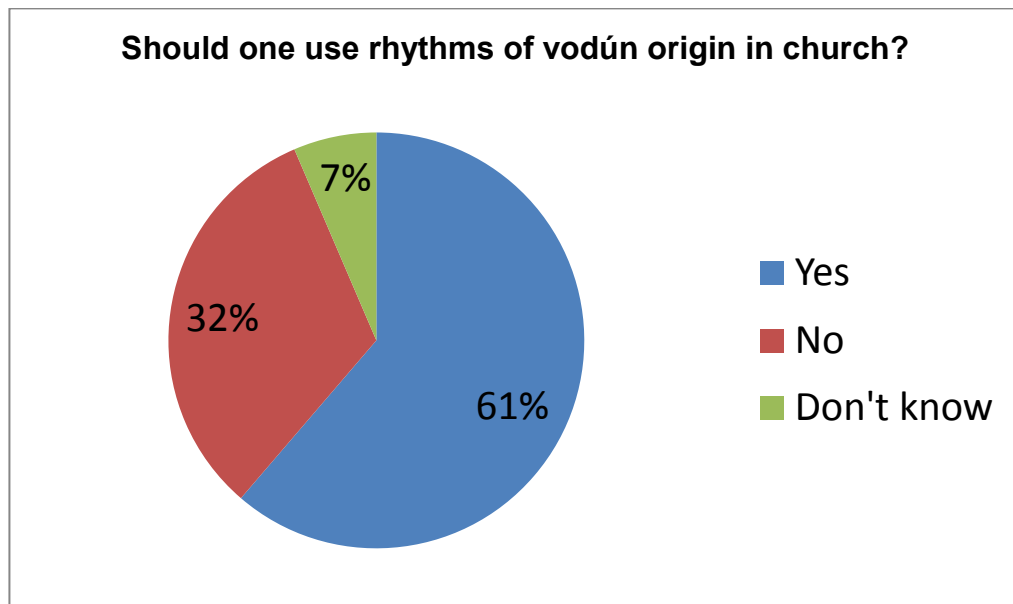




## CHAPTER FIVE:

### ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF USING VODÚN SONG GENRES IN CHURCH

In a survey I carried out, I asked: Should one use rhythms of vodún origin in church? The responses were follows:



So, in spite of all the possible negative effects given in the previous chapter, the majority are still in favour. Most negative responses came from the MEF (a mission church), whilst the MEA (an AIC) gave 100% positive responses.<sup>1</sup> Positive reasons for still using vodún music in church included:

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<sup>1</sup> As observed in Section 3.2

- Because we were all used to these rhythms before.
- Vodún is the author of no rhythm.
- God created all things.
- So we can worship God in our culture.
- David says so in Psalm 149.
- We should keep these rhythms so as to diminish the musical obsession we used to have.
- It will attract those who like this rhythm/they will turn to Christ.

In this chapter we will look in more detail at the reasons given in favour of using vodún song genres in church.

## 5.1 It is the Only Music the *Vodúnsi* Knows How to Play

In Section 3.3.2, we saw how some converted *vodúnsi* or *vodúnnɔ̀* have brought their music with them to use in church worship. Any convert from vodún has three options, musically speaking:

- (i) To give up playing African music altogether and play only music of Western origin.<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) To learn how to play non-vodún traditional genres which are accepted more easily by most Christian churches.<sup>3</sup>
- (iii) To bring the music he knows from the vodún temple and modify it so that the church will accept it for worship.

The argument against option (i) is that Western music is foreign to the African ear and is therefore difficult for an African to learn, understand or use in a meaningful way. Option (ii) would be difficult, as someone who has played only one genre all their life since initiation cannot easily give this up and learn a different one. Even if this were possible, 'if we go back far enough then all Beninese music is linked to vodún'.<sup>4</sup> Raoul Adamo also told me that 'it would be very difficult to find a traditional rhythm which is not

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<sup>2</sup> This would have been the only option in most Beninese churches 40 years ago and is still favoured in some of these to this day.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of traditional rhythms not directly linked to vodún worship yet used in church include: *tɔ̀ba*, *zenli*, *cɛngunmɛn*, *agbadja* and *hanyé*.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Akpan, interview, 03-08

linked to vodún. There are practically none.’<sup>5</sup> It is clear, however, that for a *vodúnsi*, the music of his ‘fetish’ is the only music he knows and that to give it up would mean both throwing away a talent which has taken years to create as well as losing a rich part of his cultural heritage. ‘He knows how to sing it’ says Seraphin Lokono, because ‘it was his life over there. When he sung he put his whole self into it to praise *Sakpatá*.’<sup>6</sup> Hounbedji finds it ‘normal’ that ‘when vodún adepts are converted, they use their drums, which they used previously to praise the vodún,’ because ‘that is all they know.’<sup>7</sup> ‘It is the same rhythm which people played [...] for vodún’ says John Migan, ‘only it’s the inspiration which is different.’<sup>8</sup> Thus, the *vodúnsi* says of this music: ‘I no longer have them for worshipping the fetish, but today I can take my works and worship the Lord.’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Raoul Adamo, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>6</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 03-05-08

<sup>7</sup> Théodore Hounbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>8</sup> John Migan, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>9</sup> Edouard, Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08

## 5.2 Christian Ownership of the Music

The opinion that the Christians have at least an equal right to so-called vodún music was one I frequently encountered. For example, Ange said: ‘He’ll tell us: “You’re playing our rhythm” and we, the Christians, must tell them “No! It’s not your rhythm”’.<sup>10</sup> This opinion is justified in a number of ways, which we shall now explore.

### 5.2.1 The Music was Created by God and Therefore Belongs to Christians

‘The *vodúnsi* [...] knows that God is supreme,’ said Ange. ‘We need to explain to them that the God who created all things – he made the *vodúnsi* and he made the people who made vodún.’<sup>11</sup> The Christians questioned<sup>12</sup> overwhelmingly echoed this opinion, often quoting as evidence Psalm 150:6, which says: ‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.’

Anne-Marie Toyissé told me: ‘Vodún has no rhythms. It’s the Lord who has everything. Who created man? It’s God who created man. Everything that man uses today, it’s God who made man first before he could have access to

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<sup>10</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>11</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>12</sup> Including Benoît Bossou (MEA), Théodore Houngbédji (ADC), Cheton (MIERS), Emmanuel Akpan (MEA), Anne-Marie Toyissé, Victorien (MEF), John Migan and UCAB chair Raoul Adamo.

all these things.’<sup>13</sup> ‘This drum with which vodún has been praised’ says a musician in Dorothé’s music group, ‘I’m going to take it to praise my God. It is God who created it.’<sup>14</sup>

This leads to the belief amongst many Christians that God created the music first and that it was later falsely attributed to vodún: ‘It is God who gave it to our forefathers and they<sup>15</sup> took it to worship idols’<sup>16</sup> one musician told me. ‘The people of *Sakpatá* call it the rhythm of *Sakpatá*, that’s all’ said Emmanuel Akpan. ‘They gave it that name. It is not *Sakpatá*’s rhythm, it’s God’s.’<sup>17</sup> Pastor Cheton<sup>18</sup> said: ‘[w]hen our grand-parents were in ignorance of such things, they took what belonged to God and attributed it to idols.’<sup>19</sup> Ange goes on to say that ‘today, God has opened our eyes and we are reclaiming what belongs to our God.’<sup>20</sup>

A step further still is the opinion that vodún song genres have, in fact, been falsely appropriated by the Devil. This is largely due to the demonization of

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<sup>13</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

<sup>14</sup> Interview, May 2008

<sup>15</sup> The vodúnsi.

<sup>16</sup> Vogbana Baptist Church musician, June 2008

<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Akpan, interview, 4-3-08

<sup>18</sup> See also the transcript of the interview with Dorothé’s music group for a similar opinion (in appendices).

<sup>19</sup> Pastor Cheton, interview, May 2008

<sup>20</sup> Ange, interview, May 2008

vodún by missionaries and the church, as seen in Section 3.1. ‘We should take what the Devil has stolen from us, what he diverted towards himself to give it back to God’<sup>21</sup> says Raoul Adamo. David Mensah agrees: ‘At the outset, [these rhythms] were started to worship [...] the Devil, vodún and so on. But now that everything has become new [...] we offer it rather for the glory of God.’<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Edmond Djossou states that ‘[i]f we had to reject all the rhythms which people did in the vodún temples [...] we would have to reject everything, because at the start they monopolized all the melodies to serve the Devil.’<sup>23</sup>

### 5.2.2 The Music Belongs to all Beninese and this Includes the Christians

Anne-Marie Toyissé adds to this: ‘We are Beninese. We are in Benin. They are *our* rhythms[...] I was born into it [...] and it’s what I have heard since my birth until I was grown up and it is what I know that I am going to use to

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<sup>21</sup> Raoul Adamo, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>22</sup> David Mensah, interview, 04-04-08

<sup>23</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

glorify the Lord.’<sup>24</sup> Seraphin Lokono states that ‘it is Beninese society which created it, not an individual.’<sup>25</sup> In the following conversation, Guy Xunò admits to this common heritage for all Beninese, but goes on (after this) to express his displeasure at Christians using them:

**Rob:** The rhythm, for example, *agbocěbu* or *hwedě*. Does it belong to Benin or does it belong solely to vodún?

**Guy:** It belongs to all of us.

**Rob:** To the Beninese?

**Guy:** Yes, it’s ours. It belongs to us all.

**Rob:** So even for a Beninese Christian, it belongs to him?

**Guy:** Yes, but...<sup>26</sup>

### 5.2.3 It is Therefore the Best Music for Church Worship

Pastor Cheton, like many Beninese Christians, believes that it is preferable to play vodún genres in church, rather than in the vodún temple, because ‘if we bring it and play it in church, it is as though the music has returned to its starting point – to its very origin, because the origin of music is in the Bible

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<sup>24</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

<sup>25</sup> Seraphin Lokono. See also transcript of interview with secular musician Amos (Afrpercuss), June 08, who also says the music belongs to everyone.

<sup>26</sup> Guy Xunò, interview, June 2008



and is defined through the word of God.’<sup>27</sup> ‘The Beninese’ Edmond Djossou told me ‘are attached to their rhythms, their traditions, which means that the best music for Jesus, according to my analyses, is traditional music.’<sup>28</sup>

‘Vodún’, say Geffré and Luneau ‘is first of all the Benin word for religion.’<sup>29</sup>

Is it not, therefore, logical that the new-found religion of Christianity should continue to use the nation’s ‘religious music’ for their worship?

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<sup>27</sup> Pastor Cheton, interview, May 2008

<sup>28</sup> Edmond Djossou (UCAB), interview 27-11-07

<sup>29</sup> Geffré & Luneau, 1977, p.42

### 5.3 A Tool for Evangelism

Another primary reason why Christians have adopted and continued to use vodún genres in church is because they see the positive results in terms of church attendance and conversions to Christianity. In a survey, I asked the question: In your opinion, what do the *vodúnsì* and *vodúnnɔ̀* think if they hear vodún rhythms in church? The most common positive answers all had a missiological theme:

- They are amazed and attracted by the rhythm.
- They will think ‘they are playing our drums, so we’re the same [now], and can join them.’
- They are interested.
- They like it.
- It communicates with them.

There are two ways in which this music works in an evangelistic way: (i) It is played in church services (ie ‘passive evangelism’) and (ii) It is used specifically in evangelistic campaigns outside of the church.

### 5.3.1 Vodún Music in Church Attracting Non-Believers

In section 3.2.7, we saw how Benoît Bossou's denomination, MEA, was founded in 2002 and grew to 400,000 members in 2008,<sup>30</sup> a phenomenon which he attributes, in part at least, to the usage of local song genres from the outset, in particular those of vodún origin. 'There are many among us who were formerly vodún adepts and sorcerers' he told me, 'and it is the music<sup>31</sup> which we play here which they liked and which attracted them to us'<sup>32</sup>

The fact that this music is audible from afar often causes interest and brings curious newcomers along. This is not a new phenomenon; as early as 1960, Henry Weman noted that African drums being used for the first time in a Rhodesian church had 'a splendid effect upon the level of attendance at evening prayers'<sup>33</sup> and more recently, Roberta King noted that 'the songs initially attract them to church, and even though they listen to the songs that

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<sup>30</sup> In effect, these figures are somewhat skewed as the MEA 'took over' some churches which were already in existence. The figure is, nevertheless, astounding.

<sup>31</sup> The rhythm

<sup>32</sup> Bossou Benoît, interview, 04-03-08

<sup>33</sup> Weman, 1960, p.178

essentially carry the same Christian message as a sermon, they are not offended by them'.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Foley (UEEB) noted that '[i]f you go into churches where traditional music is used, there are always lots of people in them. But if you go into a church where it is just songs which people don't know, the number of people is not as big.' Referring to the UEEB church, he went on to tell me that 'lots of people came to faith because of [this] change in music'.<sup>35</sup>

Pastor Cheton (MIERS), agreed that Western music 'will not attract them' and that '[i]f you play it too much, they see it as the white people's music.' However, 'when we play traditional music' he says, 'local people will be very interested and they say 'that's our thing'. So that's part of our policy for attracting them.'<sup>36</sup> Even Guy Xunḏ<sup>37</sup> admitted that 'when you play the drums of Sakpatá, it attracts people [...] to go to church [...] Everyone's going to church now. [...] There are people who will say "it's because of the rhythm alone that I go there" [...] There have been lots of people like that.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> King, 2009. p.173

<sup>35</sup> Robert Foley, interview, June 2008

<sup>36</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>37</sup> Son of Dagbo Hunḏ, former vodún chief of Benin in Ouidah

<sup>38</sup> Guy Xunḏ, interview, June 2008

Conversely, Edouard Ayékoro noticed members of his church were going along to hear local music being played in a non-church context, because it is the music which they liked before becoming Christians. From this he concluded that, 'if we can transfer this into the Lord's music, then that's all that is needed.'<sup>39</sup> A member of Dorothé's music group gave the following testimony:

One day, we were playing ajà [bells] and an adept of vodún was passing and he came in. And he said 'Listen! Why...?' When he came he thought we were doing vodún and he came into the middle of the circle and sat down. When he listened to the songs and we stopped he said 'You're playing ajà, aren't you? And this is a church – why are you playing ajà?' And we explained to him and he said that he was surprised, but he understood that the songs are not the same songs which are sung in the vodún temple. It attracts people.<sup>40</sup>

### 5.3.2 Vodún Music in Evangelistic Campaigns

Evangelistic campaigns have been happening for decades in Benin, but more recently the idea of using local genres has come more into play. Mathieu Assogba told me: 'when you go to a village to evangelize [...] you need to play the rhythms they like. [...] Then they come and join us and they hear an

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<sup>39</sup> Edouard Ayékoro, interview, June 2008

<sup>40</sup> Dorothé's music group, interview, May 2008

extraordinary message.’<sup>41</sup> Many Christians interviewed<sup>42</sup> mentioned this and underlined the importance of using a genre appropriate to the location, as it is this music which will best communicate the message to the people. ‘The day you play this music’ says Anne-Marie Toyissè,<sup>43</sup> ‘you’ll be evangelizing somewhere, and people will follow you in great numbers [...] I did it once and a king stood up from his throne and said “I can come to the Lord now, because there is everything.”’<sup>44</sup>

This means also using vodún genres, as these are often the predominant local form of musical expression. If a genre from another region is used then ‘people will say that it is something which has come from outside.’<sup>45</sup> When evangelising in Abomey, for example, Anne-Marie Toyissè says ‘[i]f you don’t play *agbocěbu*, who is going to come and hear what you have brought for them?’ However, ‘when you start playing *agbocěbu*, the people will run; they will come towards you.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mathieu Assogba, interview, 29-11-07

<sup>42</sup> See also Victorien (MEF) and his usage of the ajà genre in evangelism.

<sup>43</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008

<sup>44</sup> Ie that Christianity even has local music now.

<sup>45</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Ange (MIERS) told of how he used vodún genre *káká* to evangelise in the Ladjí area<sup>47</sup> of Cotonou:

Normally, they remain in the distance, but the day we played *káká*, they identified with the rhythm.<sup>48</sup> Without difficulty, they left their homes and came. They remained amongst us and danced, danced, danced. And then at the end they stayed to listen to the message. And lots of them were won for the Lord.<sup>49</sup>

And Edmond Djossou gave the following account:

We went into the *Zou-Collines* region to do evangelism. It was the *Nago*,<sup>50</sup> they have their own rhythms. But when we started to praise in their rhythms [...] they started to sing in their language, their rhythm, to glorify God. But that rhythm – they play it for their vodún, they transformed it to praise God.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Christian musician Jeanne Viegbe<sup>52</sup> gave the following account of the evangelistic rôle of vodún music in a public place:

At her mother's funeral, her music group played vodún genre *agbocěbu*, but with Christian words. There were *féticheuses* present who joined in and danced with her. Sometime later, several of them became Christians and now attend churches in the area.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lake village on the edge of Cotonou.

<sup>48</sup> Ils se sont retrouvés dans le rythme.

<sup>49</sup> Ange (MIERS)

<sup>50</sup> Language spoken in northern/central Benin.

<sup>51</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>52</sup> Jeanne Viegbe, interview, 08-11-07

<sup>53</sup> Including the MEA, URHC and *Sang et L'Eau* denominations, according to Jeanne.

### 5.3.3 The Demystification of Vodún

We saw in section 2.1 how vodún is cloaked in mystery and secrecy. However, of late many vodún genres have been demystified; in other words, their original association or ‘power’ has been removed or shown no longer to exist. This is partly because vodún music – like that of any religion – has two dimensions:<sup>54</sup> the spiritual and the cultural. The main spiritual elements of the music are as follows:

- The divinities represented by the music.
- The rituals carried out during the music.
- The perceived power behind the music.
- The spiritual significance of the music to worshippers.
- Sacred instruments.
- Incantatory words present in the songs.
- Messages – secret or otherwise – which the music communicates.

Whereas the intellectual/cultural elements are as follows:

- Dance
- Drama
- Melody
- Rhythm
- Instruments
- Costumes

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<sup>54</sup> See Koffi (ASPAM)



Vi-Phint believes it is not possible to disassociate these rhythms from their origins because ‘these rhythms were born out of the vodúns to which they are attached.’<sup>55</sup> However, the current King of Allada told me: ‘Quand ça quitte le vodún, Sakpatá n’est plus dedans.’<sup>56</sup> If the two spiritual and cultural domains are separated, the result is demystification occurs; in other words, the power and mystery present in the rhythm is removed and it becomes adopted for everyday usage. This has taken place in Beninese culture in general as well as within the Beninese church. We will now look at this in more detail.

### 5.3.2.1 Demystification within Beninese Culture

‘Everything that is done over there has been demystified. There is no longer any myth in it and it’s become so simple that we take what is sacred for their vodún and use it for something else.’<sup>57</sup>

Houngbédji

Pastor Cheton mentions that there are ‘lots of rhythms played today which didn’t use to be played’ – rhythms formerly used for a specific ceremony which have now come into common usage. ‘Today they are played in any

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<sup>55</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>56</sup> ‘When it leaves vodún, Sakpatá is no longer in it.’ King of Allada, interview, 17-01-08

<sup>57</sup> Houngbédji, interview, March 2008

setting [...] This means that these rhythms have already left the place where they were previously put and have today become general rhythms for everyone.’<sup>58</sup> Such rhythms include:

- *Zenli*, from Abomey, which used only to be played at funeral ceremonies.
- *Akɔnhun*, which was played after a battle to celebrate the king’s victory.
- *Cɛngunmɛn*,<sup>59</sup> formerly used at funerals.
- *Satɔ*, also for funerals.

Regarding *cɛngunmɛn*, Cheton states that ‘even the artists who play this on their albums did not have the right to do so in the past,’<sup>60</sup> suggesting a relatively recent appropriation of this genre for common usage. Edouard Ayékoro says that ‘[c]ɛngúnɛn was played for vodún in the past but now it has metamorphosed. [...] It has become popular.’<sup>61</sup> Regarding *sátɔ*, Ange states that ‘if you hadn’t lost both your parents, you couldn’t use both sticks, but today we play it for shows; even the pagans use it for shows.’<sup>62</sup>

King Matthias mentions ‘folk groups [...] who play at parties’ and use *gbòn*, *agbocěbu* and other vodún genres. ‘They play everything and there is nothing in it. They even play the real *Sakpatá* – they dress in *Sakpatá*

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<sup>58</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>59</sup> Large gourd which is hit over its opening hole to produce a low, hollow sound.

<sup>60</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>61</sup> Edouard, Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08

<sup>62</sup> Ange, interview May 2008

costumes and they dance before the authorities.’<sup>63</sup> This, says Anne-Marie Toyissè is ‘not vodún worship; it’s completely separate.’<sup>64</sup> Pastor Cheton even mentions folk groups who tour the world and yet play vodún music ‘using it purely for performance.’<sup>65</sup> All of the above bears testimony to the fact that much vodún music no longer has the association it formerly had, and therefore the mystery and awe associated with this music has gone, along with the fear once held by many.

That said, so called ‘vodún music’ only ever had these associations within a certain geographical location in Benin; elsewhere in the country, an identical rhythm would often be used for non-vodún purposes. Pastor Bonou Jérôme, gives the example of a rhythm from the *Mono* region, played only in a non-vodún context there, but which was taken and played in Cové (about 100km east), as a vodún rhythm. This is similar to the way in which the Yoruba language from Nigeria is ‘recycled’ and used as the vodún language in Benin.<sup>66</sup> Pastor Cheton, referring to genres now considered as non-vodún, adds: ‘If we speak of *ajogan*, *hanyé* and all that, they are rhythms which

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<sup>63</sup> King Matthias, interview, May 2008

<sup>64</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissè, interview, May 2008

<sup>65</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>66</sup> Bonou Jérôme, interview, 15-01-08

came from each part of the Beninese nation and which people used a lot for funerals and especially in the vodún temple.’<sup>67</sup>

### 5.3.2.2 Demystification within the Church

‘When worldly<sup>68</sup> people use these rhythms, there is no problem. So why is it that, when the Christians start using them that people see that there is a problem?’

Pastor Cheton (MIERS)<sup>69</sup>

If the appropriation of vodún genres has occurred on such a large scale within a secular context, then it would seem a natural progression for churches to follow suit, and this is what has happened. Houngbédji states that ‘everything that is done over there<sup>70</sup> has been demystified’ and that ‘there is no longer any myth in it and it’s become so simple that we take what is sacred for their vodún and use it for something else.’<sup>71</sup> ‘It demystifies vodún’ says Edmond Djossou, ‘because vodún no longer has its

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<sup>67</sup> Pastor Cheton, interview, May 2008

<sup>68</sup> le non-vodún, non-Christian.

<sup>69</sup> Cheton & Ange interview, May 2008

<sup>70</sup> In the vodún temple

<sup>71</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

place [...] if we bring that rhythm to church, vodún totally loses its value.’<sup>72</sup>

When this occurs, there are three main results cited by Christians:

(i) No Possession Occurs

Possession, which usually occurs when certain genres are played in their vodún context, no longer happens in church. Thus, according to Didier Adjalian, one reason for using vodún genres is ‘to show the people over there [...] that what they are saying is not true. [...] We can sing without the vodún coming.’<sup>73</sup> Possession and trance are studied in greater detail in Chapter Six.

(ii) No Harm Occurs

Apolinaire Soglo mentions ‘rhythms which in the past had to be played at certain times and in a certain way’ and that not adhering to these norms could cause death or other problems. ‘Now, we play all the rhythms in church’ he says, (and without any harm coming to them) ‘so there’s bound to be demystification.’<sup>74</sup> Edouard Ayékoro told me that ‘if you’re an atheist and

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<sup>72</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>73</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>74</sup> Apolinaire Soglo, UCAB, 29-11-07

you accept the Lord, you are protected by the Lord, but it's the same rhythm' and so nothing happens to those singing it. He continues: 'there's nothing from there which can harm someone who has accepted the Lord'<sup>75</sup> a factor which, he agreed, served to demystify vodún.

(iii) God's Power is Demonstrated

Christians believe that, in doing so, God's power is demonstrated, as the vodún song no longer has its original effect. Rather, it is believed that Jesus has a greater power than vodún. Edouard Ayékoro said:

It's the fetisheur who says '*a mɔ mi kleje vodún a mɔ*'<sup>76</sup> [...] The person who is in Jesus, who has all the power, he too can say 'if you find me, it is Jesus whom you have found...because Jesus lives in me. It is no longer I who live, but Jesus.' So, one can sing that song to demystify the *fetisheur* who sings '*vodún a mɔ*'. There is something stronger than vodún – it's Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Edouard, Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08

<sup>76</sup> If you see me as weak, look at the vodún within me.

<sup>77</sup> Edouard, Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08

## 5.4 The Need for Inculturation

The Inculturation of Christian missions in Africa is one of the most overwhelming arguments in favour of the use of vodún song genres in church. 'The mission of God, which [...] should also be the mission of the Church, is one of self-giving in dialogue, contextualization and inculturation'<sup>1</sup> says Magesa. This is not only a key argument in favour of the appropriation of vodún song genres in church but also an essential step for the mission of the Beninese Church, if it is to reach the Beninese in a powerful and meaningful way.

### 5.4.1 What is Inculturation?

The term 'inculturated Catholicism' was coined by J.Masson in 1962 and was 'soon [...] accepted in Protestant circles.'<sup>2</sup> Inculturation means 'evangelizing the culture from within'<sup>3</sup> and includes 'the assimilation of traditional ideas and rituals in Christianity.'<sup>4</sup> Another term for this could be 'indigenization.'

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<sup>1</sup> Magesa, 1997a, p.310

<sup>2</sup> Bosch 1991, p.447

<sup>3</sup> Ukpong, 1994, p.40

<sup>4</sup> Sindima, 1999, p.130

‘The issue of inculturation’<sup>5</sup> says Udeani, ‘has developed into a central and urgent challenge for the local churches in Africa, becoming even a question of survival for them.’<sup>6</sup> This is because ‘culture is that part of the environment which gives direction and intensity to human life as a response to it’.<sup>7</sup> This is not a ‘carte blanche’ acceptance of all so-called ‘pagan’ rituals or ideologies into the Christian faith, but a call to present the Gospel in ways which are natural and ‘make sense’ within a given culture. As Bosch states: ‘Inculturation does not mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built up on its ruins; neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form. The philosophy that “anything goes” as long as it seems to make sense to people can be catastrophic.’<sup>8</sup>

The term contextualization is similar to inculturation, says Bevens, ‘but seeks also to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf Meyer, 1994, p.45

<sup>6</sup> Udeani, 2007, p.159

<sup>7</sup> Knighton, 2007, p.57

<sup>8</sup> Bosch 1991, p.455



and the struggle for human justice.’<sup>9</sup> Doug Hayward gives the following characteristics of an inculturated or contextualized church:

- Worship in a local rather than Western pattern.
- Music composed by indigenous believers in an indigenous style.
- Local symbols for Christianity.
- Communication of the Gospel in communicational styles native to the culture.
- A contextualized church looks more like the local culture than a foreign culture.<sup>10</sup>

‘No culture is right in everything’ says O’Donovan, and this is as much the case with Western cultures. In fact, ‘[t]here are things in every culture which must be rejected by the sincere Christian because they are not pleasing to God.’<sup>11</sup> However, ‘[r]ather than destroy everything and transplant a foreign culture [...] we keep or modify the native culture that is already there.’<sup>12</sup>

Ukpong lists the following three aspects of inculturation:

- (i) The utilization of the resources of the culture being evangelized
- (ii) The Good News of Jesus is pronounced to challenge and animate the culture

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<sup>9</sup> Bevens, 1992, p.21

<sup>10</sup> Hayward, 1995, pp.135–138

<sup>11</sup> O’Donovan, 2000, p.15

<sup>12</sup> Lapid, 2010, p.75

- (iii) All this is done from the perspective of the culture and through the agency of an insider or insiders in the culture.<sup>13</sup>

Paul Jans laid down the following list of rules regarding Christian mission work and inculturation:

- Do not suppress anything other than that which goes against the dogmas of the Church, against morals or against a sound moral order.
- Do not suppress anything without the greatest care, and not unless that which is to be suppressed would have caused irreparable damage.
- Do not introduce anything other than what is necessary, avoiding stifling that which is valuable to the civilization in question, even if it does not completely measure up to our own norms and standards.<sup>14</sup>

#### 5.4.2 The Problem

In Section 3.1 we saw how early missionary involvement in Benin ‘left no room for appreciation for all that was good in traditional society’,<sup>15</sup> but rather left local people ‘decultured and alienated from their religious and cultural roots.’<sup>16</sup> We have also seen that the demonization of all things associated with vodún has caused churches to fear and/or avoid many parts of Beninese culture which could be incorporated into church worship and

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<sup>13</sup> Ukpong, 1994, p.41

<sup>14</sup> Jans, 1956, quoted by Weman, 1960, p.185

<sup>15</sup> Sindima, 1999, p.130

<sup>16</sup> Mosse, in Stewart & Shaw, 1994, p.85

which, if they were, would have a significant impact. 'For too long' says Schreiter, 'embracing Christ and his message meant rejection of African cultural values.'<sup>17</sup> Ela adds: 'We have reason to fear that, precisely here, Christianity will function as a powerful factor in the alienation of the black.'<sup>18</sup> So the Beninese churches which are not inculturating how they conduct their worship are in danger of causing damage or even of miscommunicating the Gospel.

#### 5.4.3 The Solution

The historically mediated message of Jesus of Nazareth needs to be connected with the cosmic Christ present in each culture, if its various aspects [...] are to be redeemed through the Holy spirit [...] Without the process of such a holistic transformation, individual converts and churches will be left with the norms of churches in the North, imposed as a universal theology.

