

Will Missionaries Destroy Haitian Religion?

Ishmael Reed interviews Boadiba

Ishmael Reed: How did you feel living with that python for a month?

Boadiba: Well, now the boy, my housemate, decided to close the snake's tank because the snake used to get out and just chill in the room, but after he came back, she ended up doing the same thing to him that she had done to me. Remember she kind of struck out at me? So the boy told me, "I think Dusa is having a midlife crisis," and I say "Why?" and he explains, "You know that thing she did to you? I saw from the corner of my eye that she kind of did that to me too and when I looked, she was all looking at me but not doing anything, but I think she did it to me." I said, "If you think she did it to you and you saw it from the corner of your eye, then yes she did do it to you." So now he's shut the tank up and she can't get out anymore and I kind of feel bad for her.

Ishmael Reed: You were there for a month with that snake alone.

Boadiba: Yeah, and I was giving her water, changing the water, cleaning the bowl. I was respectful, not touching her or anything, but it was cool. After she almost bit my face but didn't, I gave her an egg on a pretty white plate; it's the traditional offering.

Ishmael Reed: But did that snake get out into the neighborhood?

Boadiba: No, it looked out the window and saw all the green leaves down there, so it let itself fall on the plants, from the upstairs window. The boy was sleeping, and my neighbor saw a squirrel being really upset and looking down from the fence and clucking in alarm and then my neighbor's cat was also frozen in place looking too, so my neighbor went to see what was happening and she saw the snake, Dusa, but she didn't know the snake lived there. So she was shocked, "Oh my God a huge snake!" She called me up and I said, "Oh, it's my housemate's pet." So then they woke the boy up and he came to get the snake.

Ishmael Reed: I bet that scared her. What is the significance of the python in Haitian religion?

Boadiba: I think probably the people who particularly honor Danmbala Wedo, who is also called the snake Spirit, and some people who have a temple or Spirit house at their house sometimes keep a boa or python, a really big snake. They usually let it be in or around the habitation and the snake will eat the rats, doves, eggs, fruit of the place and whatever the people of the region offer it.

Ishmael Reed: Do they choose Danmbala or does Danmbala choose them?

Boadiba: In my experience the Spirits come to you in your dreams, but I think everybody might have their own way of hearing, seeing, smelling, feeling Spirit. I also think everyone must have Danmbala because he is the father of all the Spirits. He's the Creative Energy. You could see our Milky Way as a huge snake in the cosmos, our atomic makeup originating from its stars, the double helix of our D.N.A. as the intertwined snakes, Danmbala with his wife Ayida Wedo.

Ishmael Reed: What part of Africa does Danballa come from?

Boadiba: I can't remember. Possibly from Dahomey.

Ishmael Reed: Yup I think you're right because the women people call Mino had a connection with Danmbala. They wouldn't sleep with a man, but they would have Danmbala in bed with them. I wrote a poem that appears on Yosvany Terry's CD, "New Throned King," which was a finalist for an Emmy. His family lives in the area of Cuba where the people from Dahomey settled. During my research I discovered the Mino women's fondness for the python. Mino women are popularly known as "Amazons." According to Yoruba tradition, these women invaded Nigeria captured and sold slaves. They were originally the bodyguards of the King, but evolved into a fierce fighting force. They defeated the French on the battlefield (see *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey* by Stanley B. Alpern, 2nd Edition).

Boadiba: My first encounter with Danmbala was when I was a kid and I didn't even know any of that stuff. I was not interested in religion. But I used to like to get out of my room at night and go walking by myself up the hill where there was a hotel with a pool, so I'd be in my pajamas but I'd jump in the pool and swim. Nobody would be around and when I left, by the time I walked back to my house, my pajamas would be dry. That's how hot it was.

Ishmael Reed: Was this in Pétion-Ville?

Boadiba: That was between Pétion-Ville and Bourdon. It was on the road to Pétion