Ben Knighton

'In order to emerge from this impasse' says Ela 'we shall have to promote an African expression of faith arising out of our own worldview, out of our own

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<sup>17</sup> Schreiter, 1991, p.viii

<sup>18</sup> Ela, 1986, p.133

historical experience.’<sup>19</sup> Pobee and Osetilu II state: ‘Mission which is relevant will have to engage in intercultural translation and interpretation.’<sup>20</sup> This is what is happening in many of Benin’s AICs but is not happening in as many of its mission churches. ‘There is a great need for change’ says Sindima, ‘a need to reconstruct the African world so that people can live and praise God in an authentic African way.’<sup>21</sup>

The best way of authenticating Beninese worship is by using authentic Beninese worship music, that is, music which was originally intended for worship. This is music of vodún origin: the only ‘true’ Beninese worship music available. ‘Until we have found an African expression of the Christian message’ says Ela, ‘all our undertakings in Africa will continue to be foreign to the black.’<sup>22</sup> ‘Christianity’ says Fleming ‘does not necessarily have to be a foreign element in the sense of being identified with another human culture. The gospel must be recognizable to the people within their cultural matrices.’<sup>23</sup> ‘World Christianity’, Sanneh adds ‘must be interpreted by a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Pobee & Osetilu II, 1998, p.28

<sup>21</sup> Sindima, 1999, p.117

<sup>22</sup> Ela, 1986, p.132

<sup>23</sup> Fleming, 1980, p.64

plurality of models of inculturation in line with the variety of local idioms and practices.’<sup>24</sup>

#### 5.4.4 Examples of Inculturation

There now follow two examples of inculturation, both of which speak into Benin’s situation, showing that even aspects deemed ‘unacceptable’ by many churches can not only be redeemed but, if they are, will communicate more clearly whilst demystifying elements of traditional religion:

‘The name for savior, *Olugbala* [...] is preloaded with older Yoruba theological notions of divine power, solicitude, and redemptive sufferance. *Olugbala* accedes to the Jesus of Scripture without dumping the old cargo.’<sup>25</sup>

‘Certainly the charismatic healer whose ministry forms the point of attraction to the church may use techniques found also among African diviners; but he (or she) will almost certainly do so in the name of the God of the Scriptures, and justify his use of them by biblical examples. And if he insists that the deliverance he proclaims comes from the God of the Scriptures, and associates it with Christ or the Holy Spirit, then he has broken the ring of the local powers who lie at the heart of most traditional religious systems.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sanneh, 2003, p.35

<sup>25</sup> Sanneh, 2003, p.59

<sup>26</sup> Walls, 2002. p.18



## 5.5 Edouard's Ayékoro's Songs – a Case study

Edouard Ayékoro is a musician at the UEEB church in Hèvie, a village renowned for being the seat of witchcraft in Benin. Prior to converting to Christianity, Edouard played music in a vodún context for many years. 'I know *Xébyoso*' he says 'because I was with them for 20 years.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, he composed many songs using vodún genres *zàndlɔ́*<sup>28</sup> and *adanhũn*.<sup>29</sup> His songs were even used by *vodúnsi* and sung in the vodún temple. Then Edouard became a Christian. 'I was doing magic' he told me 'and someone came and told me "Jesus is better". So I left it all behind.' In doing so, he decided that: 'Now that I've come to Jesus I said I will come with what I used to play in the world and play it for Jesus. That's what made me do this for Jesus now...transforming the songs which I used to play.' He went on to say that 'it's the same rhythm, but the message changes. It is the message which is important. Because when the others take this message to say you can be an atheist, you can be this or that; we say the opposite with the rhythm.' Is there a danger that his songs will bring about trance or other adverse effects, given their origin? He says: 'when we sing it nothing

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<sup>27</sup> All quotes from Edouard in this section taken from interviews on 09-06-08 (see appendix for full script)

<sup>28</sup> Genre from Abomey, associated with vodún and telling stories.

<sup>29</sup> Literally 'drum of anger'. Associated with vodún.

happens. In other words, there's nothing from there which can harm someone who has accepted the Lord.'

He has therefore 'transformed' a large number of his own vodún songs and these are sung in his church, where he has trained the choir to sing them. Everyone in the church sings these songs, he told me, and 'they are interested' by them.

At the same time, Edouard's original vodún songs continue to be sung in the vodún temples and by vodún people in general and, as they have been popular for some time, there is little Edouard can do to prevent this. I asked him how he felt about this. He felt the existence of the same melodies in both contexts, in fact, had evangelistic advantages:

If they find the Christian version, they will be amazed. And if they're curious they will want to find out 'why has he changed them again?' This is a good opportunity to witness for Jesus. [...] It's changed lots of people [...] they're often fed up with the world too; in vodún they say 'don't do this, don't wear clothes' [...] and you stay like that all your life. Now that the Christian version has arrived [...] they have seen me too! They know that I used to be there and they have seen that there has, in fact, been a real change. Yes. They say 'Ah, he's changed this too, that means he is divinely inspired to be able to do it.'



Finally, here is another extract from our conversation, which sums up the objectives of his new music:

Mr Baker, I am popular here in Benin. Half of Benin knows me. [...] We noticed that members of our church were going along to hear traditional rhythms being played. We asked them why, they said that they liked this music before they came to the Lord. But, if we can transfer this into the Lord's music, then that's all that is needed. Even if we make cassettes, they will buy them and listen to it at home. They buy cassettes of worldly music, because they like the music but not the message. That's what encouraged us to bring it into the church and transform it. So that Christians can buy and listen to the melodies which they were already interested in before they came to the Lord. That's our goal.

Three of his songs – in both the original and Christianized versions – are included in the appendix (scores and text). However, here are two examples of how he has modified the lyrics for a Christian context. Firstly:

*'Adanḡozan gbe egbe a na nyo mi die'.*

Adanḡozan<sup>30</sup>, you will know me today.

Has become:

*'Jezu do gbe hwe yise a na mo hwɛngan yi'.*

Jesus lives, if you accept him you will have salvation.

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<sup>30</sup> Adanḡozan = a powerful person

And secondly:

*‘O xwla nu w’e do xwlagbe, Mɔ cɔn, mɔ cɔn, mɔ cɔn, agɔxwelele.  
E mɔ nɔ wa mɔ na mi.’*

The Xwla<sup>31</sup> speak the xwla language, I’m leaving, I swear.  
Don’t do that to me.

Has been changed to:

*‘Gbɛnɔ wɛ do akpagbɛ dɔ, Elɔ, elɔ, elɔ. Mĩ kpa Mǎwǎ eeee.’*  
The Lord has promised, This, this, this. Let us praise God.

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<sup>31</sup> Full name: Xwlade Tɔfin, spoken in Ganvié, also in Grand-Popo

## CHAPTER SIX:

### TRANCE AND VODÚN MUSIC

Many vodún genres are associated with calling spirits believed to cause trance in the adept of that spirit. The issue of whether trance can occur when music of vodún extraction is played in church is one on which Christians differ. In this chapter, we will study various aspects of trance and how it is caused in order to gain an insight into whether this can occur in church and, if so, what implications this has for Beninese Christians.

#### 6.1 What is Trance?

Trance is an altered state of consciousness<sup>1</sup> and also ‘a temporary state.’<sup>2</sup> Guy Xunḁ said that, when in a trance, ‘you are no longer yourself’<sup>3</sup> and Rouget explains that ‘[o]ne leaves one’s usual state when one enters into trance, and at the end of a certain period of time [...] one returns to one’s previous state.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Besmer, 1983, p.140

<sup>2</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.12

<sup>3</sup> Guy Xunḁ, interview, June 2008

<sup>4</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.12

Rouget makes a distinction between shamanic trance and possession trance: in the former, the shaman's soul will leave his body and travel away to meet spirits,<sup>5</sup> whereas in the latter, the spirit travels to the person and possesses them. He also states that 'in the former the trance subject gains control over the spirit embodied within him, in the latter the reverse is true' and lastly, 'the former is a voluntary trance whereas the latter is an involuntary one.'<sup>6</sup> The kind which takes place during vodún ceremonies is clearly possession trance, as 'possession is an integral part of voodoo ceremonies.'<sup>7</sup> This was backed up by many sources interviewed<sup>8</sup> and is the reason why, when trance occurs, the Fòn say:

*Vodún wa ta étɔn mɛ*

(The vodún has come onto his/her head)

Houngbédji explained that 'it is the spirit which possesses them and [...] the spirit puts them into a trance'<sup>9</sup> and, referring to the Yoruba divinity *Ogun*,<sup>10</sup> Rouget states that 'the trance state associated with the worship of Ogun, [...]

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.23

<sup>7</sup> Laguerre, 1980, p.163

<sup>8</sup> Including Guy Xunò & Vi-Phint.

<sup>9</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, May 2008

<sup>10</sup> Divinity also present in Beninese vodún as Gũ; see section 2.2.4 for further details

has never been regarded as a journey. [...] To view this priest as a shaman is completely to misunderstand the representations that underlie his trance.’<sup>11</sup>

One essential point to realize with trance is that it is only those who have been initiated into vodún who will go into a trance. After spending months or years in the vodún temple, the adept has been ‘programmed’ to respond to certain stimuli when he/she takes part in ceremonies of his/her vodún. Guy Xunɔ said: ‘it is in the vodún temple that everything has been done to you.’<sup>12</sup> Vi-Phint backs this up stating that ‘if the person is initiated and it is music from the vodún temple, then this can [...] make someone go into a trance. Because the melodies [...] have a certain influence on the spirit<sup>13</sup> of the adept.’<sup>14</sup> Guy Xunɔ concurs: ‘If you have not been put in the vodún temple, the drum can be played 1,000 times and you’ll just look.’<sup>15</sup>

Rouget states that ‘[o]nce this initiation has been undergone, the modification is permanent’<sup>16</sup> and ‘[t]he inner change that the votary

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<sup>11</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.23

<sup>12</sup> Guy Xunɔ, interview, June 2008

<sup>13</sup> Or mind

<sup>14</sup> Vi-Phint, interview April 2008

<sup>15</sup> Guy Xunɔ, interview, June 2008

<sup>16</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.32

undergoes when he passes from his everyday state to his possessed state, and then reverts to his former one, naturally recurs every time he goes into a trance throughout the remainder of his life.’<sup>17</sup> Finally, in terms of the duration of any trance, Jean-Paul Colleyn states that, ‘a spirit possession crisis lasts for about two hours, seldom more.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.32

<sup>18</sup> Colleyn, 1999, p.74

## 6.2 What Happens During Trance?

Rouget lists the physical ‘symptoms’ of trance as follows:

Trembling, shuddering, horripilation, swooning, falling to the ground, yawning, lethargy, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, protruding eyes, large extrusions of the tongue, paralysis of a limb, thermal disturbances (icy hands despite tropical heat; being hot despite extreme circumambient cold), insensitivity to pain, tics, noisy breathing, fixed stare.<sup>19</sup>

He goes on to list the following characteristics of a person who is in a possession trance:

- He is not in his usual state
- His relationship to the world around him is disturbed
- He can fall prey to certain neurophysiological disturbances
- His abilities are increased (either in reality or otherwise)
- This increased ability is manifested by actions or behaviour observable by others.<sup>20</sup>

Guy Xunò speaks of his son’s trance and how he changed physically during this: ‘When they began playing the drums, his eyes started to change. I said, ‘What’s going on? Go to school! I don’t agree with what you’re doing, my child.’ But he didn’t believe me, so I moved him from next to the drum; I was obliged to move him out of the zone.’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.13

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.14

<sup>21</sup> Guy Xunò, interview, June 2008

Vi-Phint refers to trance as, ‘a state which the person is in, which enables them to do things which a normal person couldn’t do.’ For example, the adept of *Xebyoso*, who ‘climbs up high and takes a goat and strangles it with his teeth in one go.’<sup>22</sup> In fact, De la Torre states that ‘[t]he individual in a state of trance is in no way responsible for his actions or his words; he has ceased to exist as a person. A possessed person can therefore express thoughts which, in his normal state, he would hesitate to pronounce out loud.’<sup>23</sup>

The vodún language is another of the increased abilities caused by trance: ‘In a possession trance, you will surely say things which are not from you; the *vodúnsi* speaks the vodún language when he goes into a trance.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>23</sup> De la Torre, 1991, p.61 (my translation)

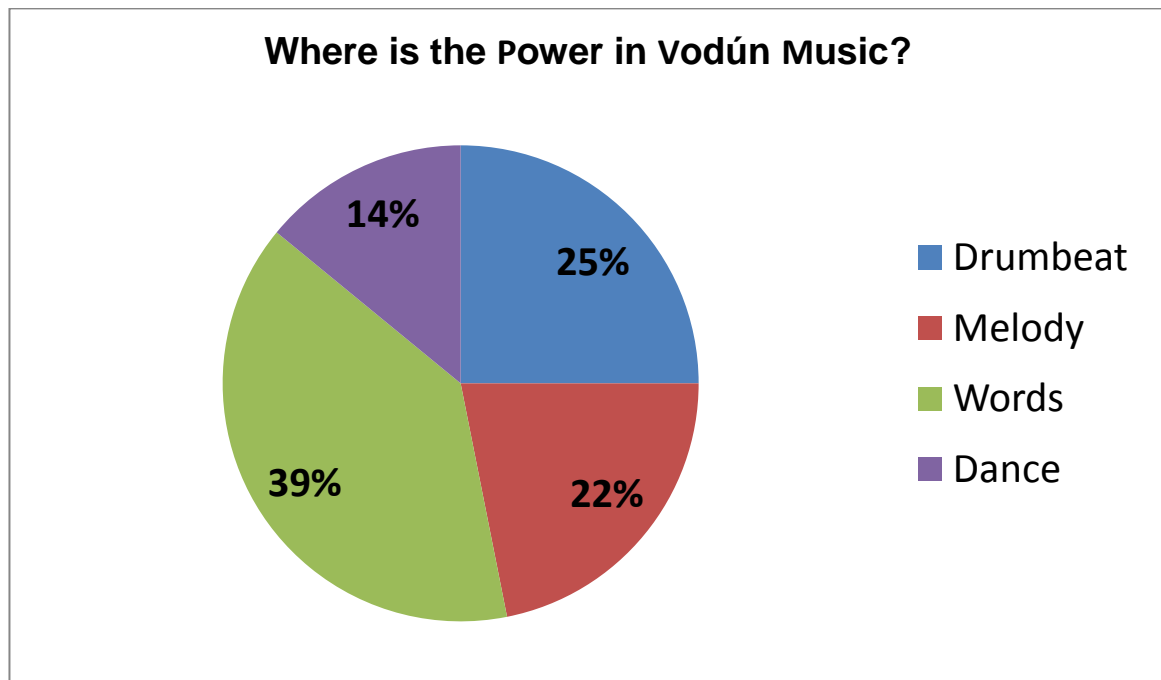
<sup>24</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, November 2007



### 6.3 Which Part of the Music is thought to Cause Trance?

Many interviewees claimed that when a certain drum is played in a certain way, that this has a power to either call spirits and/or to put someone into a trance.<sup>25</sup> For example, with song genres such as *agbocěbu*, *sakpatáhŭn*, *hwedε* and *atendεlegbo*, it is thought that the rhythm has a meaning, that the drum speaks a language.<sup>26</sup>

In a survey, I asked the question: In your opinion, where is the power in vodún music located? Here are the responses:



<sup>25</sup> Cf Hounghbedji, interview, April 2008

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Minhou, interview 17-11-07

Whilst ‘words’ was the most common answer, it by no means constitutes a majority. The main conclusion to be drawn from this chart is that opinion is greatly divided in this area. We shall now examine some of the different opinions on the subject.

### 6.3.1 Power in the Drumbeat

Michel Dossou stated that ‘in the sound of the drums, there is power’<sup>27</sup> as did Augustin Sossa.<sup>28</sup> From a vodún point of view, Anagonu Vodjo agreed that ‘[i]t is the rhythm of the drums’ which calls vodún spirits and that, even if *atendelegbó* is played without vocals, ‘they will [still] come.’<sup>29</sup> ‘The dissociative state’ says Besmer ‘is seen as primarily instrumentally, not vocally induced [...] Instrumentalists carry a significant ‘functional load’ during any possession–trance performance.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dossou Michel, 05–08

<sup>28</sup> ‘There is a very great power in the rhythm of the drums’ and ‘it is the rhythms which are the most dangerous.’ Augustin Sossa, 04–08

<sup>29</sup> Anagonou Vodjo

<sup>30</sup> Besmer, 1983, p.57

### 6.3.2 Power in the Words

Emmanuel Akpan said: 'It is with their evil words that they call it *Sakpatá*'<sup>31</sup> and Houngbédji summed the situation up as follows: 'It is not the rhythm used but [...] what is added afterwards. It could be the same rhythm, the same intonation and all that, but the words are different [...] That's what changes the sense of the whole thing.'<sup>32</sup> Both Pastor Benoît Bossou<sup>33</sup> and Edouard Ayékoro<sup>34</sup> agreed and this is backed up in literature by McCarthy Brown, who says: '[s]inging and dancing are said to entice the spirits to possess a devotee.'<sup>35</sup> Pastor Cheton summed the situation up as follows: 'when you play the rhythm and you sing about the vodún, this will connect the vodún with the people. But when you play the rhythm and you sing about the Lord, it will only connect them to the Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Akpan, interview, 04-03-08

<sup>32</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>33</sup> 'It is this song which speaks [...] it is not the rhythm which acts upon them.' Bossou Benoît, interview, 04-03-08

<sup>34</sup> 'It's the same rhythm, but the message changes. It's the message which is important.' Edouard Ayékoro interview, 09-06-08

<sup>35</sup> McCarthy Brown, 1989, p.70

<sup>36</sup> Cheton, interview, May 2008

### 6.3.3 A Combination of Rhythm and words

Thirdly, there are those who cited a combination of rhythm and words as being necessary for calling spirits. This includes Guy Xunḁ<sup>37</sup> (vodún) and Robert Foley (UEEB), who states that ‘the acceleration of the rhythm plus what the song says’<sup>38</sup> cause trance. Similarly, Vi-Phint said: ‘the rhythm, the melody which is sung, the tune; all this together, when traditional music from the vodún temple is played, has to have an effect on the *vodúnsì*.’<sup>39</sup> Finally, Herskovits states that ‘each *vodúnsì* [...] realizes the effect, on him, of the songs and drum-rhythms sacred to his god.’<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Guy Xunḁ, interview, June 2008

<sup>38</sup> Robert Foley, interview, June 2008

<sup>39</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>40</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.189 (my underlining)

## 6.4 The Four Elements Needed for Trance to Occur

And Rouget states that:

Trance, as an event, is linked with the successive stages of a ceremony, and does not generally occur at just any time. A possession ritual is an architecture of time also composed of various phases connected with different kinds of music. It is thus within the dynamics of the ceremony that we need to consider the relations between music and trance.<sup>1</sup>

Rouget

Based on my research, it would appear that there are *four* key elements without which trance will not usually occur, namely:

Planning  
Inspiration  
Sacrifices  
Invocation

These will now be studied in more detail.

### 6.4.1 Planning

Prior to a vodún ceremony, there is always some planning and preparation which takes place. For a ceremony of *Sakpatá*, for example, the rhythm *agbocěbu* is played from the preceding night to announce that, the following day, *Sakpatá* will come. Thus, there is an expectation amongst the *vodúnsi*

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<sup>1</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.32-33

that on this particular day they will take part in the ceremony and will become possessed by the spirit of *Sakpatá*. He/she may also consume alcohol prior to the ceremony.<sup>2</sup> Augustin (ADC) states that: '[b]efore leaving his house he knew that, when he took part in this ceremony, he would inevitably be inhabited by the vodún.'<sup>3</sup> Former *Sakpatási*, Didier Adjalian adds: 'It is all planned out, before the vodúns arrive [...] and the actions are planned out too' and even went on to say that '[i]f it's not planned and you beat the rhythm, the vodún cannot come.'<sup>4</sup> Finally, Ernest Oueounou (MIERS), told me that 'The vodúnno know that it is something other than the music which puts them into a trance.'<sup>5</sup> Laguerre backs this up: 'No voodoo ceremony begins without preparation' and that the 'singing serves as a kind of warming-up session while people are [...] making themselves ready to begin the most serious part of the voodoo ritual.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf Augustin Sossa, interview, February 2008

<sup>3</sup> Augustin (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

<sup>4</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Oueounou, interview, 16-05-08

<sup>6</sup> Laguerre, 1980, p.140

### 6.4.2 Inspiration

Following the planning comes the inspiration. If the *vodúnsi* are not inspired to play their music for *Sakpatá* then it will not call him. Edmond Djossou told me: 'It is the inspiration which they have, the spirit which animates them and the ritual which they have done, which will call the spirit of Sakpatá.'<sup>7</sup>

Going a step further, Apolinaire Soglo states that it will only become a rhythm of *Sakpatá* with this inspiration, when he says: 'All the inspiration which they give to this rhythm, everything they play, the singing, everything, makes it become a song or a rhythm of *Sakpatá*.'<sup>8</sup>

### 6.4.3 Sacrifices

Thirdly, sacrifices are always carried out during a vodún ceremony before possession occurs. Guy Xunò told me that it is only 'when the drum plays the rhythm and the cockerel or sheep is killed'<sup>9</sup> that the vodún will act upon them. He adds: 'At home if we play – no! But if we kill the cockerel and the

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<sup>7</sup> Edmond Djossou, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>8</sup> Apolinaire Soglo, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

<sup>9</sup> Guy Xunò, interview, June 2008 (my underlining)

sheep, the *sakpatás* are there dancing.’<sup>10</sup> Houngbédji, himself a former adept, states that ‘if they wanted to do vodún ceremonies, before this there are sacrifices.’<sup>11</sup> Herskovits sums up several of the points in this section, including sacrifices:

‘The *vodu* will not come when summoned except on the day set aside for him to do this, and then only before the cult-house, to the sound of the drums, and after the vodunɔ have made the necessary sacrifices. Even on such occasions not all vodunsi will dance, for only those designated by their vodunɔ will become possessed on a given occasion.’<sup>12</sup>

#### 6.4.4 Invocation

Finally, there is the invocation itself. Closely linked to sacrifice, this is the point at which the vodún spirit is called to participate in the ceremony in possessing the adepts. ‘When the sacrifices are made,’ says Houngbédji, ‘the vodúns are invoked [...] That means that the music is dedicated to these vodúns.’<sup>13</sup> David Mensah said that: ‘[i]t depends on the rhythm plus

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>12</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.189

<sup>13</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008



incantations and other practices’<sup>14</sup> and ADC musician Augustin states that:  
‘Playing the drum does not obligatorily attract the spirit of the fetish, but there are certain ceremonies that they do in secret which induce the spirit of the vodún to come and possess them.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David Mensah, interview, 04-04-08 (my underlining)

<sup>15</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, April 2008

## 6.5 The Onset of Trance

In this section, we will look at the onset of trance and how it occurs.

### 6.5.1 An Involuntary Reflex

One of the key characteristics of possession trance is that the adept has no control over its occurrence. Rather, says Houngbédji, ‘people go into a trance without wanting<sup>16</sup> to [...] The spirit puts them into a trance, without their being able to explain how or why.’<sup>17</sup> Didier Ajalian told me: ‘he is already programmed in this way – when you hear it – to respect the principles of vodún.’<sup>18</sup> Speaking of his own son, a vodún adept, Guy Xunò<sup>19</sup> said: ‘[Even] if he doesn’t want to do it, if he’s there listening he will join in. And I asked him one day and he said, “Dad, it’s because of that place”’.<sup>20</sup>

The above could be seen to contradict statements in the previous section which claim that ‘without planning the adept cannot go into a trance’ and that his/her foreknowledge of this possession is an almost essential factor

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<sup>16</sup> Or deciding

<sup>17</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>18</sup> Didier Ajalian, 07-02-08

<sup>19</sup> Interview, June 2008

<sup>20</sup> The vodún temple

for trance to occur. Rosenthal attempts to reconcile the two viewpoints, saying that possession is ‘fraught with mutuality in spite of protestations that spirit hosts are swept up against their own will.’<sup>21</sup> The following conversation with Beninese musicians also attempts to address this issue:

**Amos:** If the person goes into a trance, then the person already...since his childhood...has already been in it. [...] He’s an adept of vodún.

**Musician:** And he’s already prepared for it.

**Amos:** Vodún knows that he’s its child. If the moment comes, vodún enters their body.<sup>22</sup>

### 6.5.2 Varying Rates of the Onset of Trance

The rapidity with which an adept falls into a trance can be almost instantaneous or can take much longer. This is believed to depend on the degree of sensitivity of the individual to the divinity and to the triggers which cause trance. Rouget says: ‘sometimes such attacks are sudden, sometimes they are heralded by preliminary signs: a vacant or anguished expression, mild trembling, panting breath or drops of sweat on the brow;

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<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, 1998, p.102

<sup>22</sup> Amos, *Afripercuss*, 06–08

the face becomes tense or suffering.’<sup>23</sup> Vi-Phint also states that: ‘it is not all the adepts who will go into a trance at the same time. When the music is being played, not everyone will go into a trance at once.’<sup>24</sup> However, Amos (Afripercuss) says: ‘If it came upon you here now, it wouldn’t even take two seconds.’<sup>25</sup>

‘The variability of its manifestation’ says Rouget, ‘is the result of the variety of cultures by which it is conditioned’<sup>26</sup> and that timings ‘differ according to whether it involves a novice, a recent initiate, a confirmed adept, or an officiant experienced in the trance state.’<sup>27</sup>

### **6.5.3 Other Triggers for the Onset of Trance**

In addition to the four elements examined in Section 6.4, I will now examine other triggers believed to cause trance. Vi-Phint states that ‘there are several things which can put a vodún adept into a trance’<sup>28</sup> and Pastor Cheton told me that ‘it is not the music which puts people into a trance; it is

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<sup>23</sup> Métraux A, 1959, p.121

<sup>24</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, April 2008

<sup>25</sup> Afripercuss, interview, June 2008

<sup>26</sup> Rouget, 1985, p.3

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>28</sup> Vi Phint, interview, April 2008

more spirit which is being worshipped.’<sup>29</sup> Jan Ijzermans describes a trance in Zambia which ‘[c]ontrary to situations in many parts of Africa [...] is not triggered by music’ but, nevertheless, where ‘[d]rums are used because they “heat up the village”’<sup>30</sup> In this section, we will look at other triggers for trance given by interviewees.

#### 6.5.3.1 A Change in the Drumbeat

Another key factor cited with reference to the triggering of trance is the way in which the drums are played; there seems to be a certain increase in tempo, or a faster rhythmic pattern and it is this ‘frenzied drumming’<sup>31</sup> which somehow signals the imminent onset of trance. Many interviewees concurred on this point including Michel Dossou, who said that ‘if the drummer changes the sound of his drum in a certain way, then the *Sakpatási* won’t even know at what moment he/she will go into a trance.’ He goes on to say: ‘If they change the rhythm [...] it is with this that they call the vodunsi

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<sup>29</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008

<sup>30</sup> Cf: Ijzermans, 1995, pp.245–274

<sup>31</sup> Barber, 1981, p.734

to come in and make movements.’<sup>32</sup> Vi-Phint also mentions ‘certain ways of hitting (the drums) which automatically put the adepts into a trance,’<sup>33</sup> and Pastor Michel Dossou adds that ‘if you are at a ceremony in the public square and the drummer starts hitting his drum in a given way, then most of the *vodúnsi* who are there will go into a trance.’<sup>34</sup> Mathieu Assogba also said that ‘[w]hen the rhythm changes, the adept knows that it is the moment when he must go into a trance.’<sup>35</sup>

Robert Foley, however, believes that this cannot happen in a Christian context: ‘Even if we accelerate in church in the same way, it has no effect [..] because it is the power of God which descends. It is no longer the power from the other side [...] people will not go into a trance. Because there is a great change in the(se) two domains.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Dossou, 05-08

<sup>33</sup> Vi-Phint, 04-08

<sup>34</sup> Michel Dossou, 05-08

<sup>35</sup> Mathieu Assogba, UCAB, 29-11-07

<sup>36</sup> Robert Foley 09-06-08

### 6.5.3.2 The Use of *Ajà* Bells

As well as the drum beat, Vi-Phint told me that the small bells, known as the *ajà*<sup>37</sup> are the most likely instrument to bring on the trance. The *ajà* are linked inextricably to *Sakpatá* and, in fact, it is said that *Sakpatá* himself will be holding the bells when he arrives. It is also the *ajà* which are played when adepts of *Sakpatá* leave the vodún temple after initiation, so there is clearly a strong attachment to this instrument for the *sakptási*. However, I attended a service at the MEF church in Sónicɔg, Cotonou when *ajà* bells and the *ajà* rhythm were played for the first time.<sup>38</sup> I observed no adverse reactions during the service, nor any obvious complaints or displeasure. Furthermore, I questioned those present after the service and most of them did not realize that the rhythm and bells were associated with trance. However, one church member told me that: '[t]hey prayed over the bells and purified them before playing,' which was thought to remove any vodún power in them which might have caused trance.

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<sup>37</sup> See section 2.6.7

<sup>38</sup> By Victorien and his group

### 6.5.3.3 Recorded Music

One final question on triggering trance is that of whether the music has to be live or whether listening to a recording of a trance genre can also act as a trigger. Artist Vi-Phint tells a story<sup>39</sup> of someone who played a CD recording of a vodún song in their home and an adept of *Sakpatá* present went into a trance upon hearing it. Amos (Afripercuss) agreed that this was a possibility:

**Rob:** Can that even work with the CD of this music, or does it need to be 'live'?

**Amos:** Yes, yes.

**Rob:** Even with a CD?

**Amos:** Yes. It could be played on 'playback'...

**Rob:** And even on 'playback' it could cause a trance?

**Amos:** Yes, yes.<sup>40</sup>

Pastor Cheton disagrees: 'Vodún people have brought lots of music from the vodún temple into modern music and people are not going to buy their CDs or albums, playing them in their homes and starting to go into a trance.'<sup>41</sup>

Possible explanations for this 'trance through recorded music' are as follows:

- (i) Something within the words of Vi-Phint's music brought on the trance for the listener (ie an incantation).

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<sup>39</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, 18-06-07.

<sup>40</sup> Amos (Afripercuss), interview, June 2008

<sup>41</sup> Cheton & Ange, interview, May 2008



- (ii) The person concerned was of a particularly high sensitivity to trance.
- (iii) It was a fabricated trance.
- (iv) It was emotional state not linked to vodún possession at all.

In point of fact, Herskovits speaks of a *dànsi*<sup>42</sup> who refused to remain present for a recording of some of the sacred songs of *Dàn*, stating that ‘were he to hear the songs [...] he would become possessed.’ He also mentions the opinion, in vodún circles at the time, that ‘were a *vodúnsi* while at home to sing songs or hear the drum-rhythms sacred to his *vodu* he would begin to dance and would continue dancing until he died’<sup>43</sup> as he would be unable to send away the vodún spirit upon him.

However, when we consider the four elements mentioned in Section 6.4 along with the issue of separating of the spiritual and cultural elements of vodún music, studied in Section 5.3.3, then it would seem unlikely that genuine trance could occur under such circumstances. In fact, Herskovits mentions a *vodúnsi* who, although reluctant to begin with, agreed to sing sacred vodún songs ‘into the phonograph [...] without giving any evidences of the uneasiness and psychic tensions that invariably precedes possession,’

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<sup>42</sup> Adept of the vodún Dan.

<sup>43</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.189.

concluding that trance from merely singing or hearing a vodún song is by no means a universal rule. 'In all probability' he goes on 'those in the priesthood [...] may violate the rule with impunity.'<sup>44</sup> Indeed, my own fieldwork included the performance and recording a number of vodún songs, but without the ceremonial aspect. Again, I observed no evidence of trance or malaise of any kind.

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<sup>44</sup> Herskovits, 1938a, p.189

## 6.6 Can Vodún Trance Occur in Church?

If a vodún genre associated with trance is played in church, there are three principal questions we need to be considered:

- (i) Can a vodún spirit actually enter a church, or will it somehow be prevented by the presence of God/Jesus?
- (ii) If the spirits are able to enter the church, will they cause their former adepts to go into a trance in church?
- (iii) If this does happen, what effect will it have on the individual/the congregation?

### 6.6.1 Can a Vodún Spirit Enter a Church?

Some Christians interviewed believed that a vodún spirit could enter the church; that all spirits, regardless of their association or origin, are able to enter the presence of each other: 'If Satan can enter the presence of God' says Ange 'then it's not the spirit of *Sakpatá* which cannot come into the church.'<sup>45</sup> Going a stage further, Augustin Sossa stated that '[w]herever the children of God gather, the Devil is there too. [...] We must not invite the Devil with these rhythms.'<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to note that both of these

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<sup>45</sup> Ange, (MIERS) interview, May 2008

<sup>46</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, February 2008

interviewees are associating vodún spirits the Devil; could this tendency towards Western worldview also be the reason why they still fear spirits entering their churches? Vodún priestess, Anagonu Vodjo added: 'The moment you start playing a vodún song, you will be troubled and the vodún invoked will come.'<sup>47</sup> And yet I saw no evidence of this in any of the services or musical sessions I attended in a good number of churches.

Most Christians interviewed believed that if God is present, then no other spirits can enter his sanctuary. Converted *sakpátasi*, Daniel, told me that a vodún spirit 'cannot come into this place; the power of God is present there'<sup>48</sup> and Anne-Marie Toyissé says: 'Does this spirit have the power to dominate Jesus? It cannot have a place in the church.'<sup>49</sup>

Another reason for this belief is that the vodún words are no longer present: 'If it is the same rhythm and you're glorifying the name of the Lord, you call the name of the Lord, you haven't called *Sakpatá*. It is the Holy Spirit who will descend, *Sakpatá* cannot come.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Anagonou Vodjo

<sup>48</sup> Daniel from Tori Bossito, interview, 15-12-07

<sup>49</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

<sup>50</sup> Edmond Ayékoro, UCAB interview, 29-11-07

Similarly, the lack of invocation or sacrifice in a church context was mentioned Pastor Houngbédji (a former vodún priest): ‘This same music, if you take it and you don’t invoke or make sacrifices, it means that the vodúns are given no part in this affair’<sup>51</sup> He continues: ‘[i]f there is an invocation, we invoke God. [...] So there’s no vodún in it. [...] Because all the elements are not rightly in place,<sup>52</sup> how can the vodún respond? [...] it is difficult for that spirit to manifest itself when we are invoking the name of Jesus.’<sup>53</sup>

#### 6.6.2 Can a Vodún Spirit Cause Trance in Church?

The possibility of a vodún spirit entering a church already seems quite slim, given the evidence in Section 6.6.1. However, supposing it can, could this cause trance in the church? Pastor Augustin Sossa is ‘a bit careful that the intention or the spirit which they had before doesn’t enter them’ in church and believed that a former *Sakpatási* could be at risk.<sup>54</sup> Also, a musician in Dorothé’s Christian music group shared a testimony he had heard of trance in church: ‘Some people who were *vodúnsi* accepted the Lord Jesus. The

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<sup>51</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>52</sup> Uses term ‘au point’ meaning ‘perfected’

<sup>53</sup> Houngbédji, interview, April 2008

<sup>54</sup> Augustin Sossa, 04–08

rhythm of their vodún was being played [...] and one of them went into a trance.’<sup>55</sup> Possible explanations for the above include:

- (i) The statement may not be true (particularly as it is a second hand account and my informant was not actually present).
- (ii) They may not have actually been Christians.
- (iii) Even if they were, they may have lacked the spiritual maturity necessary to resist the trance.
- (iv) The appearance of trance was no more than a fabrication by the person concerned.

Amongst the *vodúnsi*, it is generally believed that trance can still occur in church. Anagonu Vodjo states that ‘if *agbocěbu* is being played, the spirit of the vodún will certainly come upon the former adept of *Sakpatá*, but he cannot say it.’ She went on to say that ‘the presence of the spirit of *Sakpatá* in the church destroys something because it is as if two [incompatible] things were put together’ but that the Christians ‘don’t see it.’<sup>56</sup> There are two issues worth considering here:

- Even if there is no trance, then the mere presence of *Sakpatá* within the church could be destructive.

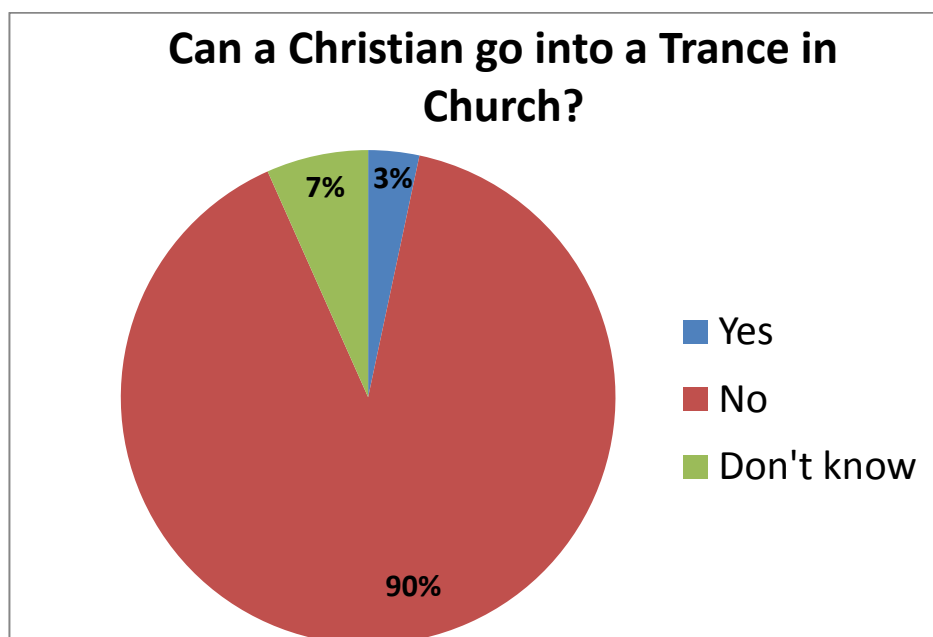
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<sup>55</sup> Dorothé’s music group, interview, May 2008

<sup>56</sup> Anagonu Vodjo, interview 06-02-08

- If *Sakpatá* does enter the church, there is a chance that Christians will not even be aware of his presence. If so, could the ‘destruction’ he causes go undetected?

The above points are consistent with the belief of some Christian leaders,<sup>57</sup> that playing vodún genres in church will lead to disorder and moral decline, a belief studied in more detail in section 4.5. However, in response to the survey question ‘Can a Christian go into a trance if music of vodún origin is played in church?’ I received the following response:



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<sup>57</sup> Notably Augustin Sossa

The results are pretty conclusive: almost all the Christians asked believed this was not possible. King Matthias shared the following first hand testimony that trance will not occur amongst former adepts in church:

I have seen several of these rhythms which have already been played at Evangelical events or in churches and which have put nobody into a trance. And on these occasions I also saw that there were adepts present – those who had been converted and who are in the church. This music was played, but they enjoyed it. They sang but they didn't go into a trance.<sup>58</sup>

Even some vodún worshippers acknowledged the power of Christ to disperse these spirits, thereby preventing the occurrence of trance. Amos (Afripercuss) said: 'If the person is not truly converted, then the trance could occur'<sup>59</sup> and Vi-Phint admitted that 'the fact that they call on Jesus can maybe dissipate things.'<sup>60</sup> Also, worshipper of *Mami-Wata*, Amos, believed that 'if the person truly has faith...if he believes in God, it can come out [...] but it is difficult.'<sup>61</sup>

The issue of being truly saved and that of spiritual maturity featured widely in this argument, amongst non-believers as well as Christians: 'If he's

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<sup>58</sup> King Matthias, interview, May 2008

<sup>59</sup> Afripercuss, interview, June 2008

<sup>60</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, 18-06-07

<sup>61</sup> Amos, Afripercuss interview, 06-08



converted' said Abel (ADC) 'and he comes to the service on Sunday, he can dance and it cannot possess him.'<sup>62</sup> Pastor Dossou was more emphatic: 'If the people are truly born again Christians,<sup>63</sup> then neither *Sakpatá* nor evil spirits can ever, ever come into the church.'<sup>64</sup>

Finally, Amongst some Christians, there is the notion that trance is merely *fabricated*, rather than being the result of spirit possession. Seraphin Lokono describes trance as 'something which the *féticheurs* try to fabricate a bit [...] the reality of it is different from that which is fabricated.'<sup>65</sup>

Didier Adjalian believes trance can be caused by curses, rather than possession: 'People could have prepared and sent something<sup>66</sup> [...] Simply to deceive people [and] to show that – Ah! what they're doing there belongs to *vodún*.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Abel (ADC), interview, 29-12-07

<sup>63</sup> See also Didier Adjalian, interview, p.3

<sup>64</sup> Dossou Michel, interview, May 2008 (an opinion also voiced by Edouard, Ayékoro, interview, 09-06-08)

<sup>65</sup> Seraphin Lokono, interview, 03-05-08

<sup>66</sup> The French term 'envoyé quelquechose' meaning 'sent something' is understood in Benin as referring to a curse.

<sup>67</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, April 2008

### 6.6.3 Risk of Trance when a Current Adept Hears Vodún Music in Church

Whilst the risk of trance amongst former vodún adepts is believed by most to be ‘removable’ if a person is truly ‘born again’, could there nevertheless be a risk to those still in vodún? For example, there are reports of cases where trance could be triggered in a *vodúnsi* by vodún genres used in a Christian context. These fall into three categories:

- (i) When vodún genres are played by Christians in the open air.
- (ii) When a vodún genre in church is heard by someone outside of the church.
- (iii) If a vodún adept enters the church and hears the music.

#### 6.6.3.1 Vodún Genres Played in the Open Air

It is common for Evangelical churches in Benin to perform in the streets or in a village square, to attract people with the music and to announce the Gospel message to them. Also, music may be played outdoors for weddings or funerals, during which Christians may play their versions of vodún genres. As this happens in the open air, then both the issues of whether a vodún spirit can enter the church and that of whether a *vodúnsi* would choose to

enter a church or not no longer apply. Thus, the risk of trance could be increased. On this issue, Léonard Amoussougan<sup>68</sup> recounted the following story to me:

His church were playing vodún genre *kɔkuhũn* in Zogbo (Cotonou) for a funeral vigil. Someone present went into a trance and began shouting. The other *vodúnsi* present took him away at once, fearing that the Christians would pray for him and that he would become a Christian as a result. If this happened, there would then be the risk of his revealing the secrets of the vodún temple.

When I told this story to Pastor Cheton (MIERS), he responded: ‘Yes, that is possible, because it is still the same music [...] It is because that spirit had already been placed in that person previously.’<sup>69</sup> In response to the same story, Didier Adjalian said that trance could occur in such circumstances but that Christians should nevertheless continue to use these genres, ‘to show them that what they<sup>70</sup> are saying is not true. [...] We can sing without the vodún coming.’<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Léonard Amoussougan, (Vice head of the URHC church in Benin), interview, 10-12-07

<sup>69</sup> Cheton, interview, May 08

<sup>70</sup> The *vodúnsi*

<sup>71</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

### 6.6.3.2 Vodún Genres Heard from Outside of the Church

The second scenario is where a *vodúnsì* hears the music of his vodún played in church, but is not him/herself inside the church building. This would mean that the ‘protection’ due to God’s presence would no longer apply. Augustin Sossa said, ‘even if he’s far away and hears the rhythm of *Sakpatá*, he could go into a trance.’<sup>72</sup> This seems unlikely though, as the *vodúnsì* could be some distance away and would not be amongst the musicians. For this reason, this is similar to the scenario of ‘hearing recorded music’ as discussed in 6.5.3.3.

### 6.6.3.3 Trance if a *Vodúnsì* Enters the Church

Thirdly, there is the scenario that a *vodúnsì* hears the music coming from the church and will actually go into the church and then fall into a trance.

Robert Foley believed that a *vodúnsì* would not enter the church out of curiosity: ‘because what the songs say does not correspond to what he is used to saying’ and because ‘at the same time he knows that it’s a church.’<sup>73</sup>

Augustin (ADC) echoes this and mentions a more serious risk this would

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<sup>72</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, May 2008

<sup>73</sup> Robert Foley (UEEB), interview, June 2008

entail: '[i]f the person is not converted to Christianity, they would not have the courage to come to the church. If ever they did so, if the vodún priests caught him, they would apply the law<sup>74</sup> or they would kill him with *gri-gri*,<sup>75</sup> a very real deterrent to such acts.

If a *vodúnsi* does get as far as entering the church itself, does he run the risk of entering into a trance there? There is always the possibility that non-believers, like those at Jeanne Viegbe's father's funeral, will join in the dancing when they arrive. In doing so, could this lead them to enter into a trance? Augustin Sossa says: 'It could happen in the church. Perhaps the person is newly arrived.[...] Each time we play the drums in church, the non-believers, the new converts and those invited all tend to dance with us at the church. If they start dancing, you cannot say: "No, no, no! You're not one of us!" You could never do that.'<sup>76</sup> However, Théodore Houngbédji believes that 'there would be no point in his going into a trance, because those present won't pay him the necessary attention. So he'll make a fool of

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<sup>74</sup> ie would punish him.

<sup>75</sup> Augustin, ADC Akogbato, 29-12-07

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

himself'<sup>77</sup> bearing testimony to the whole 'performance' aspect of going into a trance. Furthermore, Guy Xunò says that an adept would have to leave the building when he hears this music, as 'it would certainly be shameful for him to go into a trance there.'<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the likelihood of a *vodúnsi* going into trance in church seems very low, as the he is firstly unlikely to enter the church and, secondly, if he does he runs the risk of humiliation and/or punishment from the *vodúnnò*.

#### 6.6.3.4 Result if Trance Occurs in Church

If trance does occur in church – or indeed outside of church – what will be the reaction of the Christians present? Seraphin Lokono, like Léonard Amoussougan, sees it as an opportunity for evangelism: 'The people will speak to him about God, they will pray for him. It is as though he were possessed – the people will try to free him, to deliver him.'<sup>79</sup> Didier Adjalian agreed with this idea, clearly stating that, once 'delivered' from the spirit controlling them, the *vodúnsi* concerned is likely to become a Christian: 'we

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<sup>77</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, 04–08.

<sup>78</sup> Guy Xunò 06–08

<sup>79</sup> Seraphin Lokoni, 03–05–08

can pray for him and God will heal him! [...] He will become a Christian. [...] Because after being healed we will tell him the Gospel. [...] He may accept, he may not accept. I cannot say it would definitely happen, but God has the ability to heal him.’<sup>80</sup> Didier backs this up with the following an eye-witness account:

One day, we were worshipping God in the church and there was a woman who had the spirit of *Mami*<sup>81</sup> in her. We only prayed and she fell! We prayed for her until she was healed and today she’s with us.<sup>82</sup>

#### 6.6.4          Modifying the Music for Church Use

Amongst many musicians, Christian and non-Christian, there is a common belief that, if the music is played in exactly the same way as in vodún, then the risk of trance is greater. Many therefore believed that the best solution is to modify the music, just enough for it to be different, but not so much as to render it unrecognizable or foreign in sound.

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<sup>80</sup> Didier Adjalian, interview, 07-02-08

<sup>81</sup> Mami Wata – see section 2.6.6 for more information

<sup>82</sup> Didier Adjalian interview, 07-02-08

Vi-Phint told me that trance could easily happen if a *Sakpatási* enters a church and is not converted. When hears the rhythm of his fetish he will go into a trance if the music is not modified.<sup>83</sup> A secular music artist, Vi-Phint uses vodún genres, but modifies the music by changing the rhythm of the bells and by adding guitars and other instruments. If *gbéhun* were played in exactly the same way as in the vodún temple, he says, he and his musicians could die. In order to play this music in exactly the same way as the *vodúnsi*, he believed they would have to be fully initiated. This is the case, he says, even if the words to the song are changed.<sup>84</sup> Thus, a change in the musical content as well as the lyrical content may well be advisable.

I also spoke to Théodore Houngbédji about *atendélegbo*, the genre which calls *Sakpatá* to come: 'I think that the Christians will not play it "raw" like that. I think it is necessary to approach the chief *fétisheurs* to see, in that music, what it is that invokes, because there are [...] drums to invoke spirits in fact.'<sup>85</sup> Pastor Thomas Otti (ADC) told me that: 'all church rhythms have

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<sup>83</sup> Vi-Phint, interview, 18-06-07

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Théodore Houngbédji, interview, April, 2008



been modified to some extent'<sup>86</sup> and Augustin Sossa believed strongly that all vodún music should be modified for church use, so as to remove the risk of trance: 'If the person were an adept of *Sakpatá* and heard the rhythms of *Sakpatá* played in exactly the same way, he could go into a trance. [...] That's why we need to improve them so that they are spiritual and not exactly as it is in the temple of *Sakpatá*.'<sup>87</sup>

In Section 6.5.3.2, I mentioned Victorien, who introduced the vodún genre *ajà* into his MEF church,<sup>88</sup> a genre linked closely with the divinity *Sakpatá* and also with trance. Whilst members of the church seemed happy with this, both his pastor and the national pastor (Sossa) were not. He was therefore obliged to modify the music, thereby making it acceptable. Here is an extract from a conversation I had with him:

**Rob:** And why was the pastor not happy with the rhythm in its pure form?

**Victorien:** Because it's like a vodún song but, he's never [...] seen that in church [...] Especially *ajà*; it's the first time. I introduced it.

**Rob:** And he doesn't like having...

**Victorien:** Vodún rhythms like that. Because we discussed it, even going to see the National Pastor. And the pastor said that, as I've left vodún and have come to the church, then it's over.

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas Otti, interview, 18-10-07

<sup>87</sup> Augustin Sossa, interview, May 2008

<sup>88</sup> As mentioned in section 5.3.5

**Rob:** So he thinks that if someone leaves vodún, they should leave the music too?

**Victorien:** Yes, that it's (worth) nothing.

**Rob:** And now that you have modified it, it's okay?

**Victorien:** Yes, it works well.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Victorien (MEF), interview, May 2008

## 6.7 Conclusion

There are certain elements which clearly have to be in place before vodún trance occurs, without which trance does not normally happen. These elements would not be present when a vodún genre is played in church. In addition, an increase in tempo also always occurs in the drum beat prior to the trance occurring, something which seldom occurs in church and, in any case, could easily be avoided. Add to this the concept of 'divine protection' and that of the 'redemption' or 'purification' of the songs and instruments, and trance in church seems a very unlikely occurrence. Indeed, there are few testimonies – if any – of this happening. The risk of trance from reclaimed vodún music seems to increase somewhat when it is played outdoors, due to the likelihood of *vodúnsì* being present as well as the lack of any 'sanctuary of protection'. However, even this is viewed by many Christians as an 'opportunity for evangelism' and therefore not necessarily a negative thing.

On the following page is a list of common vodún song genres, the divinity to which they are linked and whether they can cause trance or not. Even here, we see numerous conflicts of opinion, even amongst those in vodún.

**A Table of Trance and Non-Trance Genres**

Divinity	Genre	Trance?	Informant	Christian or Vodún?
<i>Sakpatá</i>	<i>Agbocěbu</i>	Yes	Dorothe's group	C
		No	Guy Xunò	V
		No	Vi-Phint	V
	Ajà	Yes	Vi-Phint	V
		Yes	Dorothe's group	C
		No	Guy	V
	Atendeleḡbo	Yes	Dorothe's group	C
		No	Guy Xunò	V
	Gbèhǔn	Yes	Guy Xunò	V
Xebyoso	Hwɛḡě	Yes	Dorothe's group	C
		No	Guy Xunò	V
	Gɔgbahǔn	Yes	Vi-Phint	V
		No	Guy	V
Mamiwata	Mamiwatahǔn	Yes	Amos	V
		Yes	Guy	V
Kuvitɔ	Gbòn	No	Guy	V
		No	Dorothe's group	C
	Kuvitɔhǔn	No	Guy	V

**Table 2b**

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VODÚN AND CHURCH MUSIC

#### 7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is (i) to compare and contrast the church and vodún versions of the music in order to ascertain the degree of authenticity of the church versions and (ii) to discover what – if anything – has been removed or modified in the transfer of the music from vodún to church. Anne-Marie Toyissé said that : ‘the rhythms must resemble each other, the songs should resemble each other, because, if we speak of *agbocěbu*, there is a way of playing *agbocěbu*. I cannot take the way of playing *agbocěbu* to go and play a French rhythm. It won’t work,’<sup>1</sup> showing the importance of remaining faithful to the original.

In order to achieve the above, I will compare and analyse a number of aspects of the songs collected. In her book on analysis, ethnomusicologist

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Marie Toyissé, interview, May 2008

Marcia Herndon states that analysis 'differs from mere disintegration in that it proceeds according to a definite plan' and that '[t]he end-product of an analysis is the separation of attributes both from the whole of what is being analyzed and from each other.' The purpose of all this, she adds, is that it 'clarifies, tests, and arranges the parts of a known whole.'<sup>2</sup> Abraham and Hornbostel speak of the need for 'adequate methodology for the study of such materials'.<sup>3</sup> I will lay out my methodology in the following sections.

Methods of ethnomusicological analysis are by no means standard: Nattiez observes that 'the analytical style adopted can range from cloudy impressionism to the most rigid formalism' which is partly why 'there have been in reality very few strictly comparable analyses.'<sup>4</sup> Hood agrees, stating that 'analytical method applied to music is determined by a particular point of view. Depending on the background interest of the researcher, musical analysis may amount to little more than a table of statistics at one extreme or a complete musical grammar at the other.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Herndon, 1974, p.220

<sup>3</sup> Abraham and Hornbostel, 1994, p.426

<sup>4</sup> Nattiez 1990, p.148

<sup>5</sup> Hood, 1982, p.321

I have aimed for my methods to fall somewhere between the extremes cited above. My analyses are based upon a combination of methods outlined by various ethnomusicologists (notably, but not exclusively, Vida Chenoweth<sup>6</sup> and Marcia Herndon<sup>7</sup>) along with some of my own modified techniques.

Firstly, I will separate out the following elements of the songs: (i) rhythmic accompaniment, (ii) melody and (iii) lyrics. This will enable me to analyse each and gain a clearer understanding of how they work. ‘Like language,’ says Vida Chenoweth, ‘music is ordered and operates within a closed system. As the descriptive linguist discovers the grammar of a speech system in oral tradition, the ethnomusicologist can discover such a distinctive grammar in the music system of a people.’<sup>8</sup>

### 7.1.2 Collection of Data

‘[O]ne of the aims of ethnomusicology’ says Alan Merriam, ‘is to produce data which can be compared and that therefore the broader aim is

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<sup>6</sup> Vida Chenoweth's *Melodic Perception and Analysis*, (1972)

<sup>7</sup> Marcia Herndon's *Analysis: The Herding of Sacred Cows* (1974)

<sup>8</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, p.11

generalization about music.’<sup>9</sup> In terms of the size of sample used, Merriam goes on to advise ‘taking a single given song, chosen at random from a large song body, transcribing it, analysing it, and scoring the results on an objective arithmetic basis.’ He later recommends that ‘a further sample of perhaps twenty-five songs[...] would be sufficient to complete the basic work.’<sup>10</sup> Altogether, I collected twenty-eight songs; fourteen from church and fourteen from vodún. They are all included in the analysis of lyrics; twelve are used in the melodic analyses, and the rhythmic accompaniments from four locations were used (as these are the same for any song of the same genre).

All of the songs collected use a *pentatonic scale*,<sup>11</sup> which, says Hood, ‘with a little rounding off [...] could even represent the black keys on the piano, which are also anhemitonic pentatonic.’<sup>12</sup> In order to transcribe the songs, a certain amount of this ‘rounding off’ was necessary to make this Beninese scale ‘fit’ the Western transcription. But rather than transcribe them using

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<sup>9</sup> Merriam, 1980, p.53

<sup>10</sup> Merriam, 1980, p.54

<sup>11</sup> A five-tone scale, a version of which can be achieved by playing only the black keys of a piano.

<sup>12</sup> Hood, 1982, p.322



only the black keys, I kept them in the key closest to that which the singer was using.

## 7.2 Rhythmic Analysis

Virtually all Beninese music is accompanied by driving poly-rhythms, using an ensemble of at least three drums and one or more bells (as described in section 2.6). Whilst the melody and lyrics will differ within a given genre, the rhythmic accompaniment remains identical for all songs of that genre.

‘In order to make such comparison’ says Merriam, ‘like things must be compared.’<sup>13</sup> As the genre *agbocěbu* is by far the most commonly used vodún genre in Beninese Churches,<sup>14</sup> this is the one I have chosen for the rhythmic analysis. To do so, I transcribed the ostinato rhythms played by each instrument for *agbocěbu* in four different locations around Cotonou, three in a church context and one in a vodún context. These were as follows:

- A vodún music group, recorded in Agbocɔdji, Cotonou.
- The ADC Church music group, Akɔgbatɔ, Cotonou.
- An inter-church music group, led by Dorothé, Calavi, Cotonou.
- The MEA Church music group, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou.

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<sup>13</sup> Merriam, 1980, p.53

<sup>14</sup> 76% of all vodún song genre usage, according to my survey.

The transcriptions of these rhythms are to be found over the page (Table 3). In the following section, I will look at the similarities and differences, particularly between the vodún version of the rhythm and the church ones. To do so, I will look at each instrument separately. The purpose is not so much to ascertain 'why' as music/rhythm is likely to change when moved from one setting to another. 'Ethnomusicologists', says Bruno Nettl 'must take change into account because it is always there, and that they have a special stake in the understanding of history.'<sup>15</sup> So the main purpose is to see what kind of changes – if any – have occurred in the transition and, therefore, the extent to which these can still be considered as vodún genres.

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<sup>15</sup> Nettl, 2005, p.275

A comparison of four agbocẽbu rhythms from Cotonou (NB Pitch changes are an approximate guide only)				
	Vodún group, Agbocodji	ADC Church, Akogbatò	Dorothe's inter-church group	MEA Church Cadjéhoun
Hundaxo (Dugba)				
Hunto (Gbevina)				
Hunvi (Axlevi)				
Gan				
Gan kpanvi				
Table 3				

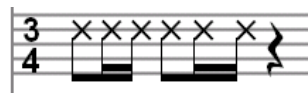
### 7.2.1 Analysis of the Rhythmic Patterns

#### The Hundăxo (large drum)

Firstly, looking at the *hundăxo* rhythms, the first two church extracts are identical to the vodún one, all three playing a rhythm which sounds like this:



However, the MEA church part differs significantly; the triplet quaver rhythm which forms the first beat for all the others has changed into a quaver followed by two semiquavers. This pattern is then repeated twice, rather than continuing with four quavers:



#### The Hŭnto (medium-sized drum)

The *hŭnto* part is vastly different, with the vodún example consisting of merely a steady pulse on dotted crotchets and, somewhat surprisingly, the church versions using a more complex syncopated rhythm:

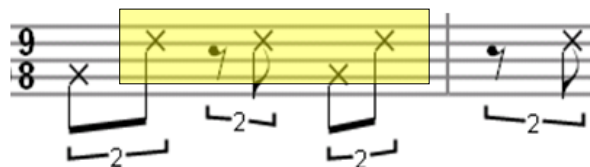


Interestingly, a variation of this syncopated rhythm is present in the vodún version, but is played by the *ganpànvĩ* instead. Here, we can see that the sequence of: *quaver, quaver rest, three quavers, quaver rest*, which resembles the *hũnto* rhythms of the first two church examples:

*Hũnto* part (ADC/Dorothé's):



*Ganpànvĩ* part (vodún group):

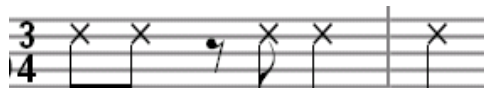


Once again, the MEA Church's rhythm bears little resemblance to either the vodún rhythm or the two church examples, with the *hũnto* merely mimicking the first bar of the *gǎn* part note:

*Hũnto* part (MEA):



*Gǎn* part (all examples):



## The Hǔnvi

The *hǔnvi* part is identical for all three church extracts. The vodún example is virtually identical to these, but has a definite 9/8 feel to its rhythm, which was not present in the church ones. Furthermore, the vodún version then adds an extra quaver beat at the end of the rhythmic pattern:

*Hǔnvi* part (all church examples):



*Hǔnvi* part (vodún):



## The Gǎn

The *gǎn* part is identical for all four examples:



## The Gǎnkpanvi

The *gǎnkpanvi* only existed in the vodún example and was found in none of the church rhythms but, as mentioned above, a variation of its rhythm is found in the *hǔnto* part.

### 7.2.2 Conclusion Based on the Above Analyses

The essential rhythmic elements are present in the first two church examples (ADC and Dorothé's), notably:

- (i) The triplet followed by two duplets played by the *hundǎxo*.
- (ii) An accented beat on the second half of the first beat of the bar in the *hǔnto* part, (also achieved through the use of the higher bell of the *gǎnkpanvi* in the vodún example).
- (iii) The 'crotchet, two quavers, crotchet' pattern on the *hǔnvi*.
- (iv) The syncopated four-beat *gǎn* part (against the three-beat patterns in the other parts).

The combination of these four elements, all specific to the *agbocěbu* rhythm, makes these two church examples almost identical to the vodún one. Thus, appropriation of this music from vodún has occurred in an authentic way and they would almost certainly be recognizable as *agbocěbu* to an outsider with a vodún background. This then means that the music is likely to appeal to such individuals and attract them to the church – as discussed in Section 5.3.1.

However, the MEA church's rhythm, however, is too deviant from the original to be considered as a genuine *agbocěbu*. In fact, only elements (iii) and (iv)



are present in its version. Thus, whilst it is still a Beninese rhythm, composed and played by Beninese, it is perhaps only fifty percent true to the original pattern.

In the transition from vodún to church, the principal changes observed are ‘downward’; in other words, the music has become slightly less complex in the process. This is seen in the lack of *gǎnkpanvi* (not exclusively lacking in churches, but certainly in these three examples), the 3/4 time signature, rather than the more elaborate 9/8 and the lack of a fifth note in the *hǔnvi* part.

It stands to reason that this kind of simplification would occur, as a vodún adept would spend literally years mastering the rhythms of his vodún and – whilst some of the church musicians are converted adepts, this is by no means the case across the board. Thus, it would seem that a kind of ‘Chinese whisper’ amongst non-initiated church musicians has caused the authentic rhythmic patterns to be watered down, only mildly in the first two examples, but severely in the last one.

### 7.3 Melodic Analysis

I recorded and transcribed the melodies of twelve songs (six from church and six from vodún) covering a range of genres. These were randomly selected and were gathered from different parts of Cotonou and Southern Benin.<sup>16</sup> The songs used are as follows and these will be referred to by their numbers (1–12) in subsequent sections:

#### Vodún Songs:

1. ‘Ya xo go’ (*agbocěbu*), recorded in Agbocɔdji, Cotonou.
2. ‘Má wa mǎ ó’ (ajà), performed by *Afripercuss*, near Akɔgbatɔ, Cotonou.
3. ‘Un gbɛ nǔ we à?’ (ajà), performed by *Afripercuss*, near Akɔgbatɔ, Cotonou.
4. ‘Landé na dǔ ǎ’ (ajà) performed by *Afripercuss*, near Akɔgbatɔ, Cotonou.
5. ‘Mɛdée nɔ mɔ dò na ǎ’ (hwɛdɛ), recorded in Dovi–Dove, Benin.
6. ‘O ká dada tòn eee’ (hwɛdɛ), recorded in Dovi–Dove, Benin.

#### Church Songs:

7. ‘Ayi xi je satin’ (*agbocěbu*), from the MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou.
8. ‘Mi we mǎ xwedo Jezu’ (*agbocěbu*), from Abomey Baptist Church, Benin.
9. ‘Mi xo asɔgwe’ (*agbocěbu*), from the ADC Church, Akɔgbatɔ, Cotonou.
10. ‘Mǎ un dǔ b’ɛ z’e hw’e wu’ (ajà), from Vɔgbana Baptist Church, near Abomey.
11. ‘Xɛɛ mǐ aliḡée mǐ ma gbɔn’ (ajà), from the MEF Church, Sɔnicɔg, Cotonou.
12. ‘Gigo lo’ (hwɛdɛ), from the MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou.

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<sup>16</sup> See map on page 10 for research locations.

Based upon these twelve songs, melodic analyses were then carried out in four ways:

### **(i) The Most Commonly Used Tones**

Establishing the most commonly occurring tones within a given melody tells us much about where the tonal centre(s)<sup>17</sup> of the music lie and also enables similar musical characteristics to be drawn out. ‘In the non-Western world’, says Hood, ‘the inner workings of most modal music depends on the recognition of a hierarchy of pitches far more developed than that in the church Modes.’<sup>18</sup> Chenoweth adds: ‘If the basic structure of compositions is determined by a “scale”, an attempt should be made to define the unique function of each member of that scale.’<sup>19</sup> Analysing the most commonly used tones, as well as the most flexible tones (described below) will help fulfil this.

### **(ii) The Most Flexible Tones**

Once the most common tones, have been established, the next task is to find out ‘[w]hich discrete variable pitches [...] are associated with which principal tones of the hierarchy?’<sup>20</sup> To do so, I examined which tones within the scale are the most versatile; in other words how many other tones can immediately follow a given note and how many can precede it? This, too,

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<sup>17</sup> Tonal centre: a pitch which dominates and/or has a significant role in the music.

<sup>18</sup> Hood, 1982, p.326

<sup>19</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, p.82

<sup>20</sup> Hood, 1982, p.329

helps us see the tonal centres, establish the most ‘important’ tones in the scale and thereby compare the structure in both contexts.

### **(iii) The Most Common Interval Steps<sup>21</sup>**

This is more specific than (i) and looks at the directions in which the melody moves and the relative frequency with which each interval occurs. This is a good way of ascertaining similarities in the shape of the melody. Also, ‘[p]redominance of certain intervals may also signal a style within the system’.<sup>22</sup>

### **(iv) Detailed Melodic Analysis**

Going deeper still, and comparing specific melodic motifs from both domains, in order to observe their similarities and differences.

#### **7.3.1 Most Commonly Used Tones**

In order to discover the most commonly occurring tones, it is first necessary to decide how to name each degree of the scale, for identification purposes.<sup>23</sup> Abraham and Horsbostel say that ‘[i]n order that scales

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<sup>21</sup> Cf Chenoweth, 1972, pp.44–49

<sup>22</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, p.80

<sup>23</sup> Cf Schneider, 2001, pp.494–496

representing various melodies can be compared they must be transposed in such a manner that [...] having ordered them through the correspondence of their principal tones, as many scales as possible are recognizable as members of similar types.’<sup>24</sup> This is why I have chosen a common central point from which to measure all other degrees of each scale, regardless of its key or its tonal centre which ‘is not a fixed pitch but lies within the range of possible transpositions.’<sup>25</sup> Thus (remembering that all the songs use the pentatonic scale) I called ‘zero’ (0) the tone above which the following tones occur (in ascending order):

*minor third, perfect fourth, minor sixth and minor seventh*

and below which occur the following (in descending order):

*major second, major third, perfect fifth and major sixth.*

The number of tones above and below point ‘zero’ varied depending upon the range of each song and, although the actual pitch of this central tone varied from singer to singer and from song to song, the same intervals above and below it were always observed. I used a capital ‘M’ to signify

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<sup>24</sup> Abraham and Hornbostel , 1994, p.454

<sup>25</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, p.44

major intervals above and below 'zero' and a lower-case 'm' for minor intervals.

Thus, the tones of the pentatonic scale for each song can be shown as follows:

p8  
m7  
m6  
p4  
m3  
0  
M2  
M3  
p5  
M6  
p8

The analysis of the tones used was carried out using a square grid similar to that outlined by Vida Chenoweth.<sup>26</sup> The two axes were labelled 'preceding pitch' and 'following pitch' and both axes were also labelled with the intervals above and below pitch zero (0) as contained in any given song (using 'L' to denote 'lower' and 'H' for 'higher'). The actual note names (eg C#, E, F#) were also included for reference. The succession of each pitch was then plotted on the grid. For example, if the melody moved from C# to E, then I would place one tally mark in the square on the grid labelled 'C#'

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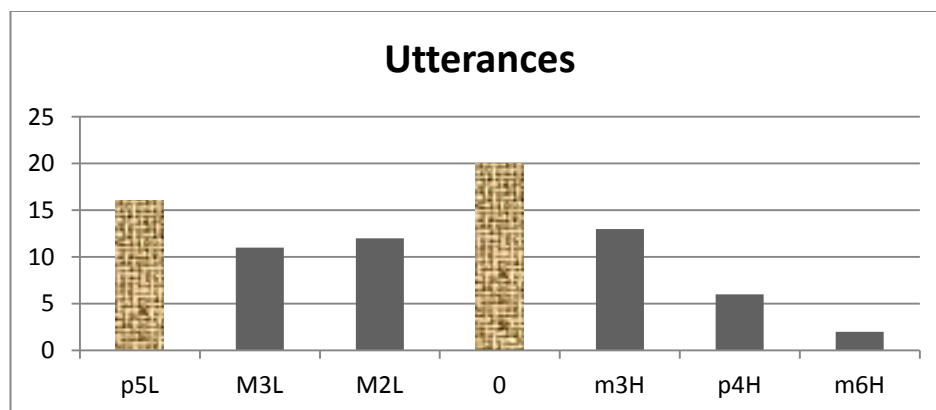
<sup>26</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, pp.42-49

on the 'preceding pitch' axis and 'E' on the 'following pitch' axis.<sup>27</sup> Pitch progressions which occurred across a clear break in a phrase/line, were noted in brackets ( ) but still counted in the final result. Here is an example:

### Following Pitch

Preceding Pitch		F#	A	B	C#	E	F#	A	
		p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	End
	A	m6H					2		
	F#	p4H				2	2	2	
	E	m3H	(1)		7(1)	2	2		
	C#	0	2	2	5	4	7		
	B	M2L		4	4	4			
	A	M3L	6	2		3			
	F#	p5L	5(3)	(2)	4	1			1
	Start					1			

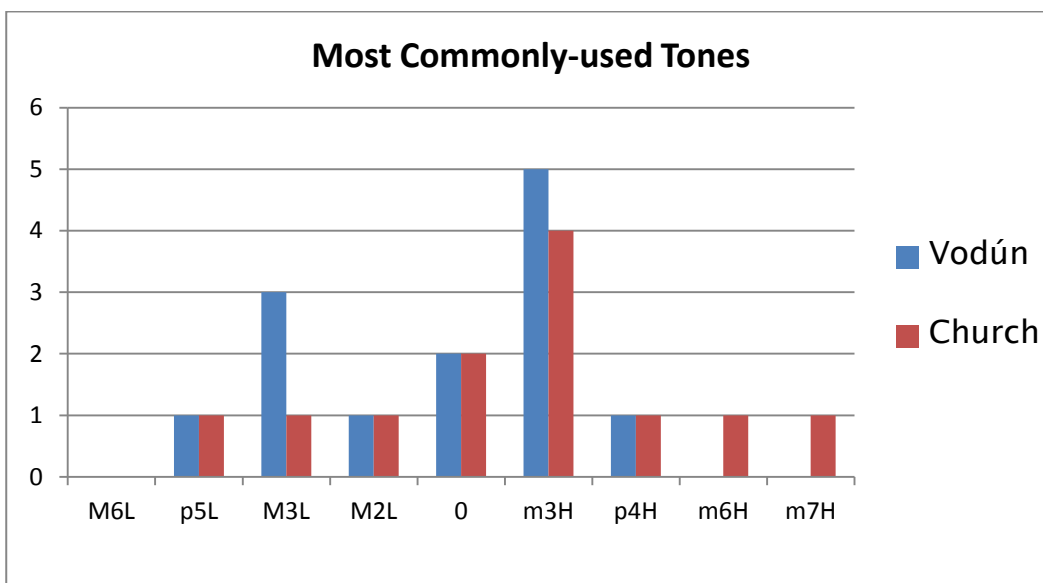
Following this, a bar chart was plotted for each song so that the range of tones used and the number of utterances could be seen. The highest values were also highlighted on each grid, as follows:



<sup>27</sup> Seven such progressions occurred in the example grid given.

This provided a clear way of comparing the frequency of utterances in each song as well as being able to see which songs have similar tone usage and/or tonal centres. The scores, interval grids and bar charts for each of these songs are included in the appendix.

Based on the above results, here is a chart showing the most commonly-used tones in each of the twelve songs, taking the two most common tones in each case:

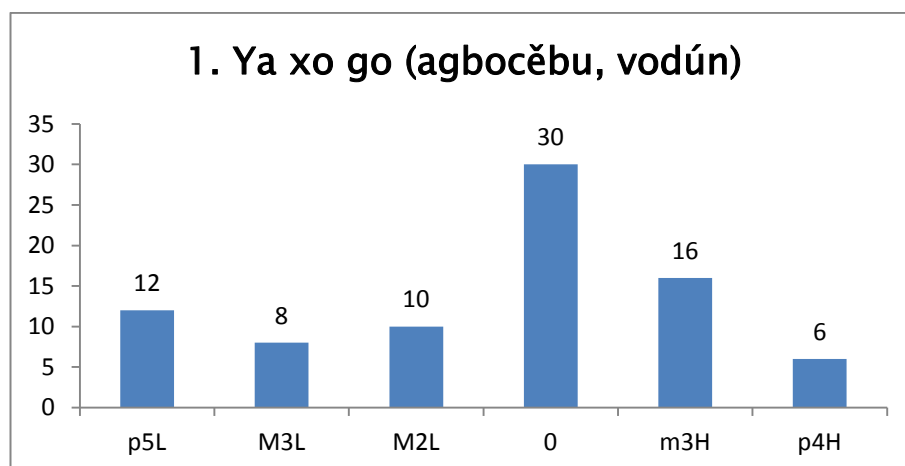


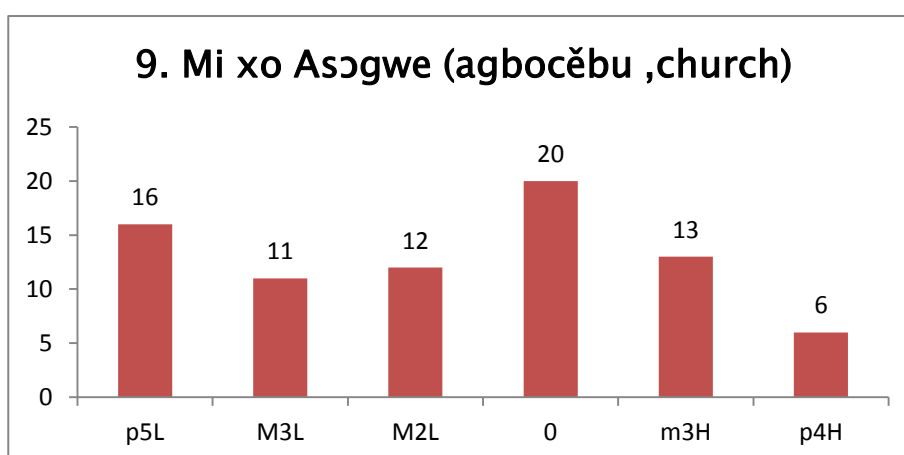
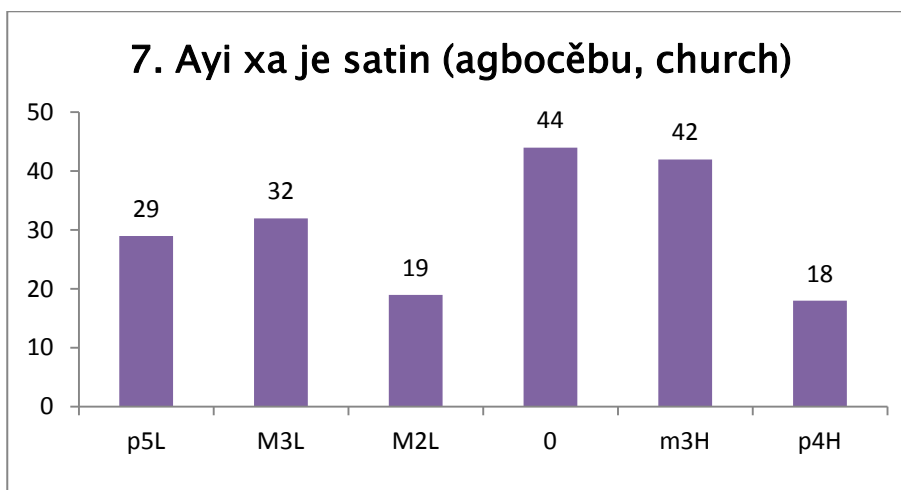
From the above results, it is clear that the most commonly used tones within vodún and Christian songs are similar in many cases, with m3H being the most frequently used tone and p5L, M2L, 0 and p4H being identical.



One notable difference between the vodún and church songs is that the higher tones (m6H and m7H) are not found in the vodún extracts studied, possibly showing a deviance from the norm for some of the church examples; possibly due to the greater influence of Western music in this environment. It can also be seen that the vodún songs have made significantly greater use of the tone M3L than the church ones, indicating a difference in the choice of tonal centre for some of these.

Now to take some more specific examples, here are the tonal frequency grids from three agbocěbu songs – one from vodún, two from church (pitches p5L – p4H inclusive):

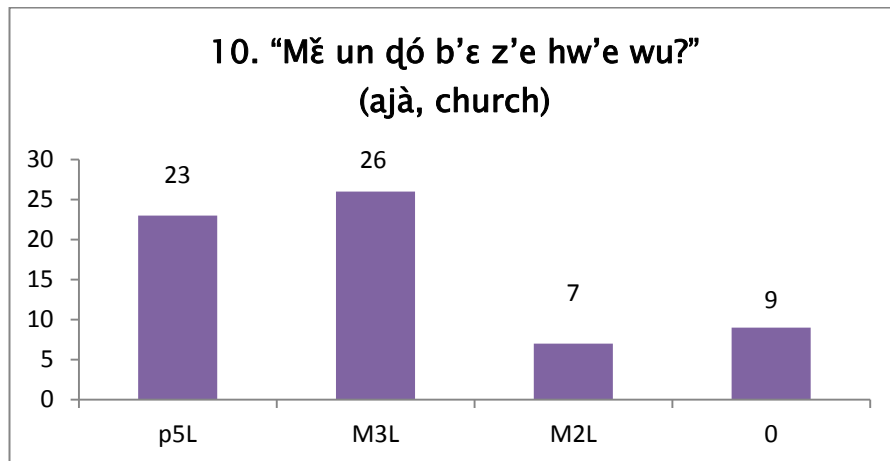
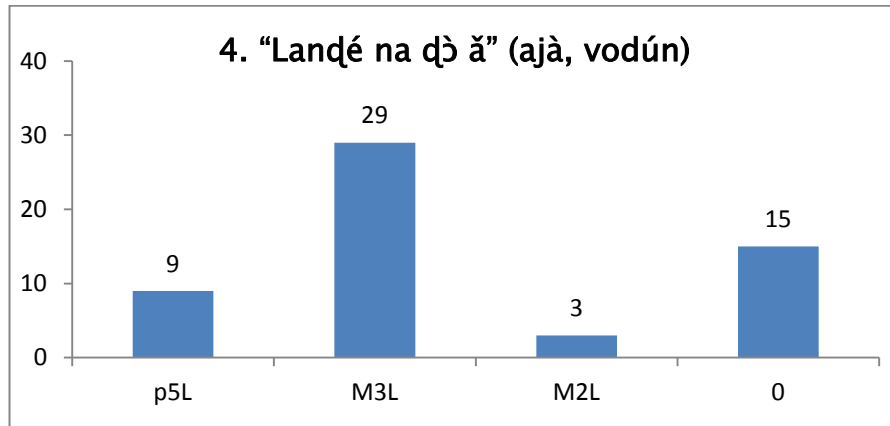




The similarities in the number of utterances of each respective pitch can easily be observed here. Firstly, pitch '0' is the most commonly used in all three songs and is also significantly more common than most of the other tones. Also, pitches m3H and p5L are always amongst the most common. Furthermore pitch p4H is the least used in all three extracts and M2L consistently amongst the least heard.

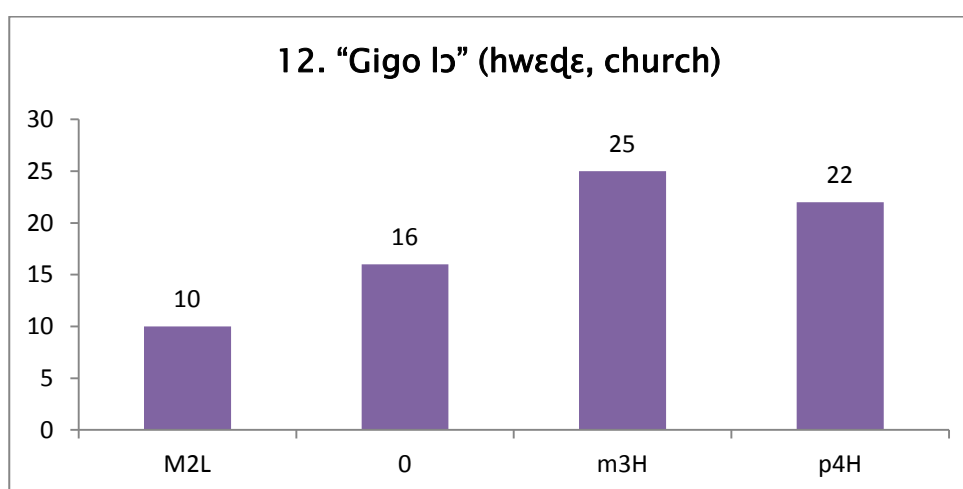
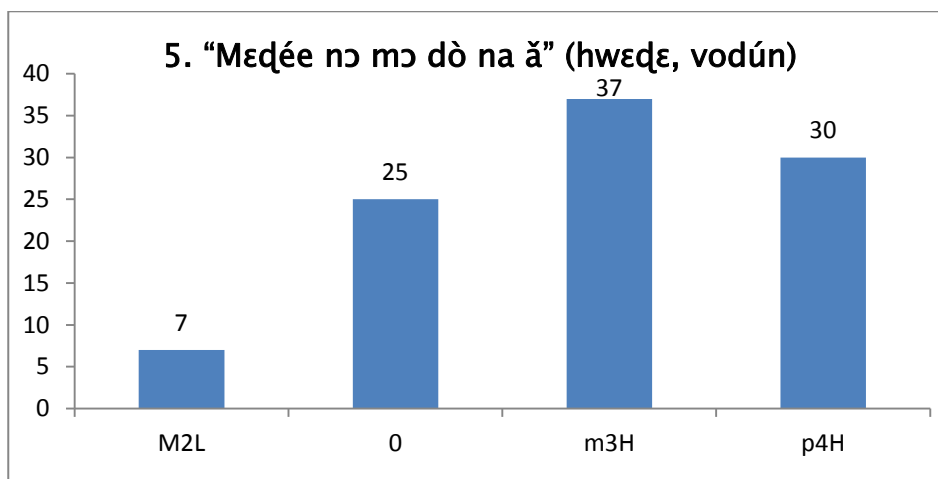
Similar resemblances can be seen in the following two *ajà* songs (itches p5L

– zero inclusive):

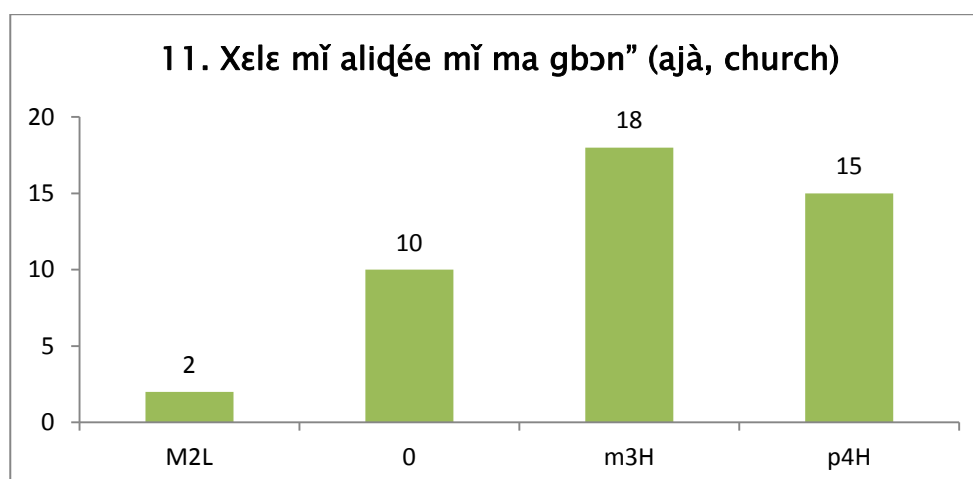


Finally, the occurrences of tones M2L to p4H inclusive are very similar in the

following two *hwεdε* songs:



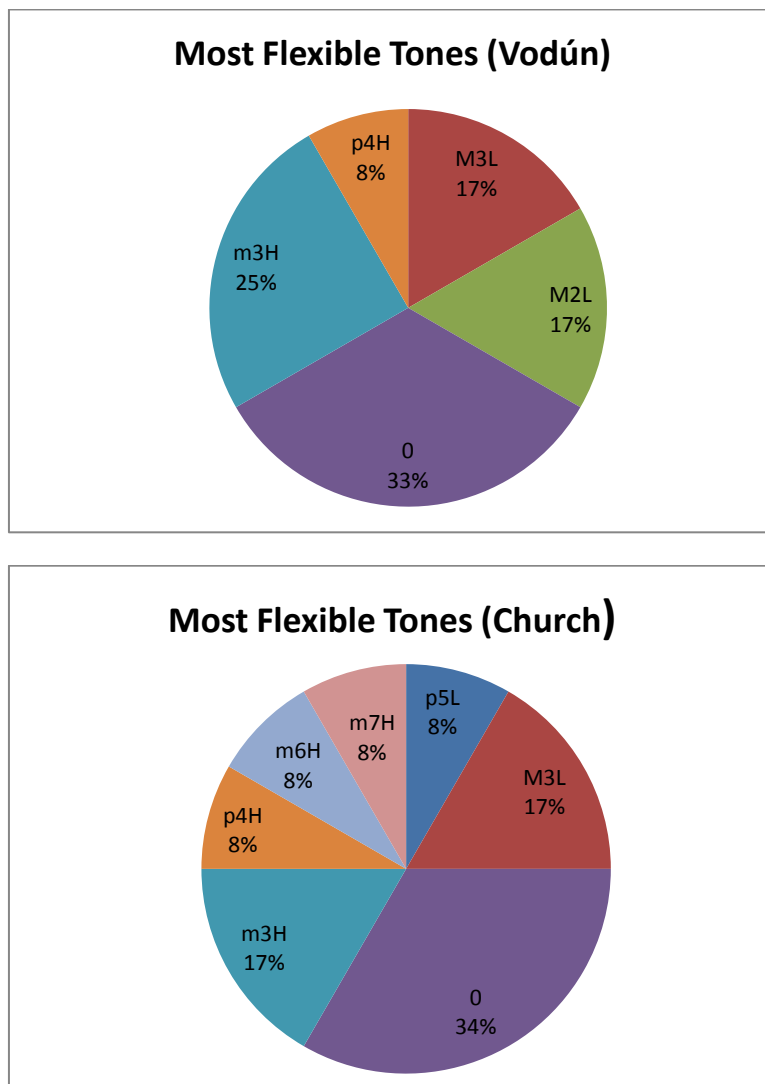
Song no.11 also bears a striking resemblance even though it is in the *ajà* genre rather than hwedε. This shows considerable cross-genre similarities, melodically speaking:



### 7.3.2 Most Flexible Tones

Here is a summary of the results for the most flexible tones for each of the vodún and church examples:

No.	Most Flexible Tones
<b>Vodún</b>	
1.	0, m3H
2.	M3L, 0
3.	M2L, m3H
4.	M3L, 0
5.	p4H, m3H
6.	0, M2L
<b>Church</b>	
6.	0, p5L
8.	m6H, m3H
9.	M3L, 0
10.	M3L, 0
11.	m3H, 0, p4H
12.	p4H, m7H



The first, and perhaps most striking, difference is the sheer range of flexible tones found in the church examples. The perfect fifth below ‘zero’, the

minor sixth above and the minor seventh above are all to be found, but do not occur once in the vodún examples. As with the most ‘commonly used tones’ results, this shows a certain deviance from the normal ‘rules’ of traditional vodún music. Similarly, M2L is one of the most flexible tones in two vodún examples but in none of the church ones.

Let us now look at the similarities, which are also quite striking. Firstly, tone ‘zero’ is the most commonly flexible tone in both domains, followed closely by M3H and then M3L. Indeed, eleven out of the twelve songs include either ‘0’ or ‘m3H’ for flexibility. Also, the low rating of p4H as a flexible tone is found across the board. The above shows that, in at least some of the examples collected, there are similarities in terms of flexible tones.

### 7.3.3 Most Common Interval Steps

The first two criteria for analysis have shown us similarities and differences in terms of the choice of pitches used within the scale, how frequently each of these is used and which tones have the greatest significance. The following section will go deeper, listing all the interval steps between every tone of each piece in order to ascertain the frequency with which they occur. 'Having established a serviceable tonal system [...] and having calculated the intervals lying between the scale degrees,' say Abraham and Hornbostel, 'one must compare these intervals with each other.'<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, '[t]he frequency of occurrence pertinent to each etic interval' says Chenoweth 'is an aid to analysis.'<sup>29</sup>

For this, I followed Marcia Herndon's<sup>30</sup> methods, noting the frequency of each interval step (regardless of its starting point) and its direction: ascending or descending, again using a capital 'M' to denote 'major' and a lower case 'm' for minor. On the following pages are the results for each of the twelve songs, in table and chart form:

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<sup>28</sup> Abraham and Hornbostel, 1994, p.452

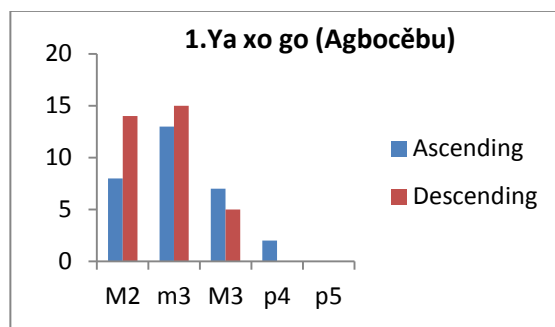
<sup>29</sup> Chenoweth, 1972, p.59

<sup>30</sup> Herndon, 1974, p.236–253

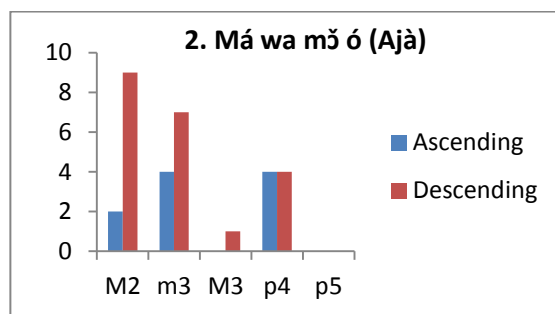
## Tables Showing Interval Frequency in each of the Twelve Songs

### Vodún songs:

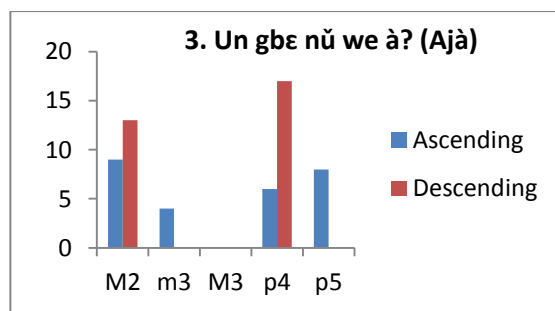
1. Ya xo go ( <i>Agbocěbu</i> )			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	8	14	22
m3	13	15	28
M3	7	5	12
p4	2		2



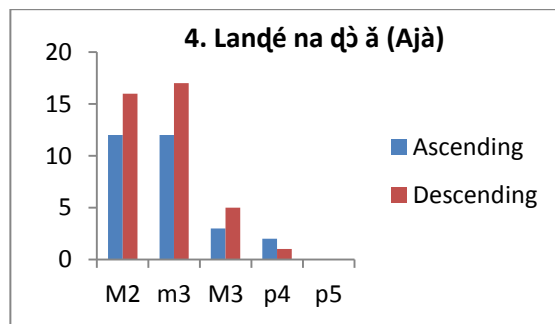
2. Má wa mǎ ó ( <i>Ajà</i> )			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	2	9	11
m3	4	7	11
M3		1	1
p4	4	4	8



3. Un gbẹ nǔ we à? ( <i>Ajà</i> )			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	9	13	22
m3	4		4
M3			
p4	6	17	24
p5	8		8

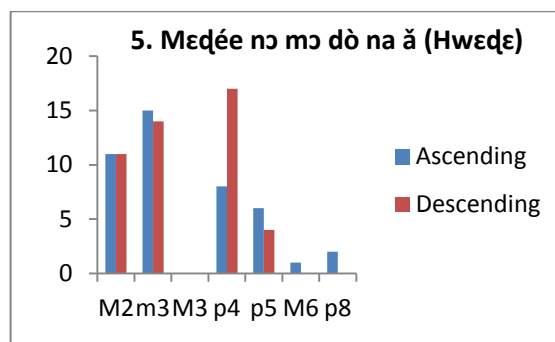


4. Landé na dǎ ă ( <i>Ajà</i> )			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	12	16	28
m3	12	17	29
M3	3	5	8
p4	2	1	3
p5	2		2

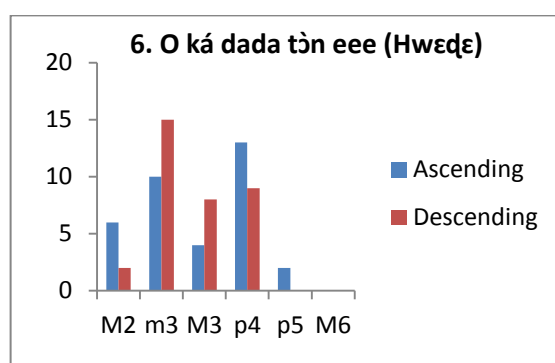




5. Mɛdɛe nɔ mɔ dɔ na ă (Hwɛdɛ)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	11	11	22
m3	15	14	29
M3			
p4	8	17	25
p5	6	4	10
M6	1		1
p8	2		2

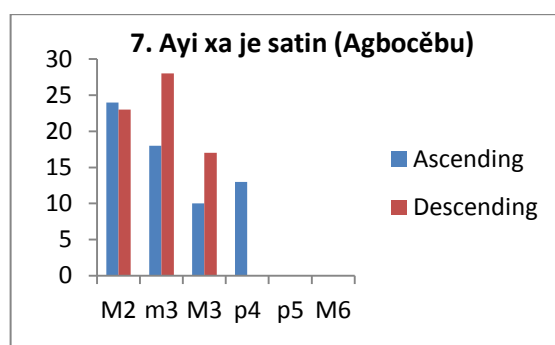


6. O ká dada tòn eee (Hwɛdɛ)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	6	2	8
m3	10	15	25
M3	4	8	12
p4	13	9	22
p5	2		2
M6		1	1

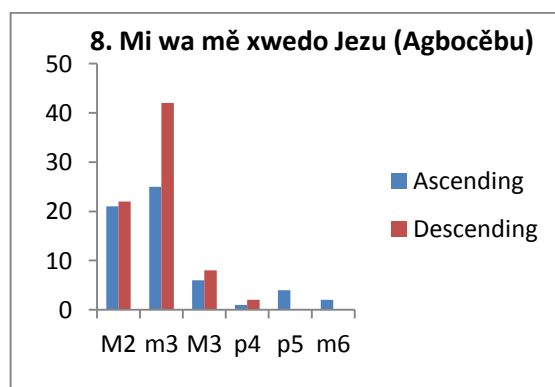


## Church Songs:

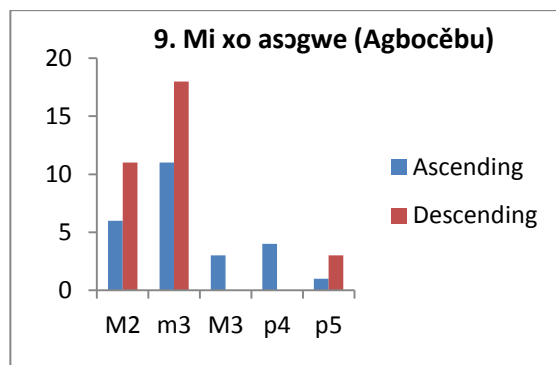
7. Ayi xa je satin (Agbocěbu)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	24	23	47
m3	18	28	46
M3	10	17	27
p4	13		13
M6		2	2



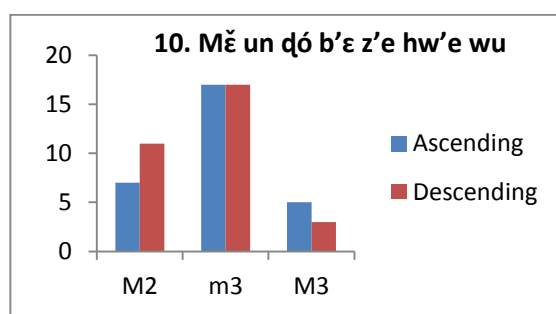
8. Mi wa mě xwedo Jezu (Agbocěbu)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
m2			
M2	21	22	43
m3	25	42	67
M3	6	8	14
p4	1	2	3
p5	4		4
m6	2		2



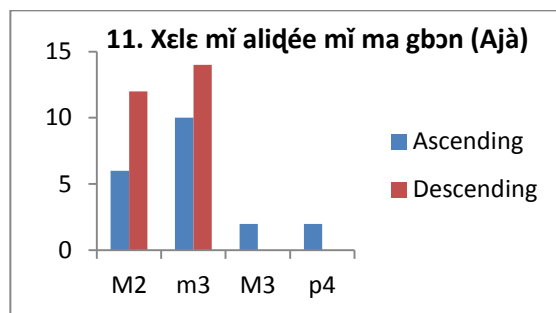
9. Mi xo asɔgwe (Agbocěbu)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	6	11	17
m3	11	18	29
M3	3		3
p4	4		4
p5	1	3	4



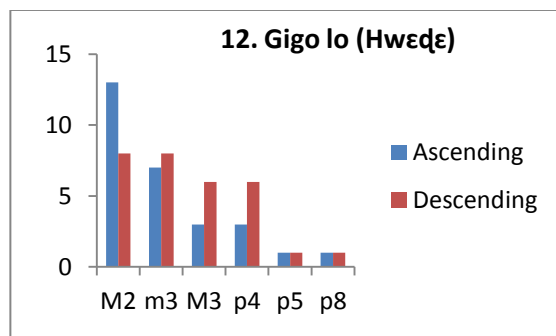
10. Mě un dɔ b'ε z'e hw'e wu (Ajà)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	7	11	18
m3	17	17	34
M3	5	3	8



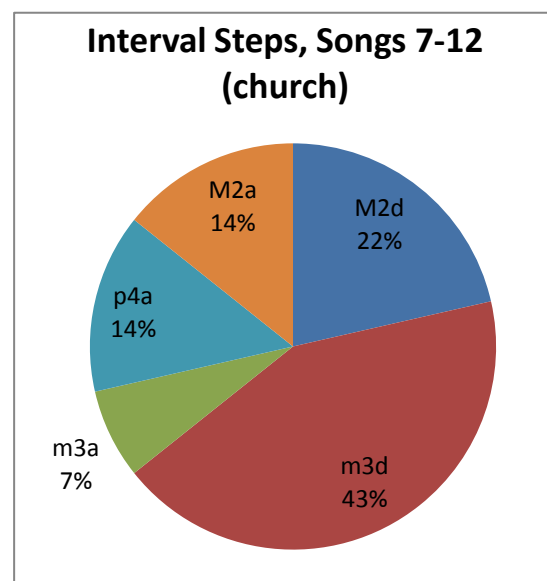
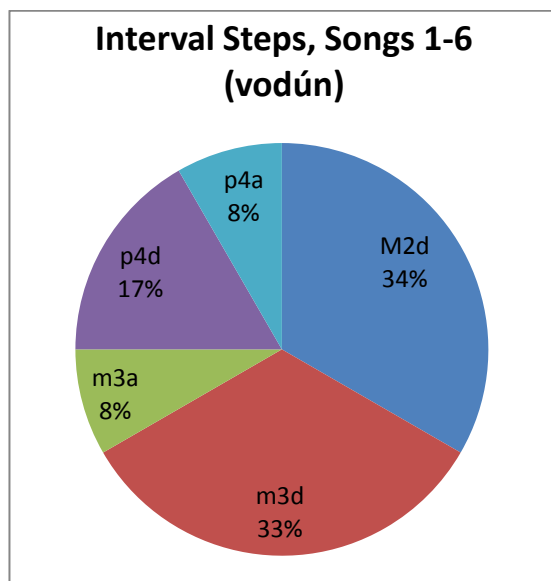
11. Xεε mĩ aliděe mĩ ma gbɔn (Ajà)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	6	12	18
m3	10	14	24
M3	2		2
p4	2		2



12. Gigo lo (Hwεdε)			
	Asc.	Desc.	Total
M2	13	8	21
m3	7	8	15
M3	3	6	9
p4	3	6	9
p5	1	1	2
p8	1	1	2



The first general observation to be made is that descending intervals outnumber ascending ones without exception. Furthermore, the descending minor third stands out as by far the most common interval step, in most cases followed by the descending major second. Whilst there are clear exceptions to this, the smaller intervals (seconds and thirds) nevertheless dominate across the board. Here are two charts, summarizing the percentage of seconds, thirds and fourths occurring in both types of song:



Once again, there are similarities and differences between church and vodún. In terms of similarities, it can clearly be seen that the descending minor third and descending minor second comprise roughly two thirds of intervals in both cases (67% in vodún, 65% in church).

In terms of differences, the descending perfect fourth is present only in the vodún songs. The second difference to observe is that the ascending major second occurs only in church but not in vodún.

On the following page is a summary of the analysis results for all twelve songs, showing the genre, time signature, most commonly used tones, most flexible tones and the most common interval steps.

No.	Song	Genre	Time signature	Most commonly used tones	Most flexible tones	Most common Interval steps
<i>Vodún songs</i>						
1.	Ya xo go	Agbočěbu	12/8	0, m3H	0, m3H	m3d, M2d
2.	Má wa mǎ ó	Ajà	4/4	M3L, p5L	M3L, 0	M2d, m3d
3.	Un gbě nǔ we à?	Ajà	4/4	M2L, m3H	M2L, m3H	p4d, M2d
4.	Landé na dǎ ǎ	Ajà	4/4	M3L, m3H	M3L, 0	m3d, M2d
5.	Mědéé nǎ mǎ dò na ǎ	Hwědẹ	4/4	m3H, p4H	p4H, m3H	p4d, m3a
6.	O ká dada tǎn eee	Hwědẹ	4/4	M3L, 0/m3H	0, M2L	m3d, p4a
<i>Church songs</i>						
7.	Avi xa je satin	Agbočěbu	3/4	0, m3H	0, p5L	m3d, M2a
8.	Mi wa mě xwedo Jezu	Agbočěbu	12/8	m6H, m3H	m6H, m3H	m3d, M2d
9.	Mi xo asogwe	Agbočěbu	12/8	0, p5L	M3L, 0	m3d, M2d
10.	Mě un dó b'ě z'e hw'e wu	Ajà	12/8	M3L, M2L	M3L, 0	m3a, m3d
11.	Xẹlẹ mǎ alidée mǎ ma gbɔn	Ajà	12/8	m3H, p4H	m3H, 0, p4H	m3d, M2d
12.	Gigolo	Hwědẹ	12/8	m3H, m7H	p4H, m7H	M2a, m3d

Table 4

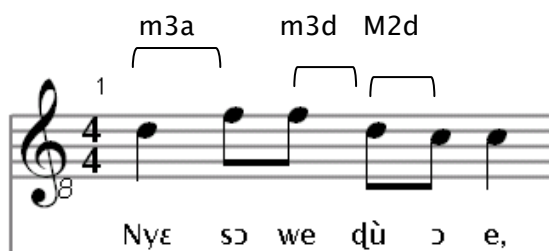
### 7.3.4 Detailed Melodic Analysis

There are several examples of melodic motifs which occur across the board.

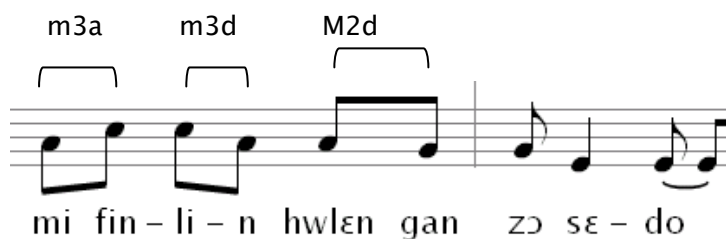
Firstly, there is the melodic pattern: *m3a - m3d - M2d*, which opens song no.5 (hwεdε, vodún):



This same motif is also found at the start of song no.4 (ajà, vodún):



This tonal sequence is equally common in church renditions, such as bar 4 of song no.7 (*agbocěbu*, church):



And in bar 8 of song no.8 (*agbocěbu*, church):



Another common motif is the following one:

m3d - M2d - p4a - m3d - M2d - M2a

This equates to the pitch names:

m6H - p4H - m3H - m6H - p4H - m3H - p4H

It is found in both songs no.4 and no.11:

**No.4 (vodún):** m6H - p4H - m3H - m6H - p4H - m3H - p4H



**No.11 (church):** m6H - p4H - m3H - m6H - p4H - m3H - p4H



However, the two songs which resemble each other more than any others are: No.1 (*Ya xo go*, vodún) and No.9. (*Mĩ xo asɔgwe*, church). As the locations where they were recorded (Agbocɔdji and Akɔgbato respectively) are both on the Western edge of Cotonou within one kilometre of each other, the influence is – in some ways – not surprising. Nevertheless, it shows that strong melodic similarities remain even once a vodún melody has been appropriated for church usage. Here is the entire sequence of tonal successions of these two songs, using tone names rather than intervals. The similarities can clearly be seen:

**No.1, Ya xo go:**

m3H – 0 – m3H – p4H – m6H – p4H – p4H – m3H – 0 – M2L – M3L – 0 – m3H – 0  
 0–m3H – 0 – M2L – 0 – m3H – 0 – M3L – 0 – 0 – M2L – M3L – p5L – p5L – p5L – p5L

**No.9, Mi xo Asɔgwe:**

m3H – 0 – m3H – m3H – p4H – m6H – p4H – p4H – m3H – 0 – M2L – M3L – p5L –  
 p5L – p5L – p5L – p5L – M2H – M2H – 0 – m3H – 0 – M3L – 0 – 0 – M2L – 0 – m3H

There now follows a more detailed comparison of these two melodies.

Firstly, the opening phrase of each song is virtually identical; only the anacrusis at the start differs from a crotchet in ‘Ya xo xo’ to a quaver in ‘Mi



xo Asɔgwe'. As a result, the latter adds a repetition of m3H in the first whole beat:

**No.1 (vodún):** m3H - 0 - m3H - p4H - m6H - p4H - p4H - m3H - 0 - M2L

1 Molto rubato 2 ↑ 3

Ya xo go, nu má m - la hǔn Lɛ - gba

Detailed description: This musical score is for a soloist in 12/8 time. It consists of three measures. Measure 1 is marked '1 Molto rubato' and contains a whole rest followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4. Measure 2 is marked '2' with an upward arrow and contains a quarter note C5, an eighth note D5, a quarter note E5, an eighth note F5, and a quarter note G5. Measure 3 is marked '3' and contains a quarter note A5, an eighth note B5, and a quarter note C6. The lyrics 'Ya xo go, nu má m - la hǔn Lɛ - gba' are written below the notes.

**No.9 (church):** m3H - 0 - m3H - m3H - p4H - m6H - p4H - p4H - m3H - 0 - M2L

Soloist 12/8

Choir Mi xo'a - sɔ - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce

Detailed description: This musical score is for a choir and soloist in 12/8 time. The soloist part (treble clef) starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, an eighth note C5, and a quarter note D5 in the second measure. The choir part (bass clef) starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then a quarter note G3, an eighth note A3, a quarter note B3, an eighth note C4, and a quarter note D4 in the second measure. The lyrics 'Mi xo'a - sɔ - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce' are written below the notes.

In the second phrase of the song, we find the following identical motif:

**No.1 (vodún):** M2L - 0 - m3H - 0 - M3L - 0 - 0 - M2L

4 5

go nu má m - la hǔn Lɛ - gba d

Detailed description: This musical score shows a motif in 12/8 time. It consists of two measures. Measure 4 contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, an eighth note C5, and a quarter note D5. Measure 5 contains a quarter note E5, an eighth note F5, and a quarter note G5. The lyrics 'go nu má m - la hǔn Lɛ - gba d' are written below the notes.

**No.9 (church)** M2L - 0 - m3H - 0 - M3L - 0 - 0 - M2L

xo'a - sɔ - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce

Detailed description: This musical score shows a motif in 12/8 time. It consists of two measures. Measure 1 contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, an eighth note C5, and a quarter note D5. Measure 2 contains a quarter note E5, an eighth note F5, and a quarter note G5. The lyrics 'xo'a - sɔ - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce' are written above the notes.

Finally, at the end of the second phrase of no.1 and the first phrase of no.9

we see the following identical sequence of tones:

**No.1 (vodún):**      0 - M2L - M3L p5L -p5L - p5L - p5L



**No.9 (church):**      0 - M2L M3L - p5L - p5L - p5L



### 7.3.5 Conclusion Based upon the Melodic Analyses

From the above results it is clear that many of the songs analysed resemble each other in terms of scale, predominant tones, flexible tones and predominant intervals. These similarities also cross genre boundaries. All of the church melodies resemble the vodún ones to some extent; this varies from passing resemblances in scale and pitch to virtually identical melodic passages. Thus, whilst not all the church songs can be considered as ‘pure’ vodún melodies, some of them certainly can. This shows that authentic vodún melodies are indeed being appropriated by Beninese churches.

## 7.4 Analysis of Song Lyrics

One element of the songs which is bound to change during transfer to church is the lyrics; as the purpose for singing them changes, so too will the words. It is therefore interesting to observe which aspects of the lyrics are retained in church usage: verbal devices, vocabulary and topics which are still found in church songs in spite of the change in what/who is being worshipped. I also looked at the lyrical differences which exist between the two types of song.

### 7.4.1 Common Elements in Both Song Types

Here is a list of the main lyrical similarities found, with an example from vodún and church in each case:

(i) The mention of playing instruments for worship

Several of the songs in both categories speak of singing and/or playing instruments for worship, or invite others to do so:

‘Ya xo go, nu má mla hǔn *Legba*.’  
They will play the bells, for me to worship the vodún *Legba*.  
(Song no.1, vodún)

‘Mi xo’asɔgwe nu ma mla Jezu ce.’  
Play the gourd shakers to praise my Jesus.  
(Song no.9, church)

(ii) Naming the drum rhythm used

‘Xo go nu má mla hǔn *Legba* do hwɛɖɛcemɛ.’  
Play the bells so that I [can] worship *Legba* in my hwɛɖɛ rhythm.  
(Song no.1, vodún)

‘Nyɛ na mla Gbɛɖɔtɔ dɔ̀ jixwe bon a do xo hwɛɖɛ e.’  
I will praise the creator of Heaven with my hwɛɖɛ rhythm.  
(Song no. 27, church)

(iii) Stating that something is incomprehensible

To do this, the Fòn terms ‘mɛɖɛɛ...ǎ’ or ‘mɛɖɛɛ má’ are used to signify  
‘nobody’:

‘Mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ̀ dò na ǎ, mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ̀ dò na agbeta awoyo aji’  
Nobody understands the depths, nobody can see the bottom of the ocean.  
(Song no.5, vodún)

‘Mɛɖɛɛ má mɔ̀ do nu, gbɛɖɔtɔ.’  
Nobody can understand [you], creator.  
(Song no.24, church)

(iv) Warnings against certain behaviour

‘O ká dada tòn, alɔ nɔ jɛ go ă’  
The King’s gourd: You must not touch it  
(Song no.6, vodún)

‘A gbɛ sinsɛn e kan we’  
If you refuse the religion, too bad!  
(Song no.27, church)

(v) Inclusion of proverbs/wise sayings:

‘Dan má wli Jawunta u mɛ wɛ.’  
The Serpent can catch the Lion.  
(Song no.4, vodún)

‘Atin e jlǒ xɛ, ji wɛ xɛ nɔ zɔnjɛ’  
The tree which the bird wants, on it the bird will rest.  
(Song no.22, church)

‘Vivɔ nu nú dɛ tòn nyɔ hu bǐ bɛ nu ɔ mi mǎ mɔ ă.’  
The end of a thing is worth more than its beginning.  
(Song no.21, church)

(vi) Asking questions, usually rhetorical

‘Un gbɛ nu we à? Eǒ! Un gbɛ nu we à?’  
Have I refused you that? No! Have I refused you that?  
(Song no.3, vodún)

‘Dan má wli Jawunta u mɛ wɛ. Hwɛ na dɔ na?’  
The Serpent can catch the Lion. Who is to blame?  
(Song no.4, vodún)

‘O mɛdɛ wɛ un dɔ́ à? O un dɔ́ b’ɛ zɛ hwɛ wu ce?  
Have I someone? Have I someone who surpasses you?  
(Song no.10, church)

(vii) Mentioning characters by name

This occurs in several songs, even though it is unlikely that anyone mentioned will actually be known to those present:

‘Aɔnsi bɔ Atakpemi xo go’  
Aɔnsi and Atakpemi play the bells  
(Song no.1, vodún)

‘Zinsou wli Sagbo d̀̀ ɔ’  
If Zinsou catches Sagbo and eats him.  
(Song no.4, vodún)

‘Fifanyɔ wɛ d̀̀ ɔjà xo wɛ.’  
It is Fifanyɔ who is playing the ɔjà  
(Song no.28, church)

(viii) The mention of various animals:

Although this is common to both types of song, the animals cited in each differ. Also, the vodún songs include more frequent occurrence of animals.

Animals in the vodún songs (with respective song numbers) are as follows:

Lion (4,14)  
Serpent/snake (4,14,17)  
Dog (5)  
Hyena (18)

Animals in the church songs (with respective song numbers):

Bird (22)  
Sheep (24)  
Pigs (24)

(ix) Use of enigmatic language, which outsiders may not understand:

E d̀ awe wε xo kpatíngolixε, bɔ ɔɔlixε d̀ ‘un bó ja’  
Ce aganza nyla we bó yì Dassa, Bó d̀ ‘gbε gble do mi.’

The hornbill was struck by misfortune and said ‘I am coming’.  
The crab danced badly and went to Dassa and said ‘Life is messed up’.  
(Song no.13, vodún)

Gleta we gbε fí nyi loooo, axi jije wε ayihɔn eee lɔ nyi  
O m̀ die ma kǎ lε tuwun, O hwenu dε wε gǎn naxo do

Life down here, is [like] a field; the world is like a market which comes to life too.  
And so, we do not know, at what moment the hour will chime.  
(Song no.21, church)



(x) The use of the phrase ‘E d̀̀’

This means ‘one says’ or ‘they say’ and is used frequently as a ‘fill’ at the start of a line and can be included or omitted, it would seem, at the soloist’s whim:

‘E d̀̀, má wa mǎ ó e’  
(They say) don’t do that,  
(Song no.2, vodún)

‘E d̀̀, avunlɛ ɲɔ ba do tɔn.’  
(They say) it is dogs who try to understand its mysteries.  
(Song no.5, vodún)

Church:  
‘E d̀̀ nyi wɛ d̀̀ ajà xo wɛ ɲɔ.’  
(They say) I am playing the ajà.  
(Song no.28, church)

(xi) Interjections with no meaning:

These most often occur at the end of a line and are also included or omitted at the singer’s discretion. One of the most common is the sound ‘eee’:

‘Un gbe nu we à? Eeee.’  
Have I refused you that? Eeee.  
(Song no.3, vodún)

‘Xɛlɛ mǐ aliqee mǐ ma gbɔn eeee.’  
Show us the way we should take, eee.  
(Song no.11, church)

Another common sound of this kind is 'looo' or 'eloo':

'Ya xo go, nu má mla hũn *Legba* eloo!'

They will play the bells, for me to worship the vodún *Legba*, eloo!

(Song no.1, vodún)

'Gigo lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cyɛ ɖɛ looo.'

I do not give the glory to idols, looo.

(Song no.12, church)

### 7.4.2 The Main Differences in the Song Lyrics

In order to ascertain the main thematic differences between vodún and church songs, I made a list of the principal themes occurring in both types.

Below are the results:

#### Song Lyric Content: Vodún Songs

Themes	Song Number															Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
Play music	x						x								2	
Worship vodún	x						x								2	
Warning against certain actions		x			x	x				x	x	x	x	x	8	
Threats				x		x		x			x	x	x		6	
Enigmatic themes			x	x			x	x							4	
The mystery of vodún					x										1	
Invitation to come							x								1	
Drinking alcohol									x	x					2	
Table 5																

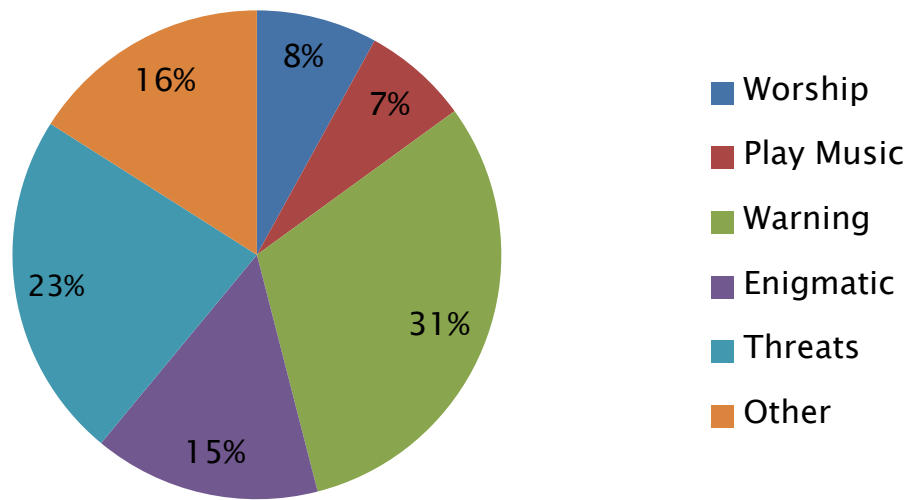
## Song Lyric Content – Church Songs

Themes	Song Number														Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
Christ's crucifixion	x					x						x			3
Playing music	x		x										x		3
Praise / worship			x			x	x			x		x	x		6
Salvation / Heaven			x			x	x					x			4
God's greatness	x			x			x	x		x	x	x	x		8
Asking God for something					x		x								2
Against vodún / idols					x	x			x					x	4
Warning against certain behaviours					x						x		x	x	4
The Second Coming							x					x		x	3
Enigmatic language							x	x						x	3
Evangelistic songs		x					x				x		x		4
<b>Table 6</b>															

The above results were then converted into percentages and put into the following charts, enabling the predominant themes of the two song-types to be clearly visible and – therefore – the similarities and differences in these:

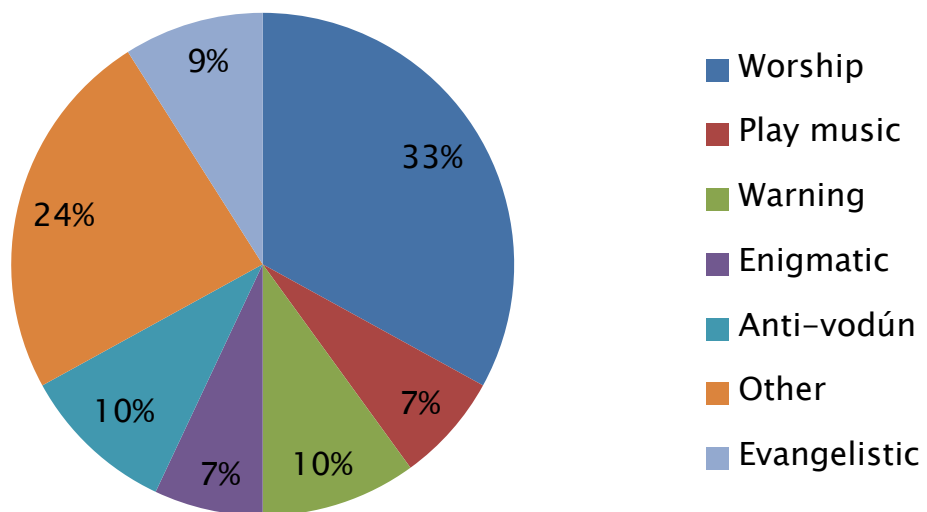
**Vodún Song Themes**

**Table 7**



**Church Song Themes**

**Table 8**



From the above data, the following differences can be observed:

- (i) Firstly, the vodún songs include far more songs of warning, mostly stating actions which are forbidden in the vodún religion, but also more general warnings, such as:

‘Ahwan ɔɔnu vɔɔ ɛ mí sɛ vɔ ɔɔ, ɔhòn Huzuhuzu Ja eloő, vɔɔ ɛ mí sɛ vi ɔò.’

The war chief is coming, a violent wind is coming, mothers hide your children.

(Song no.20, vodún)

- (ii) Linked with the above category are songs containing threats; not merely saying ‘do not do this’ but also stating, ‘if you do this, something bad will happen to you.’ For example:

‘A yi hwiɔěe do nu mì ă, Vodún hù we a n gbɔjɛ.’

‘You didn’t ask me to protect you. If vodún kills you, it will serve you right!’

(Song no.17, vodún)

Indeed, songs containing warnings or threats compose over 50% of those collected from a vodún context. The church songs contain no threatening songs and a lot fewer warning songs. However, there are ‘anti-vodún’ songs in church, which contain negative and/or challenging statements towards vodún.

- (iii) More of the Christian songs focus specifically on worship in general, saying how powerful God or Jesus is. Whereas the vodún songs collected do not seem to exult their divinities in this way:

‘Gbɛnɔ wɛ jɛ gbɛ nɔ wɛ jɛ bɔ mi na kpa naa (x2)  
Hwɛn gan tɔ Jezu, e wɛ ze huntɔn, bo do xɔ alindɔn’

It is to the Master of Life that I give the glory  
The saviour Jesus took his blood to redeem my soul.  
(Song no.12, church)

- (iv) Enigmatic language is twice as common in the vodún songs as in the church songs, bearing testimony to the assertion that vodún is ‘shrouded in mystery’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See section 2.1

### **7.4.3 Conclusion Based on Lyrical Analyses**

In spite of the obvious thematic differences between the two types of song, there are nevertheless numerous thematic, stylistic, poetic and phonetic elements of the vodún songs which are retained in church usage.



## **7.5 Conclusion based upon all the Musical Analyses**

Based upon the research and analyses of the entire chapter, there are clear examples of authentic rhythmic accompaniment and of authentic melodies being used in church. Furthermore, even the lyrical content is similar in the areas where it can be. I therefore conclude that, based upon the songs collected, the church songs studied do indeed resemble the vodún ones significantly and, in some cases at least, constitute an authentic appropriation of this Beninese cultural heritage.



## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### CONCLUSION

In the introduction, I stated my conviction that the associations of vodún music with ‘evil’ or ‘paganism’ could be removed, allowing it to be used in church worship. In the thesis, we have seen that many Christians have appropriated this music for church use and that, as long as certain measures are taken and believers have true faith in Christ, this can be done without adverse effects. In doing so, it not only enables the Beninese to worship in a culturally appropriate way, it also serves to demystify vodún, showing its perceived power no longer to be present when used in a Christian context. ‘Once the external considerations have been lost or put aside’ says F. Smith ‘any music that is intrinsically artistic can qualify for “baptism” in the one, true church.’<sup>1</sup>

One of the main reasons why churches are reticent to use this music is fear; fear of vodún, witchcraft, curses, trance, violence or general disorder. Yet much of this fear stems from Western missionaries misinterpreting vodún,

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<sup>1</sup> Smith F., 1957, p.20

along with its music and practices and branding them all as 'evil'. The thesis has shown that the music alone need not be evil and that the adverse effects of its usage are caused by vodún preparations, ceremonies and incantations. Also, the heart of the worshipper and what/who is being worshipped plays a big part in this, which is why, in a church context, there is therefore a big difference.

If, after considering all of the above, churches are still cautious about using this music, there are measures can be taken to avoid certain practices believed by some to attract spirits/trance or provoke animosity (these are listed in as seen in Sections 4.6 and 4.9). 'What is important for the musician is that he allow himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit' Raoul Adamo told me. 'Whatever you do, you must not be disturbed in your heart. If you have the spirit of God in you, you do what you do and your heart is at peace.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Raoul Adamo, UCAB, interview 27-11-07

Also in the introduction, I stated that music of vodún origin not only can but should be used by Beninese churches and that the missiological benefits of doing so would be considerable. We have seen multiple examples of how this music has not only attracted people to churches, but also been instrumental in their conversion to the Christian faith. Furthermore, this music communicates the Gospel message through the Beninese music styles originally designed for the very purpose of worshipping. Moreover, the fact that much of this appropriated music has been seen to closely resemble the vodún versions melodically, rhythmically and – where it can – lyrically, means that it provides an authentic, inculturated form of church worship, which has great value and meaning to the Beninese people. ‘We should not say anything, think anything, or do anything in the church,’ says Ela, ‘unless it springs from the daily reality, from the living traditions of the African peoples.’<sup>3</sup>

Vodún music needs to be appropriated by Beninese churches in order to provide a culturally appropriate expression of the Christian faith. In doing

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<sup>3</sup> Ela, 1988, p.143

so, not only will Beninese Christians understand the songs and their content more clearly, but the church's mission will also be more effective, as we have seen in numerous examples throughout this thesis. 'African music scholars on the continent' says Kidula, 'are experiencing a certain transition and desire to represent themselves at home and abroad from their own positions, perspectives, and worldviews'<sup>4</sup> and this is the case with musical expression in Benin. 'If we continue to insist on defending and maintaining traditions that owe their origin to Christendom' says Ela, 'the African churches will continue to seem a by-product of the Christian West.'<sup>5</sup> This is why all aspects of church worship in Africa, including its music, need to be Africanized, and this can only be done to the full by the adoption of true Beninese worship music, which has its roots in vodún. 'Music in the church' says Roberta King, 'either creates barriers or gateways to the Christian faith [...] Thus the development of culturally appropriate and authentic music for local churches is of critical importance in fostering Christian faith.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kidula, 2006, p103

<sup>5</sup> Ela, 1988, p.108

<sup>6</sup> King, 2008a, p.5

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# APPENDICES



# **APPENDIX 1: SONG LYRICS**

## Songs 1–6 (vodún)

### 1. “Ya xo go”

(agbocěbu), from Agbocɔdji

Ya xo go, nu má mla hǔn Ƙegba,

Nyɛnive Hunnɛjo,

xo go nu má mla hǔn Ƙegba do  
hwɛɖɛcemɛ.

They will play the bells, for me to worship the  
vodún Ƙegba.

Madame Hunnɛjo,

play the bells so that I [can] worship Ƙegba in my  
hwɛɖɛ rhythm.

Ya xo go, nu má mla hǔn Ƙegba eloo!

They will play the bells, for me to worship the  
vodún Ƙegba.

Ya xo go, nu má mla hǔn Ƙegba.

They will play the bells, for me to worship the  
vodún Ƙegba.

Aɔnsi bɔ Atakpemi xo go nu má mla hǔn  
Ƙegba do hwɛɖɛcemɛ.

Aɔnsi and Atakpemi play the bells so that I [can]  
worship Ƙegba in my hwɛɖɛ rhythm

Ya xo go, nu má mla hǔn Ƙegba eloo!

They will play the bells, for me to worship the  
vodún Ƙegba.

### 2. “Má wa mǎ ó e”

(Ajà), from Afripercuss

E ɖò, má wa mǎ ó e,

Na hù vodún hwɛ.

Húnsi ɖé má wa,

na hù vodún hwɛ.

Don't do that,

You will sin against vodún.

No adept does such a thing

It is an offense toward vodún.

E ɖò, má wa mǎ ó e,

Na hù Ahwanjo hwɛ.

Húnsi ɖé má wa,

na hù vodún hwɛ.

Don't do that,

You will sin against the divinity Ahwanjo.

No adept does such a thing

It is an offense toward vodún.

**3. “Un gbε nu we à?”**  
(ajà, from Afripercuss)

Un gbε nu we à?  
Eǒ! Un gbe nu we à? Eeee (x2)  
Amákanboce un gbε nu we à?  
Eǒ! Un gbe nu we à? Eeee.  
E ka dǒ un gbε nu we à?  
Eǒ! Un gbe nu we à? Eeee.

Have I refused you that?  
No! Have I refused you that?  
Amákanboce<sup>2</sup>, have I refused you that?  
No! Have I refused you that?  
Have I refused you that?  
No! Have I refused you that?

**4. Landé na dǒ ǎ? (ajà)**  
from Afripercuss

Nyε sɔ we dǔ ɔ e,  
Landé ná dǒ a e  
Zinsou wli Sagbo dǔ ɔ  
Sagbo wil Zinsou dǔ ɔ  
Nε Manta wli Jawunta  
nε wε hwε na blɔ.  
Ohàn d’ayě eeee  
Ohàn d’ayě eeee  
Ahèn<sup>1</sup>, Ayìdòwhεdò Dan baqabaqá  
Dan má wli Jawunta u mε wε  
Hwε na dǒ na?

If I devour you.  
No animal will speak of it.  
If Zinsou catches Sagbo and eats him  
If Sagbo catches Zinsou and eats him  
It is as if Manta caught the loin  
And devoured it.  
The song says “Ayě eeee”  
The song says “Ayě eeee”  
Yes, the strange Rainbow Serpent  
The Serpent can catch the Lion.  
Who is to blame?

**5. “Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ǎ”**  
(hwεdε) from Dovi Dove

Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ǎ  
Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na agbeta awoyo aji  
Tɔ godwe mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ǎ.  
  
Sákpátá vaudoun ma nyi do ba nu dé.

Nobody understands the depths.  
Nobody can see the bottom of the ocean.  
It is difficult to fathom the depths of expanses of water<sup>3</sup>.  
You must not try to fathom the depths of the vodún fetish Sákpátá.

<sup>1</sup> Ahèn is a generic francophone West African affirmative, as distinct from the fɔn ‘een’ for yes.

<sup>2</sup> Ama = leaves, kan = take/cut, bòcyé = a statuette.

<sup>3</sup> Tɔ godwe can refer to lakes, rivers, oceans, ponds, wells etc.

E ɖɔ, avunɛ nɔ ba do tɔn.

Mi ma na mɔ ɛ ce

Tɔ godwe mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Hervioso, Agbedun ma nyi do ba nu ɖɛ.

Cuku ɛ nɔ ba do tɔn.

O ma na mɔ ɛ ce

Tɔ godwe mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ dò na ă

Tɔ godwe mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Dɔkunno mɔlou ma nyi do ba nuɖɛɛ.

Avunɛ nɔ ba do tɔn.

O ma na mɔ ɛ ce.

Hervioso mɛɖɛɛ nɔ mɔ dò na ă

Un ɖɔ ji vaudoun Sɔgbo ma nyi do ba nu ɖɛɛ.

Un ɖɔ ji Lissa Sɔgbo ma nyi do ba nu ɖɛɛ.

They say it is dogs<sup>4</sup> who try to understand its mysteries.

You will not understand it.

It is difficult to fathom the depths of expanses of water.

You must not try to fathom the depths of the vodún fetish Hervioso.

It is dogs<sup>5</sup> who try to understand its mysteries.

You will not understand it.

It is difficult to fathom the depths of expanses of water.

Nobody understands the depths.

It is difficult to fathom the depths of expanses of water.

You must not try to fathom the depths of Dɔkunno<sup>6</sup> Molou.

It's dogs who try to understand its mysteries.

You will not understand it.

Nobody understands the depths of Hervioso.

I say that you must not try to fathom the depths of the vodún Sɔgbo

I say that you must not try to fathom the depths of the vodún fetish Lissa Sɔgbo.

## 6. "O ká dada tòn"

(Hwɛɖɛ) from Dovi Dove

O ká dada tòn eee

E ɖɔ alɔ nɔ jɛ go ă eee

O ká dada tòn eee

Alɔkwɛ nɔ jɛ go ă

The King's gourd:

You must not touch it

The King's gourd:

You must not touch it

Alɔ e wa dǎn

Alɔ wa dǎn,

The trembling hand<sup>7</sup>

The trembling hand

<sup>4</sup> *Avun* literally means *dog*, but used here to refer to fools or imbeciles.

<sup>5</sup> *Cuku* also means *dog*, but here refers to fools or imbeciles.

<sup>6</sup> Dɔkunno (possessor of riches) is another name for Sakpatá/

<sup>7</sup> ie fearful

Nɔ sɔ zò ă  
O wa mǎ, bo sɔ zò ɔ  
Má zo a mɛ we

Does not take the fire  
If you do that and take the fire  
The fire will burn you.

## Songs 7–12 (vodún songs appropriated for church)

### 8. Mi wa mǐ xwedo Jézu, (agbocěbu)

#### Abomey Baptist Church

##### **Soloist:**

Mi wa, mǐ xwedo Jezu  
O mi wa mi na ɖɔ gbexo

Come, let us follow Jesus  
Come, we are going to speak about life

##### **Chorus:**

Mε e hɛn myɔ e nɔ bu ă  
Mε e mɛ ali ɖagbe, e no bu ă  
Mi wa mi xwedo nugbe

The one who has a lamp doesn't get lost  
He who follows the good road doesn't get lost  
Come, let us follow the truth

##### **Soloist:**

Aklunɔvi dodo ɛ wε nyi zogben  
Lobó na hɛn weziza wa  
Gbɛdotó ví dodo ɛ wε nyi jε  
Bo na hɛn vivi ɔ wa

The true children of the Lord are like a lamp  
They bring clarity<sup>8</sup>  
The true children of God are like salt  
They will bring a pleasant savour

Aklunɔvi dodo ɛ wε nyi atín  
Lobó na hɛn sinsen ɔ wa  
Gbɛdotó ví dodo ɛ wε nyi tɔ  
Bo na hɛn fifa ɔ wa

The true children of the Lord are like a tree  
Which will bring fruit  
The true children of God are like water  
Which will bring coolness<sup>9</sup>

##### **Chorus:**

Mε e hɛn myɔ e nɔ bu ă  
Mε e mɛ ali ɖagbe, e no bu ă  
Mi wa mi xwedo nugbe

The one who has a lamp doesn't get lost  
He who follows the good road doesn't get lost  
Come, let us follow the truth

Mi wa, mǐ xwedo Jezu  
O mi wa mi na ɖɔ gbexo  
Mε e hɛn myɔ e nɔ bu ă  
Mε e mɛ ali ɖagbe, e no bu ă  
Mi wa mi xwedo nugbe

Come, let us follow Jesus  
Come, we are going to speak about life  
The one who has a lamp doesn't get lost  
He who follows the good road doesn't get lost  
Come, let us follow the truth

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<sup>8</sup> light

<sup>9</sup> Signifying peace.



**9. Mi xo'asɔgwe (agbocěbu)**  
**ADC Church Akɔgbato**

Mi xo'asɔgwe nu ma mla Jezu ce  
Do gbe han mɛ  
Mi xo'asɔgwe nu ma mla Jezu ce

O Jezu ce,  
Hwi wɛ hun Sɛxwe hɔn mɛ.  
Aklunɔ ce  
Hwi wɛ hun Sɛxwe hɔn mɛ.

Play the gourd shakers to praise my Jesus  
With singing  
Play the gourd shakers to praise my Jesus

O my Jesus  
It is you who have opened the door of Heaven  
My Lord  
It is you who have opened the door of Heaven

**10. Mě un dɔ́ b'ɛ zɛ hwɛ wu? (ajà)**  
**Vɔgbana Baptist Church**

O mɛdɛ́ wɛ un dɔ́ à?  
O un dɔ́ b'ɛ zɛ hwɛ wu ce?  
O mɛdɛ́ wɛ nyɛ dɔ́ à?  
O un dɔ́ b'ɛzɛ hwɛ wu ce?  
O mɛdɛ́ wɛ un dɔ́ dìn b'ɛzɛ gbɛdɔtɔ́ wu sín  
a vɛdo?  
O mɛdɛ́ wɛ nyɛ dɔ́ dìn b'ɛzɛ atɔndɔbũ wu  
sín a vɛdo?  
O mɛdɛ́ wɛ ny'e dɔ́ à?  
O un dɔ́ b'ɛzɛ hwɛ wu ce.

Have I someone?  
Have I someone who surpasses you?  
Have I someone?  
Have I someone who surpasses you?  
You think that I have someone who surpasses the  
Author of Life<sup>10</sup>?  
Do you think that I have someone who surpasses  
the Holy Trinity?  
Have I someone?  
Have I someone who surpasses you?

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<sup>10</sup> gbɛdɔtɔ́ literally means 'the doctor of life'

**11. Xɛɛ mĩ aliqee mĩ ma gbɔn (ajà)**  
**MEF Church, Sɔnicog**

Xɛɛ mĩ aliqee mĩ ma gbɔn eee  
 Mĩ xwe Jesu ɔɔn  
 Xɛɛ mĩ aliqee mĩ ma gbɔn eeee  
 Mĩ xwe gbɛɔ ɔɔn

Show us the way we should take  
 We are going to the house of Jesus  
 Show us the way we should take We are  
 going to the house of the Lord<sup>11</sup>

Jesu we do kpagbe  
 Lɛgba do xɔ qe mɛ agbantɔn ni tɔn  
 Jesu we do kpagbe  
 Lɛgba do xɔ qe mɛ xɔxayatoqɛe  
 ma nɔ do xɔnɔgbɛ.  
 Bɔ agbantowe jɛ hɛnɛn.

Jesus promised  
 If Lɛgba is in this place<sup>12</sup> he should leave.<sup>13</sup>  
 Jesus promised  
 The tenant does not speak like the landlord.  
 And your baggages are outside.

Kakahũn vɛ mɛ  
 Bɔ lɛɛ lo  
 Kakahũn vɛ mɛ  
 Azɛ lɛɛ lo  
 Kakahũn vɛ mɛ  
 Mami lɛɛ lo  
 Kakahũn vɛ mɛ

The vodún Kaka is forbidden  
 And the gri-gri  
 The vodún Kaka is forbidden  
 And sorcery  
 The vodún Kaka is forbidden  
 And the Mami Wata fetish  
 The vodún Kaka is forbidden

**12. Gigo lɔ (hwɛqɛ)**  
**MEA Church, Cadjéhoun**

Gigo lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cyɛ qe looo  
 Gigo lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cyɛ qe

I do not give the glory to idols  
 I do not give the glory to idols

Gbɛɔ wɛ jɛ gbɛ nɔ wɛ jɛ bɔ mi na kpa naa  
 (x2)

It is to the Master of Life that I give the glory

Hwlɛn gan tɔ Jezu, e wɛ ze huntɔn  
 bo do xɔ alindɔn ce

Le saviour Jesus took<sup>14</sup> his blood to redeem  
 my soul

Gigo lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cyɛ qe

I do not give the glory to idols.

<sup>11</sup> gbɛɔ = the master of life

<sup>12</sup> Building/room (xɔ).

<sup>13</sup> Literally may *his baggage leave*.

<sup>14</sup> Or gave

## Other Vodún Song words

### 13. "Un ny'valu e" (Ajà) from Afripercuss

Un ny'valu e,  
Ake má ké ă  
Hùnvɔ dé nɔ ké ă, vɛdo à?  
Gan un ló yi dọ Ake  
Gan un ló yi dọ  
wa sè xo!

I give homage  
If Ake does not give out a powerful cry  
[Then] no other adept can do so.  
I must go and play the bell for Ake  
I must go and play.  
Come, here the news!

E dọ awe wɛ xo kpatíngolixɛ  
bɔ ɔlɪxɛ dọ "un bó ja"  
Ce aganza nyla we bó yì Dassa  
Bó dọ "gbɛ gble do mi."  
E Maxi wɛ nyla we bó jɛ Dassa  
bɔ dọ "gbɛ gble do mi."

The hornbill was struck by misfortune  
And said "I am coming".  
The crab danced badly and went to Dassa  
And said "Life is messed up".  
It is Maxi who danced badly, went to Dassa  
And said "Life is messed up".

Akekle hùngbɔ hùngbɔ 'kele hùngbɔ  
E wa nɛ nyaxo.  
Gan un ló yi dọ Aké.  
Gan un ló yi dọ.  
wa sè xo !

Akekle hùngbɔ<sup>15</sup>  
has come.  
I must go and play the bell for Ake.  
I must go and play.  
Come, hear the news!

### 14. "Nyɛ sɔ we dù ɔ e" (Ajà) from Afripercuss

Nyɛ sɔ we dù ɔ e,  
Landé ná dọ a e,  
Zinsou wli Sagbo dù ɔ  
Sagbo wli Zinsou dù ɔ

If I eat you up  
No animal will speak of it  
If Zinsou<sup>16</sup> catches and eats Sagbo  
If Sagbo catches and eats Zinsou

Nɛ Manta wli Jawunta nɛ wɛ hwɛ na bló  
O hàn d'ayě eeee  
O hàn d'ayě eeee

It is as if Manta caught the lion and ate it.  
The song goes: Ayě eeee!  
The song goes: Ayě eeee!

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<sup>15</sup>Hùngbɔ = great vodún

<sup>16</sup> Zinsou and Sagbo are popular surnames in Benin

Ahèn, ayìdòhweḍò dan baḍabaḍa  
Dan má wli Jawunta  
u me we hwe na dó na?

Yes, the strange rainbow snake  
The snake cannot catch the lion,  
Who's fault is that?

Nye so we dù ɔ e,  
Landé ná dè a e,  
Zinsou wli Sagbo dù ɔ  
Sagbo wli Zinsou dù ɔ

If I eat you up  
No animal will speak of it  
If Zinsou<sup>17</sup> catches and eats Sagbo  
If Sagbo catches and eats Zinsou

#### 15. “Nuḍée kpeḍekpe trè dè jijo” (gbòn) from Afripercuss

Nuḍée kpeḍekpe trè dè jijo  
Ahàn we mi ná nu.  
Kpɔn! Soḍabì je kpɔn ene  
Mí na nu bo ayi na bòn!

Whatever happens  
We will drink!  
Look! Soḍabì<sup>18</sup> costs 100 francs  
We will drink until the morning!

#### 16. “Soḍabì ɔ ahàn dé we nyi à?” (gbòn), from Afripercuss

Soḍabì ɔ ahàn dé we nyi à?  
E nu ɔ,  
e no je nuḍé bló jí  
Bó no je ko ba kɔn nyi yɔkpɔvu le me ji.  
Soḍabì ɔ ahàn dé we nyi à?  
E nu ɔ,  
e no je nuḍé bló jí

Is Soḍabì<sup>19</sup> a good drink?  
When you drink it,  
you start doing foolish things  
And you start to throw sand over the children.  
Is Soḍabì a good drink?  
When you drink it,  
you start doing foolish things

#### 17. “A yi hwiḍée do nu mì ă” (gbòn) from Afripercuss

A yi hwiḍée do nu mì ă  
Vodún hù we a n gbɔje

You didn't ask me to protect you.  
If vodún kills you, it will serve you right!<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Zinsou and Sagbo are popular surnames in Benin

<sup>18</sup> A strong local alcoholic drink.

<sup>19</sup> Palm wine

Vodún hù we, Dan gaga hwedo hù we  
A na gbɔjɛ e.

If vodún kills you, if the rainbow serpent kills you  
That will teach you!

**18. E sɛ gblegble wɛ dɔ̀ we (gbòn)  
from Afripercuss**

E sɛ gblegble wɛ dɔ̀ we a ee  
Se gblegble wɛ dɔ̀ we  
Hwɛ na yi tòn jɛ zùngbonu  
Bo yi mɔ hla.  
Hla, sɛ gblegble wɛ dɔ̀ we

If your destiny is bad  
If your destiny is bad  
You will find yourself at the edge of the forest  
Facing the hyena.  
The hyena, you have a bad destiny.

**19. E dɔ̀ a nɔ sà bǒgbè do mi (ajà)  
from Afripercuss**

E dɔ̀ a nɔ sà bǒgbè do mi,  
A sɔ́ flín bǒ enɛ lé gbè tɔn à?  
A sa bǒ gbè do mi,  
E dɔ̀ a nɔ sà bǒgbè do mi  
A sɔ́ flín bǒ enɛ lé gbè tɔn à?

You say incantations against me,  
Do you remember their significance?  
You say incantations against me,  
Do you remember their significance?

O mɛdɛ lɛ na ja aximɛ ló cobo kú nyi  
axilixo  
O mɛdɛ lɛ na xwè glè mɛ ló cobo kú nyi  
goxɔnu.  
Mɛdɛ lɛ na dɔ̀ xwegbè bon a ji go dewun  
dewun bo kú

Some people go to the market and die on the  
way  
Some people go to the fields and die in front of  
their hut.  
Some people are at home, yet they die with a  
swollen stomach.

E dɔ̀ a nɔ sà bǒgbè do mi  
A sɔ́ flín bǒ enɛ lé gbè tɔn à?  
E dɔ̀ a nɔ sà bǒgbè do mi  
A sɔ́ flín bǒ enɛ lé gbè tɔn à?

You say incantations against me.  
Do you remember their significance?  
You say incantations against me.  
Do you remember their significance?

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<sup>20</sup> Literally: you will stay calm/rest.

20. “Jòhòn Huzuhuzu Ja”  
(agbocěbu) from Agbocɔdji

Jòhòn Huzuhuzu Ja eloő,  
vìnɔ ɛ nì sɛ vi ɔo,  
vìnɔ ɛ mí sɛ vido,

Ahwan gɔnu vìnɔ ɛ mí sɛ vù ɔo,  
Jòhòn Huzuhuzu Ja eloő,  
vìnɔ ɛ mí sɛ vi ɔò.

A violent wind is coming  
Mothers hide your children,  
mothers hide your children,

The war chief is coming  
A violent wind is coming  
Mothers hide your children.

## Other appropriated songs from churches

### 21. Gleta we gbɛ fí nyi (agbocěbu) MEA church, Cadjéhoun

Gleta we gbɛ fí nyi loooo<sup>21</sup>  
Axi jije wɛ ayihɔn eee lo nyi  
O mĩ die ma kǎ lɛ tuwun  
O hwenu dɛ wɛ gǎn naxo do

Enɛ wu nǎvi ce lɛ  
O mi bĩ bo nɔ gbě sisɔ  
Enɛ wu nǎvi ce lɛ  
Mĩ bĩ bo nɔ tǔ nu si se mɛ nu  
Gan ɔ xo ɔ mĩ na yi lɔn<sup>22</sup>.

Life down here<sup>23</sup>, is [like] a field  
The world is like a market which comes to life too  
And so, we do not know  
At what moment the hour will chime.<sup>24</sup>

That is why, my brothers [and sisters]<sup>25</sup>  
You must all be ready  
That is why, my brothers [and sisters]  
We must all be faithful so that  
When the hour chimes, we will go to Heaven.

#### Main section (soloist):

Axɔsu gbě dɔ tɔ ce  
Nyɛ wa bo dɔ kpoli jije  
Hwlɛngantɔ vivɛ na nyɛtɔn  
Un ko wa kpodo kpɛdidɔ kpó

Oxo gbe dokpo gee dɛ wɛ  
Nyɛ finlin b'a dǔ nɔ humi  
Vivɔ nu nú dé tɔn nyɔ hu  
Bĩ bɛ nu ɔ mi mǎ mɔ ǎ

Ekleziatu ta tɛnwě mɛ wɛ  
Oxixa e tɔn tantɔn wɛ dɔ xo ɔ

E wɛ nyɛ byɔ we dɔ  
Bo wan a mi vivɔ nu dagbě  
Bo ma lɔn gbě dɛ gbě dɛ nu  
O bĩbɛ nu cě wa nyɔ hú  
O vivɔnu o gigǔnɔ ce

Ay ixa yí satin ji ee

The king possesses the world<sup>26</sup>  
I have come to kneel down  
My Saviour is dear to me<sup>27</sup>  
I have come to give thanks.

It is only one word  
Which I remember and which frightens me:  
The end of a thing is worth more than  
Its beginning.<sup>28</sup>

It is in Ecclesiastes chapter seven  
Verse eight that this is said.

This is why I ask you  
To give me a good end  
Never let  
its<sup>29</sup> beginning be better  
Than the end, o my glorious God.

<sup>21</sup> The word *loooo* is a purely musical device with no meaning.

<sup>22</sup> On repeat, *lɔn* is replaced with *sexwe*. Both mean *heaven* or *paradise*.

<sup>23</sup> On Earth

<sup>24</sup> When we will die

<sup>25</sup> *Nǎvi* is not gender specific so can mean either *brother* or *sister*.

<sup>26</sup> *Possesses* or *(has) created*.

<sup>27</sup> Or *My precious Saviour*.

<sup>28</sup> Meaning I have to live a good life/grow in my faith so that the end is better.

<sup>29</sup> *Its* referring to *my life*.

## 22. O Jesu nyi sogangan, (agbocěbu) ADC Church Akɔgbato Cotonou

O Jesu nyi sogangan bo ɔo te  
Agɔ nu ma yi eee  
Atin e jlɔ xe eeee  
Ji we xe nɔ zɔnjɛ

Jesus is the unmoveable rock<sup>32</sup>  
Let me depart<sup>33</sup>  
The tree which the bird wants  
On it the bird will rest<sup>34</sup>

Jezu hwi we jlɔ mi do nu ɔe wutu  
O zinzan towe we nye kpɔn b'ejɛxa.  
Uwe nye ka kpoɔo yo towe nu.

Jesus, you please me because of something  
It is your conduct which is exemplary<sup>35</sup>  
That is why I am behind you.<sup>36</sup>

## 23. Wa yi dekwin towe (gbɔn) MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou

Wa yi dekwin towe  
Bókɔnɔ, wa yi dekwin towe  
Má gbɔjɛ  
Nye kó yi Jezu sè  
Bókɔnɔ, wa yi dekwin towe  
Má gbɔjɛ.

Come and take your palm nuts away  
Bókɔnɔ<sup>37</sup>, come and take your palm nuts  
So I can be in peace.<sup>38</sup>  
I already believe in Jesus  
Bókɔnɔ, come and take your palm nuts  
So I can be in peace.

Alɔ? Alɔ?<sup>30</sup>  
Jezu jɛ asi ce.  
Alɔ?  
Jezu ɔo asi ce.

Isn't it so? Isn't it so?  
Jesus is mine.  
Isn't it so?  
Jesus is mine.

## 24. Hwi ɔokponɔ we ɔó gbɛ (gbɔn) MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou

Hwi ɔokponɔ we ɔó gbɛ  
E jɛ we loɔ!  
Axɔsu jɛ we, gbɛɔotɔ.<sup>31</sup>

You are the only creator of the world,  
And that suits you.  
Being king suits you, creator.

<sup>30</sup> A deformation of the French word "alors"

<sup>31</sup> Gbɛɔotɔ literally means "life doctor".

<sup>32</sup> Sogangan = solid rock, boɔo te = which is standing

<sup>33</sup> ie let me go and follow him (Jesus)

<sup>34</sup> ie The bird will land on the tree which it wishes, therefore 'I' will follow Jesus if I want to.

<sup>35</sup> A good example to follow

<sup>36</sup> Following you



Hwi ɖokponɔ we ɖó gbɛ  
 Axɔsu jɛ we,  
 mɛɖɛe má mɔ do nu, gbɛɖotó.

You are the only creator of the world,  
 Being king suits you.  
 Nobody can understand [you], creator.

Atín kpo kan kpo nɔ mlá we, gbɛɖotó.  
 Nudidá bí nɔ mla we, gbɛɖotó.  
 Gbɔ kpo hàn kpo nɔ mlá we, gbɛɖotó.

Trees and vines praise you, creator.  
 All the creatures praise you, creator.  
 Sheep and pigs praise you, creator.

## 25. A ma sɛn Mawu hun gbò (gbòn) MEA Church, Cadjéhoun

Mɛ e má sɛm alunc eee  
 Yě ze yeděe nyi gbě  
 Gbɛɔ e mɛ má sɛn Jezu eee  
 E flu yeděe wɛ  
 Mawu ajalɔnɔ wɛ ɖo gbɛ lɔ  
 Fifón ɖo gbɛ lɔ kpo bí wɛ ɖò alɔtɔnmɛ  
 A ma sɛn Mawu hũn gbɔ  
 Mawu nyɔ  
 A ma sɛn Kristu hũn gbɔ  
 Mawu nyɔ  
 A ma sɛn Aklunc hũn gbɔ  
 Mawu nyɔ

Those who do not worship God  
 Are lost<sup>39</sup>  
 The person who does not worship Jesus  
 Wanders without purpose.  
 It is the all powerful God who created the world  
 Life and the world depend upon him<sup>40</sup>  
 If you don't worship God, too bad!<sup>41</sup>  
 God is good  
 If you don't worship Christ, too bad!  
 God is good  
 If you don't worship the Lord, too bad!  
 God is good

## 26. Atòn ɖò bu (agbocěbu) ADC Church, Togoudo

Atòn ɖò bu eeee  
 Nyɛ ɖò kpɛ do nu we  
 Atòn ɖò bu eeee  
 Nyɛ ɖò kpɛ do nu we

The Holy Trinity  
 I give thanks to you.  
 The Holy Trinity  
 I give thanks to you.

O mɛ wɛ kpɛ lɔ jɛ?  
 Jezu wɛ kpɛ lɔ jɛ.

Who is worthy of our thanks?  
 Jesus is worthy of our thanks.

<sup>37</sup> Priest of the goddess Fá (see ch.2)

<sup>38</sup> Or, so that I can breathe.

<sup>39</sup> Lit: are thrown away

<sup>40</sup> Lit: are in his hand

<sup>41</sup> Lit: That's your business

Nũ e a wa nu mi ɔ  
Bĩ wɛ klo.

What he has done for me  
Is a great thing.

Hwlɛnganzɔ e Jezu wa nu mi ɔ, e syɛn  
E kú do tá ce mɛ  
bó nɔ ɔ mi dɔ hwebinu,  
Bó lɛ d'akpa nu mi dɔ,  
Zaandé dìn mí na wa bo kpla mi yi lɔn  
eee!

The work of salvation Jesus came to do is great.<sup>42</sup>  
He died because of me  
and he protects me all the time.  
And he has promised me  
That he will come soon and take me to Heaven.

## 27. Nyɛ na mla eee (agbocěbu) Vɔgbana Baptist Church

Nyɛ na mla eee  
Gbɛdɔtɔ dɔ jixwe bon a do xo hwɛdɛ e.  
O tɔ ce wan nyinɔ,  
Hwi wɛ na nɔ mla eee.

I will praise  
The creator of Heaven with my hwɛdɛ rhythm.  
O my loving father  
It is you whom I worship.

Xo e dɔ han nɛ mɛ bɔ un dɔ mǎ lɛɛ ɔ  
Nũ e dɔ abɔjɪhũn mɛ bɔ hanjinu.  
Jezutɔ un wa xo nyi mǎ lɛɛ ɔ  
Ma nyɛ ka kpɔn, o kɛ mɛ,  
Nyɛ má mɔ nuɖɛɛ b'ɛ dagba bó hú o  
gbɛnu ce.  
E we dá awoji bo da adodo mɛ ɔ  
Gbɛnɔ wɛ bló bĩsesé  
Aya dɔkpo wɛ tiĩn bɔ nyɛ nado bɔ  
hwɛdɛhũn na bɛ.

This is what I want to say through this song:  
This is what the singer of Jesus praises wants  
to say with this rhythm of abɔjɪhũn.<sup>43</sup>  
When I consider the universe,  
I have seen nothing as great, which surpasses  
my creator.  
It is he who created the seas and the earth.  
The creator made everything in this world.  
There is one thing I will tell you before I  
begin playing the hwɛdɛ:

A gbɛ sinsɛn e kan we  
E nu a gbɛ sinsɛn e kan we  
A mɔ Jezu bo gbɛ sinsɛn e kan we bo jo  
do.

If you refuse<sup>44</sup> the religion,<sup>45</sup> too bad!  
You have found Jesus and you renounce the  
faith. Too bad for you. Leave it then!

<sup>42</sup> Lit: is strong.

<sup>43</sup> Abɔjɪhũn literally means: 'drum on the shoulder'

<sup>44</sup> Or turn away from.

<sup>45</sup> Christianity

**28. Nyi wε dɔ ajà xo wε (gbòn)**  
**MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou**

E dɔ nyi wε dɔ ajà xo wε bɔ  
Yě ka nɔ lɛ dɔ myɔ ja eee  
E dɔ nyi wε dɔ ajà xo wε bɔ  
Yě ka nɔ lɛ dɔ myɔ ja eee

I am playing the ajà  
And they say that fire is coming!  
I am playing the ajà  
And they say that fire is coming!

Fifanyɔ wε dɔ ajà xo wε bɔ yě ka nɔ dɔ  
ji:

It is Fifanyɔ who is playing the aja and they say:

Má kpón bó: wele iyeě  
Gbɛnɔ ko ja  
Wele aga  
Gbɛnɔ ko ja.

Look: Wele iyeě<sup>46</sup>  
The creator is already arriving  
Wele in Heaven  
The creator is already arriving.

Mí e má ɖuwe lɛ ɔ,  
Awo nu mi!  
Hwi mɛ e dɔ mɔ,  
Awo nu mi!

You have not danced,  
Awooo to you!<sup>47</sup>  
You who said that.  
Awooo to you!

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<sup>46</sup> An interjection with no actual meaning.

<sup>47</sup> Rough equivalent to 'boo' in English

**Adanhũn Songs by Edouard Ayékoro,**  
**UEEB Church, Hèvie, Cotonou**

**Adanhun (1) Vodún version:**

Adandozan gbe egbe a na nyo mi dje  
(x2)  
Adandozan eee  
Adandozan loooo  
Adandozan gbe egbe a na nyo mi dje  
(x2)

Adandozan<sup>49</sup>, you will know me today  
Adandozan eee  
Adandozan loooo<sup>50</sup>  
Adandozan, you will know me today

**Adanhun (1) Christian version:**

Jezu do gbe hwe yise a na mo hwe yise  
a na mo hwlengan yi (x2)  
Jezu do gbe. Mi wa mi kpa Aklun  
Jezu do gbe. Mi wa mi sen Aklun  
Jezu do gbe hwe yise a na mo hwe yise  
a na mo hwlengan yi (x2)

Jesus lives, if you accept him you will have  
salvation  
Jesus lives, come and worship him  
Jesus lives, come and celebrate him.  
Jesus lives, if you accept him you will have  
salvation

**Adanhun (2) Vodún version:**

Iyalode<sup>48</sup> looo  
Iyalodo aeee (x2)  
Iyalode ḍ hwɛgbe xo ma fa  
Iyalode ḍ hwɛgbe kpodo te

You, Iyalode  
You, Ilayode  
Ilayode said that the arguments would not be  
easy  
Ilayode said that arguments still happen

**Adanhun (2) Christian version:**

Jezu hwlɛn mi looo  
Jezu hwlɛn mi aeee

Jesus has set me free  
Jesus has set me free  
Jesus has set me free from the enemy

---

<sup>4848</sup> *Iyalode* is a vodún féticheuse responsible for family life. She is consulted regarding family issues, including marriage.

<sup>49</sup> Adandozan was King of Abomey from 1803 – 1819 (Segurola & Rassinoux, 2000), but here symbolizes a powerful person in general.

<sup>50</sup> 'eeee' and 'looo' are non-lexical interjections

Jezu hwɛn mi ɔ awovi sín alɔ mɛ  
Jezu hwɛn mi bɔ Satan nɔ yavi

Jesus has set me free and Satan is weeping

### Adanhun (3) Vodún version:

É mɔ nɔ wa mɔ na mi  
Tafɛce wɛ wa mɔ na mi  
Agoxwelele yě monɔ wa mɔ na mi  
Tafɛce wɛ wa mɔ na mi

Don't do that to me!  
My uncle did something to me  
I swear to you that they should do that  
My uncle did something to me

E jlɔ na ɔ gbɛ bo ku we  
E jlɔ na ɔ gbɛ bo ku we ɔ gbɛ hwɛnu  
O xwla nu w'e do xwlagbe  
Mɔ cɔn, mɔ cɔn, mɔ cɔn, agoxwelele.  
E mɔ nɔ wa mɔ na mi.

He wants to enjoy himself<sup>51</sup> until he dies  
He wants to enjoy himself until his day of death  
The Xwla<sup>52</sup> speak the xwla language  
I'm leaving, I swear  
Don't do that to me.

### Adanhun (3) Christian version

Aklunɔce wɛ yɔ mi  
Jezuce wɛ yɔ mi looo  
Mĩ kpa Mawu eeee

My saviour has called me  
My Jesus has called me  
Let us praise God

Aklunɔce wɛ yɔ mi  
Jezuce wɛ hwɛn mi gan  
Mĩ kpa Mawu eeee

My saviour has called me  
My Jesus has saved me and given me life  
Let us praise God

Mi wa mi kpa gbɛdotɔ eeee  
Mi wa mi kpa gbɛdotɔ do gbɛ nɔ eee  
Gbɛnɔ wɛ do akpagbɛ dɔ  
Elɔ, elɔ, elɔ.  
Mĩ kpa Mawu eeee.

Come and we will praise the Lord  
Come and we will praise the Lord and thank Him  
The Lord has promised  
This, this, this  
Let us praise God.

---

<sup>51</sup> ie in a debauched manner

<sup>52</sup> Full name: Xwlade Tɔfin, spoken in Ganvié, also in Grand-Popo



# **APPENDIX 2:**

## **SONG SCORES**





1. "Ya xo go" (hwede, vodún), Agbocodji, Cotonou

*Molto rubato* ↑

**Soloist**

Ya xo go, nu má m - la hũn Lɛ - gba Nyɛ - ni - ve Hun - nɛ - jo, xo

go nu má m - la hũn Lɛ - gba do Hwɛ - dɛ ce mɛ

**Choir**

Ya xo

Ya xo go, nu má m - la hũn

go, nu má m - la hun Lɛg - ba e - loo.

Lɛ - gba Az - ɔn - si bɔ'A - tak - pe - mi xo go nu má m - la hũn

Lɛ - gba do Hwɛ - dɛ ce mɛ

Ya xo go, nu má m - la hun

Lɛg - ba e - loo.

2. "Má wa mǎ ó, a na hù vodún hwε" (ajà, vodún), Afripercuss musicians

The musical score is written for a Soloist and a Choir in 4/4 time. The Soloist part is on the top staff, and the Choir part is on the bottom staff. The lyrics are in a mix of English and a local language.

**First System:**

Soloist: E dǒ: Má wa mǎ ó eee, a na hù vo - dún hwε!

Choir: Hùn - si dé má

**Second System:**

Soloist: E dǒ, má wa mǎ ó - eee, a na hù'a

Choir: wa'a na hù vo - dún hwε.

**Third System:**

Soloist: -hwan - jǒ hwε.

Choir: Hùn - si dé má wa'a na hù vo - dún hwε.

### 3. Un gbɛ nu we à?" (ajà, vodún), Afripercuss musicians

**Soloist**

Un gbɛ nu we à?

**Choir**

E - e - ɔ un

E ɔ: Un gbɛ nu we

gbɛ - - nu we à - eee -

à?

E - e - ɔ un gbɛ - - nu we à - eee

A - má - kan - bo - ɔ un - gbɛ - nu we à?

E - e

Un

- ɔ un gbɛ - - nu we à - eee -

gbɛ nu we à?

E - e - ɔ un gbɛ - - nu we à

eee -

4. "Landé na dǝ ǎ" (ajà, vodún), Afripercuss musicians

Fast

Nye sɔ we dǝ ɔ e, Lan - ɖe ná dǝ a - e - o Zin - sou w - li Sag - bo dǝ ɔ,

Sag - bo w - li Zin - sou dǝ ɔ ne Man - ta w - li Jawun - ta ne we hwe na b - ló

-hàn dǝ'a-yě - Eee O - hàn dǝ'ay-eee - Eee - a - -hèn A

-yì - dǝ hwe - dǝ dan - ba - ɖa - ba - ɖa dan má w - li Ja - wun

-ta u me we hwe na dǝ na?

5. "Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă" (hwεḑε, vodùn) from Dovi Dove

*Molto rubato*

Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă. ' Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na agbeta a-wo-yo a-ji.

Tɔ go-dwe mε-ḑée mɔ dò na ă - Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò nae a-gbe-ta a-wo-yo a-ji.

Tɔ go-dwe mε-ḑée mɔ dò na ă.

Sá-kpá-tá vo-dun ma nyi do ba nu ḑé. E ḑɔ, a

-vun - lε nɔ ba do tɔn. Mi ma na mɔ ε ce.

Tɔ go-dwe mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Xε-bio-so, a-gbe-dun ma nyi do ba nu ḑé. Cu-ku lε nɔ ba do tɔn. O

ma na mɔ ε ce. Tɔ go-dwe mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă Mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò nae a

-gbe-ta a-wo-yo a-ji. Tɔ go-dwe mε-ḑée nɔ mɔ dò na ă.

6. "O ká dada tòn ee" (vodún, hwεδε), Afripercuss Musicians

O ká da - da tòn eee d'a - lɔ nɔ jε - go ă eee O

ka da - da tòn e a - lɔ kwε nɔ jε go ă eeee! O

ká da - da tòn eee d'a - lɔ nɔ jε - go ă eee O

ka da - da tòn e a - lɔ kwε nɔ jε go ă eeee! a - lɔ e

wa dăn. A - lɔ wa dăn, nɔ só zò ă a - lɔ kwε

wa dăn. A - lɔ wa dăn, nɔ só zò ă, o wa

mă, bo só zò ɔ má zo'a mε we. A ka da - da tòn e, d'a

-lɔ nɔ jε - go ă eee!

7. "Ayi xa jε yi satin ji ee" (agbocěbu) MEA Church, Cajěhoun, Cotonou

A - yi xa jε yi sa - tin j'ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loooo

O

mi fin - li - n hwlen gan zɔ sɛ - do O - gan ba dɛ wɛ yě ka ze dɔ xo je - su

A - yi xa jε yi sa - tin ji ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loooo

ce!

O

mi fin - li - n hwlen gan zɔ sɛ - do O - gan ba dɛ wɛ yě ka ze dɔ ta - tɔn lɛ

A - yi xa jε yi sa - tin j'ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loooo

mɛ'eeee

mi fin - li - n hwlen gan zɔ sɛ - do O - hun - jɛn dɛ wɛ yě ka

A - yi xa jε yi sa - tin j'ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loo

hwe - da lɔk - wɛ tɔn mɛ.

Mi fin - li - n hwɛn gan zɔ sɛ - do O - hun - jɛn dɛ wɛ yě ka xwe - do a - fɔk - pa

A - yi xa jε yi sa - tin j'ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loo

mɛ.

Mi fin - li - n hwɛn gan

A - yi

zɔ sɛ - do O - gan - hwan dɛ wɛ yě ka sɔ ε da - ha - ha mɛ'eee

xa jε yi sa - tin j'ee, A - zɔn hɛn gbɔ un mɔ loo



# 8. "Mi wa mĩ xwedo Jezu" (agbocěbu), Abomey Baptist Church

Soloist

Mi we, mĩ xwe - do Je - zu, O mi wa mi na dǝ gbe - xo

Choir

Mε e hεn my - ɔ e nɔ bu ǎ, Mε e'mlε a - li ɔa - gbe'e, nɔ bu ǎ

A - klu nɔ - vi do - do lε wε nyi zo - gbεn

Mi wa mi xwe - do nu - gbo.

Lo - bó na hεn We - zi - za wa, Gbε - ɔo - tɔ ví do - do lε wε nyi jε

Bo na h'en vi - vi lɔ wa. A - klu nɔ - vi do - do lε wε a - tin

Lo - bó na hεn sin - s'en lɔ wa. Gbε - ɔo - tɔ ví do - do lε wε nyi tɔ

Bo na h'en fi - fa ɔ wa.

mɛ e hɛn m - ɔ, e nɔ bu ă

Mɛ e ml'a - li - 'da - gbé nɔ bu ă Mi wa mi xwe - do nu - gbo.

Mi we, mĩ xw - do Je - zu, O mi wa mi na ɔ gbe - xo

Mɛ e hɛn mɔ - e nɔ bu ă,

Mɛ e' mlɛ a - li ɔa - gbe'e, nɔ bu ă Mi wa mi xwe - do nu - gbo.

9. "Mi xo Asogwe" (Agbocebu) ADC Church Akogbato

Soloist

Mi xo'a - so - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce do gbe han me

Choir

Mi

Ooo, mi

xo'a - so - gwe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce - loo

xo'a - so - gwe ne ma m - l'A - xo - si o do gbe han me

Mi

O Je - zu ce

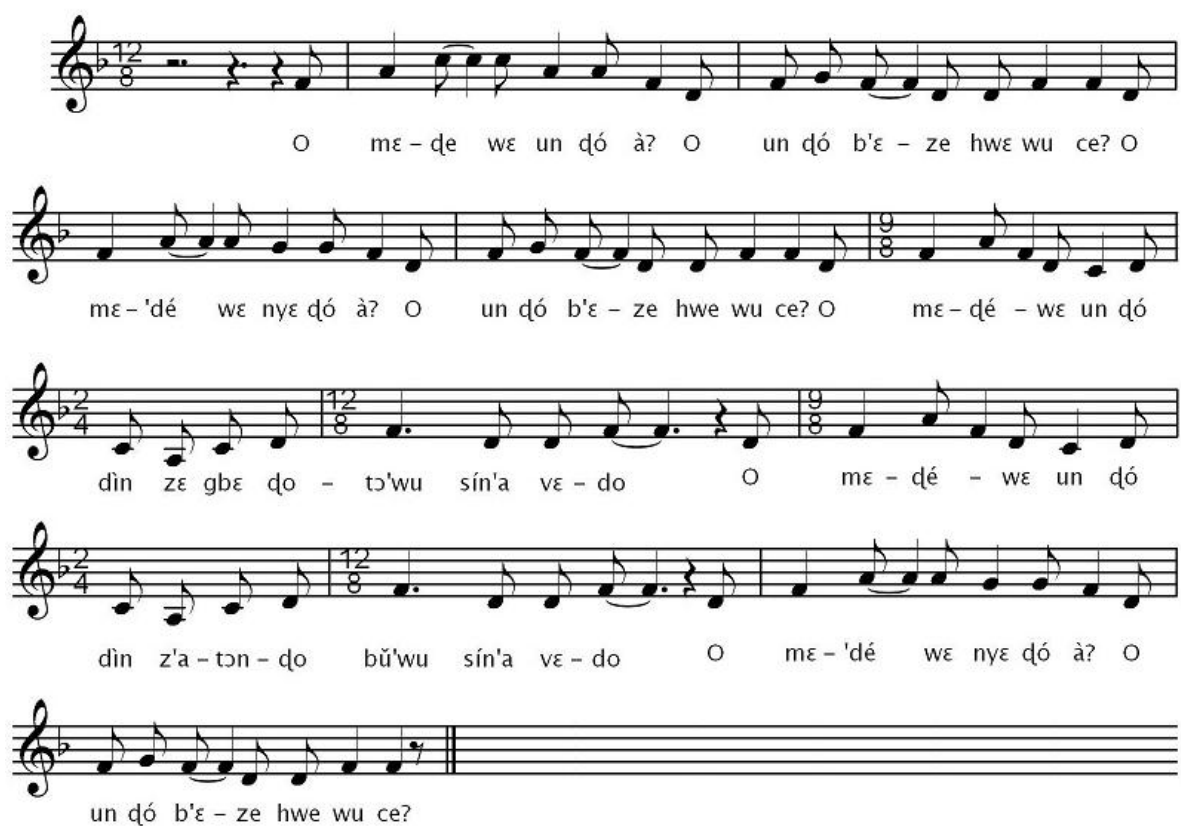
xo'a - so - gbe nu ma m - la Je - zu ce - looo!

A - k - lu - no ce

Hwi we hun Se - xwe hoh me

Hwi we hun Se - xwe hoh me

10. "Mě un dǒ b'ě z'ě hw'e wu?" (ajà), Vɔgbana Baptist Church



O mɛ - dɛ wɛ un dǒ à? O un dǒ b'ě - ze hwɛ wu ce? O

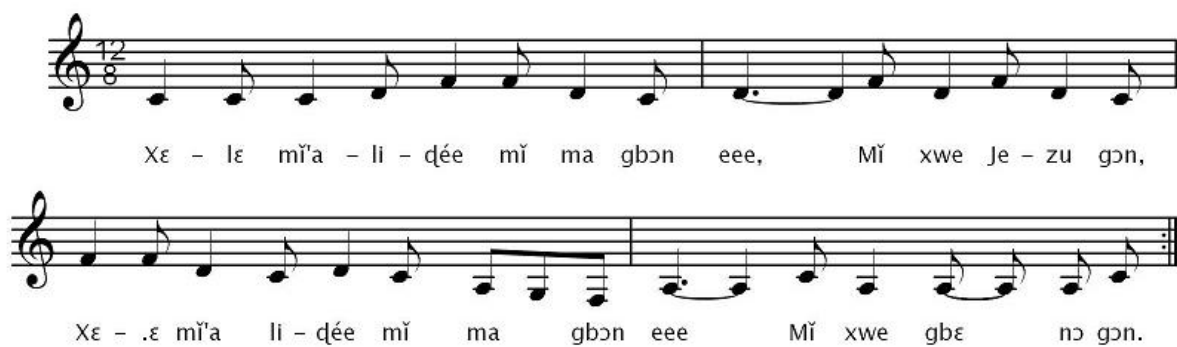
mɛ - 'dé wɛ nyɛ dǒ à? O un dǒ b'ě - ze hwɛ wu ce? O mɛ - dé - wɛ un dǒ

din zɛ gbɛ dǒ - tɔ'wu sín'a vɛ - do O mɛ - dé - wɛ un dǒ

din z'a - tɔn - dǒ bú'wu sín'a vɛ - do O mɛ - 'dé wɛ nyɛ dǒ à? O

un dǒ b'ě - ze hwɛ wu ce?

11. "Xɛɛ mǐ aliɖee mǐ ma gbɔn" (ajà), MEF Church, Sɔnicɔg (words by Victorien)



Xɛ - lɛ mǐ'a - li - dɛɛ mǐ ma gbɔn eee, Mǐ xwe Je - zu gbɔn,

Xɛ - .ɛ mǐ'a li - dɛɛ mǐ ma gbɔn eee Mǐ xwe gbɛ nɔ gbɔn.

12. Hwɛdɛ song, "Gigo lɔ" (hwɛdɛ), MEA Church, Cadjéhoun, Cotonou

Gi - go lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cy - ɛ dɛ looo Gi - go  
 lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo Cy - ɛ dɛ Gi - go  
 lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo cy - ɛ dɛ looo Gi - go  
 lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo Cy - ɛ dɛ Gbɛ - nɔ wɛ  
 jɛ gbɛ nɔ wɛ jɛ bɔ mi na kpa Gbɛ - nɔ wɛ  
 jɛ gbɛ nɔ wɛ jɛ bɔ mi na kpa Hwlɛn gan tɔ Je  
 -zu, e wɛ ze hun - tɔn bo do xɔ'a - li - dɔn ce, Gi - go  
 lɔ nyɛ mɔ nɔ kpa nu bo Cy - ɛ dɛ



**APPENDIX 3:**

**INTERVAL SUCCESSION GRIDS  
FOR THE 12 SONGS ANALYSED**

# 1. “Ya xo go” (vodún), Agbocěbu

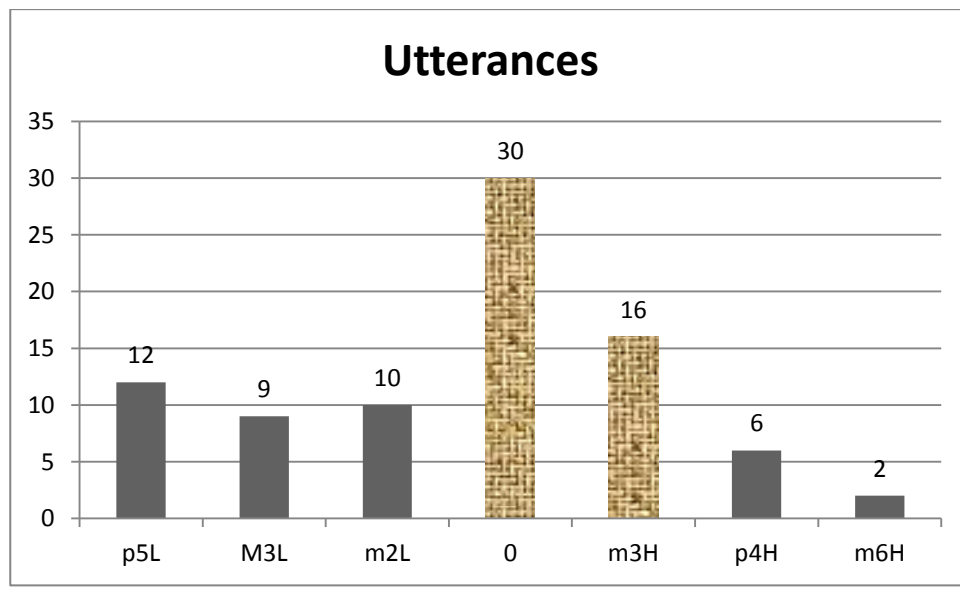
## Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		A	C	D	E	G	A	C	
		p5L	M3L	M2L	0	m3H	p4H	p5H	End
C	m6H						2		
A	p4H					2	2	2	
G	m3H				11	(1)1	2		1
E	0		5	8	6	11			
D	M2L		(1)3		6				
C	M3L	2			7				
A	p5L	8 (2)		2					
	Start					1			

Most Flexible notes: 0 (6) and m3H(6)





## 2. “Má wa mǎ ó” (vodún) Ajà

### Pitch Succession:

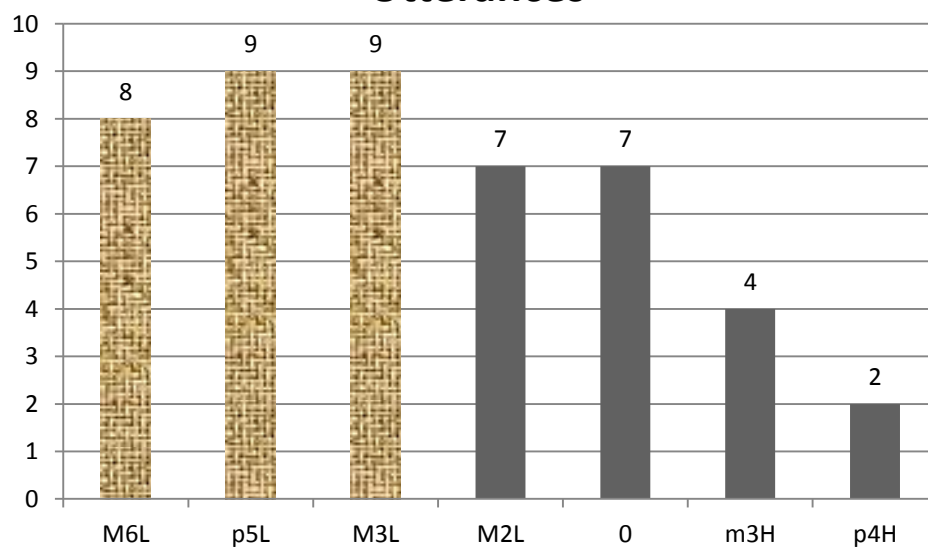
Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		D	E	G	A	B	D	E	
		M6L	p5L	M3L	M2L	0	m3H	p4H	End
E	p4H					1	1		
D	m3H					3		1	
B	0			1	2	2	1	1	
A	M2L			3	2		2		
G	M3L	3	4	1	1				
E	p5L	3	2	(1)2	(1)				
D	M6L	3	2	1	(1)				1
	Start					1			

Most Flexible notes: M3L (7) and 0 (7)

### Utterances



### 3. “Un gbε nũ we à?” (vodún), Ajà

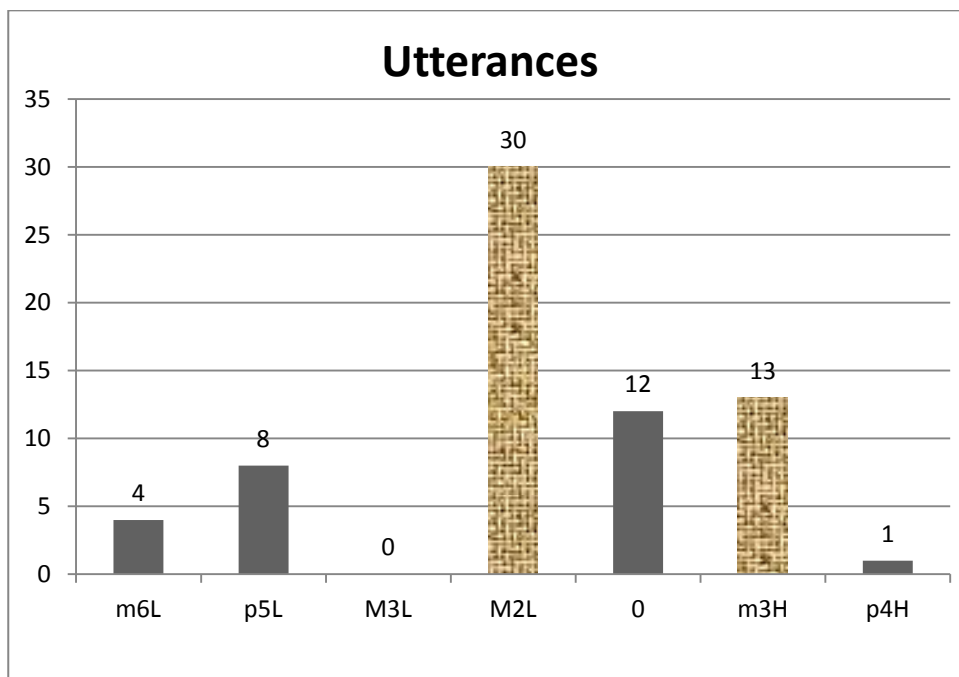
#### Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		C	D	–	G	A	C	D	
		m6L	p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	End
D	p4H						1		
C	m3H				10		2	1	
A	0				8		4		
G	m2L		7		6(2)	8	5(1)		1
–	M3L								
D	p5L	4				(4)			
C	m6L				4				
	Start				1				

Most Flexible notes: M2L (6) and m3H (5)



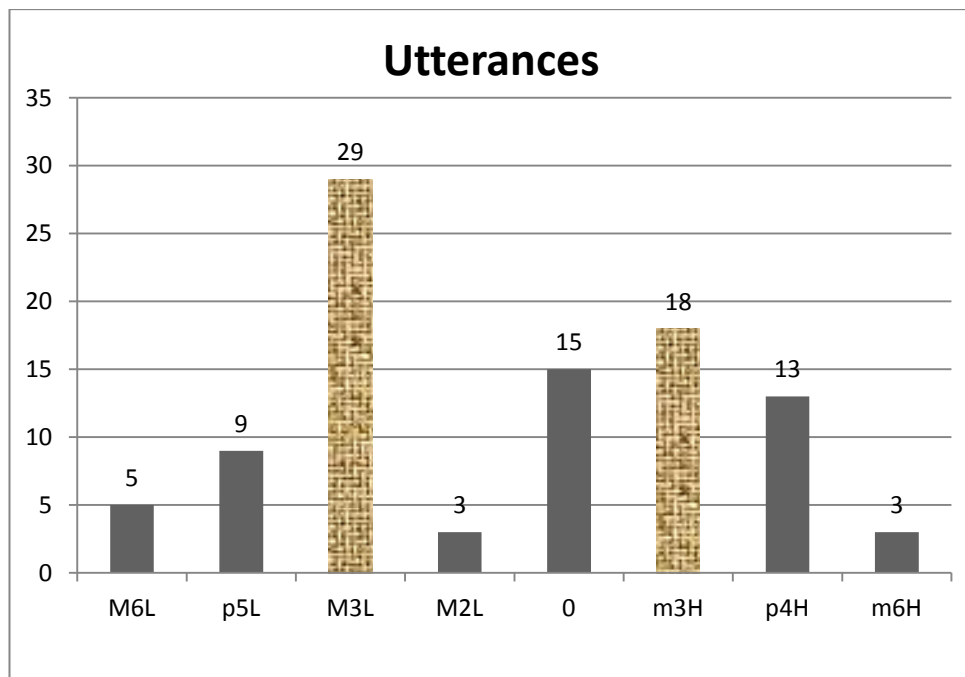
#### 4. “Landé na dǝ ă” (vodún), Ajà

##### Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

		C	D	F	G	A	C	D	F	
		M6L	p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	End
Preceding Pitch	F	m6H						2	1	
	D	p4H				1	7	3	2	
	C	m3H				8	3	7		
	A	0		5	2	2	6			
	G	m2L		2		1				
	F	M3L		7	14(1)	1	3	(1)1		1
	D	p5L	5		4					
	C	M6L		3	2					
		Start		1						

Most Flexible notes: M3L (8) and 0 (7)

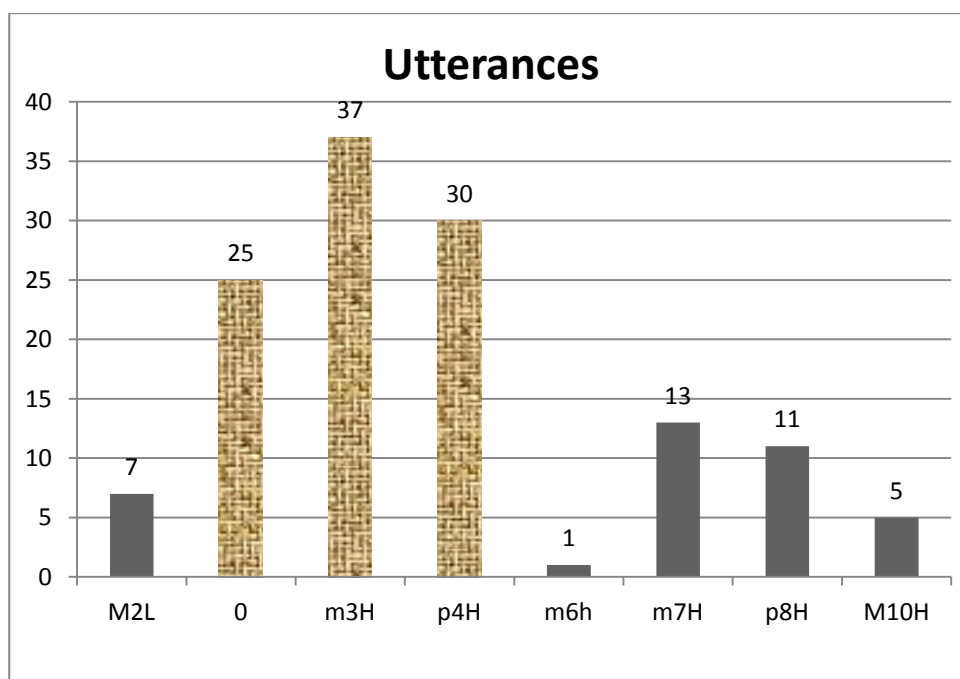


## 5. “Mεdée nɔ mɔ dò na ǎ” (vodún), Hwεdε

### Pitch Succession:

		Following pitch								
		C	D	F	G	Bb	C	D	F	
		M2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	m7H	p8H	M10H	End
Preceding Pitch	F	M10H						5		
	D	p8H					7		4	
	C	m7H			4	9				
	Bb	m6h			1					
	G	p4H		4	7	8	1	6	(2)2	
	F	m3H	(3)	9	15	8(1)		1		
	D	0	1(1)	9	9(1)	(2)		(1)1		
	C	M2L	(1)	4		2				
	Start		1							

Most Flexible notes: m3H(8) and p4H(9)

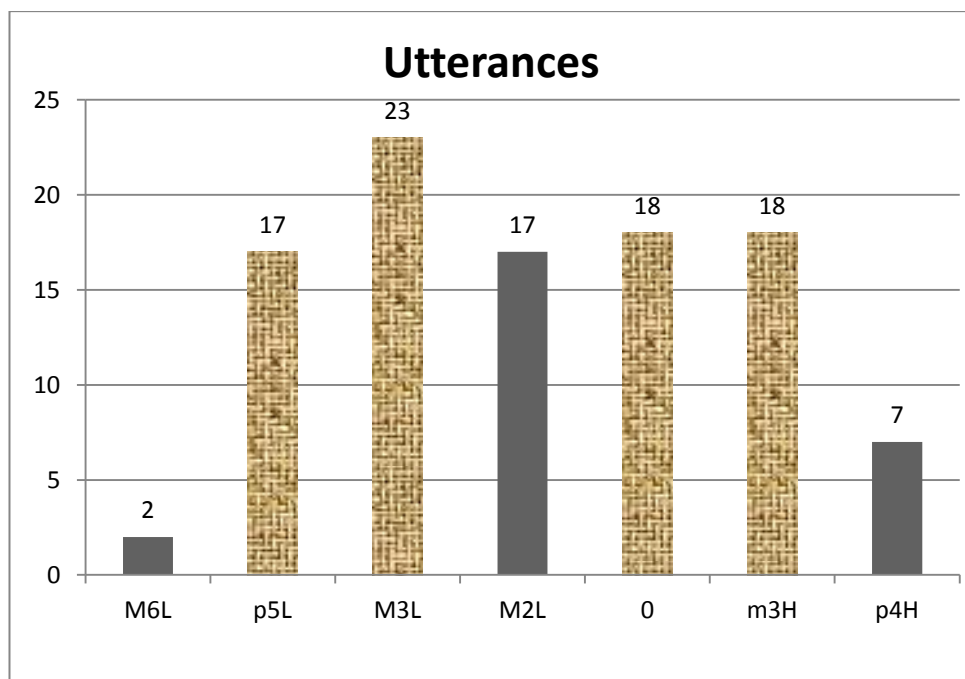


## 6. “O ká dada tòn eee” (vodún), hwεdε

### Pitch Succession:

		Following pitch							
		B	C#	E	F#	G#	B	C#	
		M6L	p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	End
Preceding Pitch	C#	p4H				2	3	2	
	B	m3H			4	10	4		
	G#	0	1	8			4	5	
	F#	m2L		(2)1	6	2	5	1	
	E	M3L		5	9	3	4	2	
	C#	p5L		8	6	3			
	B	M6L	1	1					
		Start			1				

Most Flexible notes: 0 (8) and M2L (7)



## 7. “Ayi xa je satin je ee” (church), agbocěbu

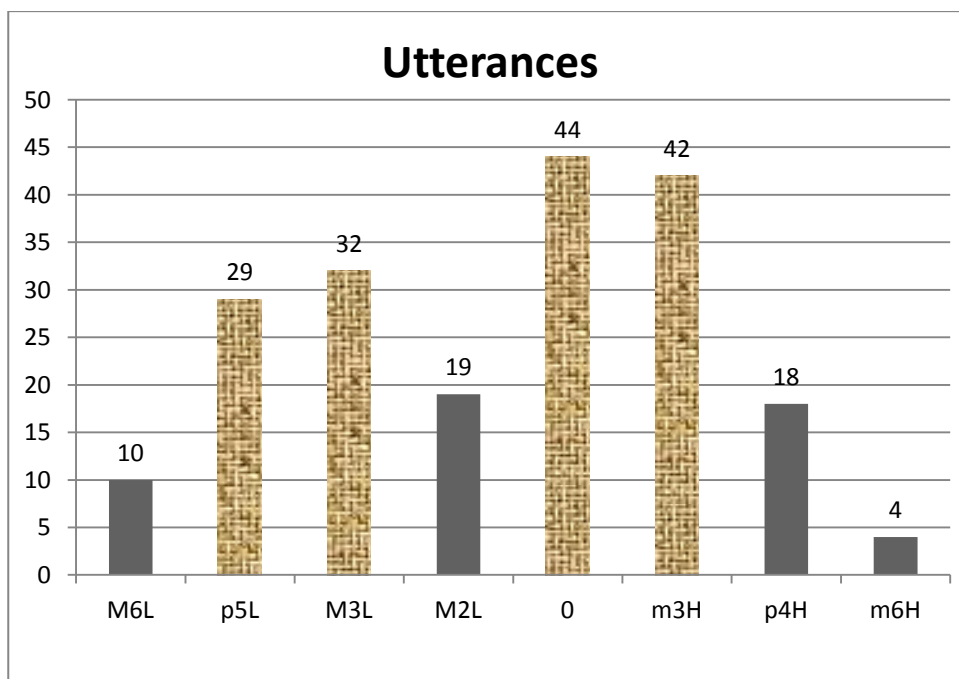
### Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		G	A	C	D	E	G	A	C	
		M6L	p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	End
C	m6H							2	2	
A	p4H						13	3	2	
G	m3H					18	17	7		
E	0			17		10	10	7		
D	m2L				12	7				
C	M3L		10	11		7(3)				1
A	p5L	10	7	6	6					
G	M6L		5(5)							
	Start		1				2			

Most Flexible notes: 0 (6) and p5L (6)



## 8. “Mi we mě xwedo Jezu” (church), agbocěbu

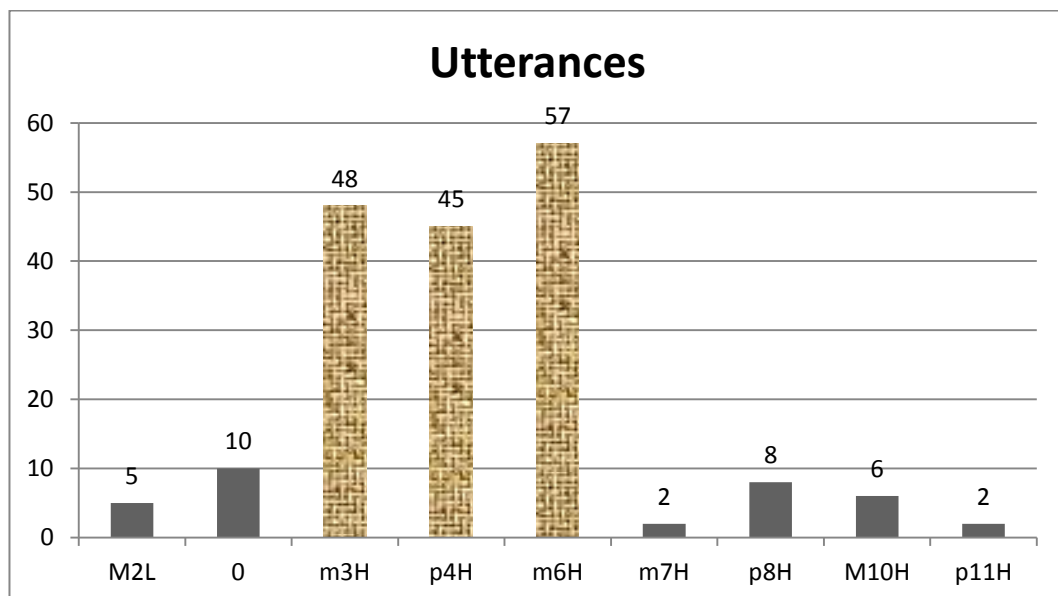
### Pitch Succession:

#### Following pitch

#### Preceding Pitch

		Eb	G	Bb	C	Eb	F	G	Bb	C	
		M2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	m7H	p8H	M10H	p11H	End
C	p11H								2		
Bb	M10H							4		2	
G	p8H					8					
F	m7H					2					
Eb	m6H			2	22	23	2	4	2(2)		
C	p4H			17	8	20					
Bb	m3H		5(11).	13(1)	10(7)	(1)					
G	0	1	2	5		2					
Eb	M2L	(2)1	2								
	Start					2					

Most Flexible notes: m6H (11) and m3H(6)



## 9. “Mi xo Asɔgwe” (church), agbocěbu

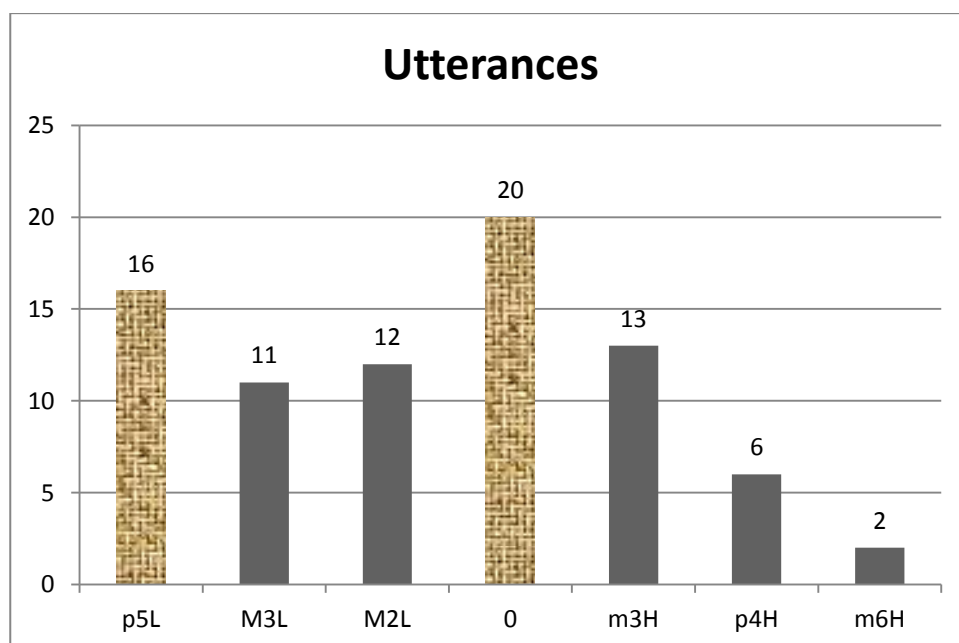
### Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		F#	A	B	C#	E	F#	A	
		p5L	M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	End
A	m6H						2		
F#	p4H					2	2	2	
E	m3H		(1)		7(1)	2	2		
C#	0	2	2	5	4	7			
B	M2L		4	4	4				
A	M3L	6	2		3				
F#	p5L	5(3)	(2)	4	1				1
	Start					1			

Most Flexible notes: M3L (6) and 0 (8)



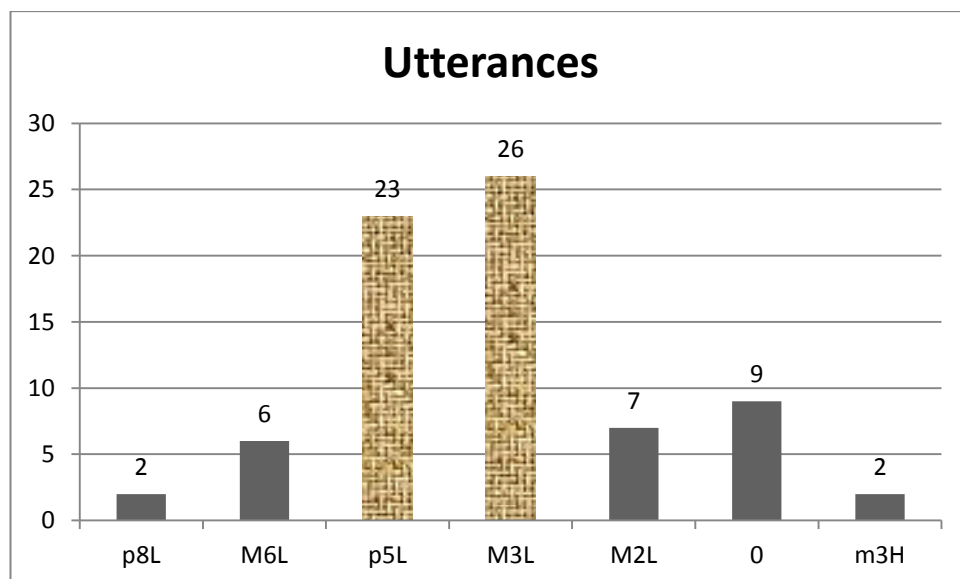


# 10. “Mě un dǒ b’ε z’e hw’e wu?” (church), Ajà

## Pitch Succession:

		Following pitch							
		A	C	D	F	G	A	C	
		p8L	M6L	p5L	M3L	M2L	0	m3H	End
Preceding Pitch	C	m3H					1	1	
	A	0			3	2	3	1	
	G	M2L			5	2			
	F	M3L		14	3	3	5		1
	D	p5L		4	5	14			
	C	M6L	2		4				
	A	p8L		2					
		Start			1				

Most Flexible notes: M3L(6), and 0(5)



# 11. “Xele mĩ aliqée mĩ ma gbɔn” (church), Ajà

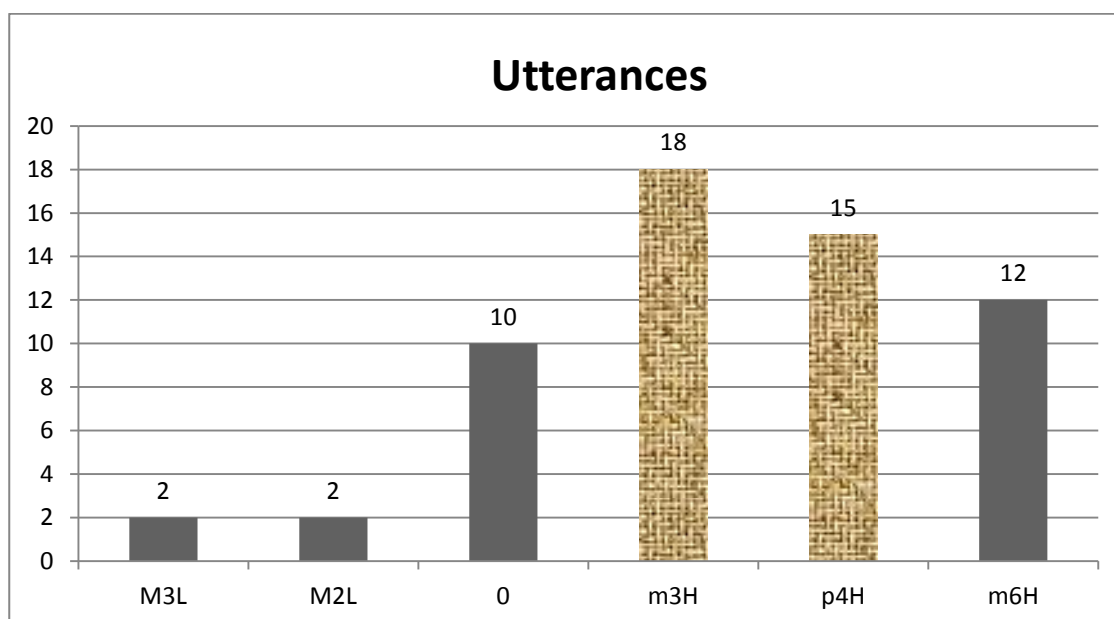
## Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		F	G	A	C	D	F	
		M3L	m2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	End
F	m6H					8	4	
D	p4H				8		6	
C	m3H			4	5	6	(2)	1
A	0		2	4	4			
G	m2L	2						
F	M3L			2				
	Start				1			

Most Flexible notes: m3H (5), 0 (4) and p4H(4)



## 12. “Gigo lɔ” (church), Hwɛdɛ

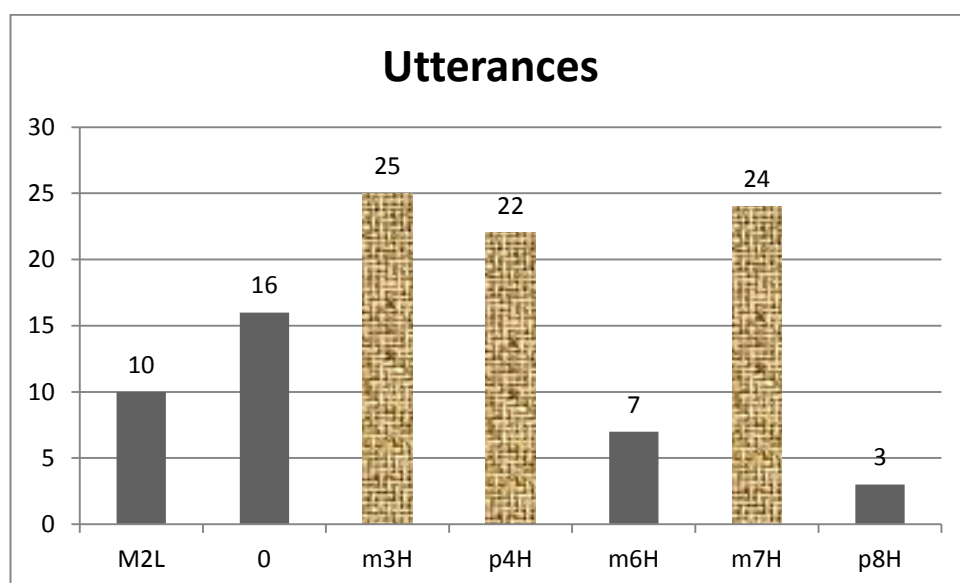
### Pitch Succession:

Following pitch

Preceding  
Pitch

		Ab	Bb	C	Eb	F	Ab	Bb	C	
		M3L	M2L	0	m3H	p4H	m6H	m7H	p8H	End
C	p8H						3			
Bb	m7H		1		1	4		15(1)	2	
Ab	m6H					3	1	3		
F	p4H			2	5	9	3	2	1	
Eb	m3H			5	12	8				
C	0	3	3	6	4					
Bb	M2L		6		1			1		1
Ab	M3L			3						
	Start		1							

Most Flexible notes: p4H (8) and m7H (7)



**NB The Following Interview Transcripts (pp.361–542) are not available in the on–line version of the thesis:**

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Augustin and Abel, (ADC Church, Akɔgbatɔ)	379
Koffi, ASPAM (Association pour le Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Artistique et Culturel)	385
Anagonu Vodjo (Sákpatási)	400
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Didier Adjalian (Baptist pastor, former vodún adept)	409
Augustin Sossa (National Pastor, MEF Church)	418
Pastor Bossou Benoît and Emmanuel Akpan (Founder of MEA Church & a musical director)	424
Emmanuel Akpan (Musical director, MEA Church, Agɔntikon)	428
Theodore Houngbédji (Co–founder of ADC Church and former adept of <i>Dàn</i> )	432
Michel Dossou (founder of the EEU Church)	443
David Mensah (National Pastor, Assemblies of God Church)	455
Vi–Phint (Secular musician who used vodún genres)	459
Seraphin Lokono (National Pastor, Baptist Church)	469
Victorien (Musical director, MEF Church Sɔnicɔg)	475
Dorothé (Christian musician) and his music group	477
Pasteur Cheton and Ange (Pastor at MIERS Church, Akpakpa & musical director).	483
Anne–Marie Toyissé (Christian artist, daughter of a vodúnsi)	492
‘King’ Matthias (member of the Royal Family of Abomey)	500
Pastor Robert Foley with Edouard Ayékoro (UEEB Pastor and musical director)	503
Edouard Ayékoro (UEEB Hevie, Musical Director and composer)	515
Vɔgbana Musicians (various, from the Baptist Church in Vɔgbana)	519
Guy Xuǹ (Son of former vodún chief of Benin).	520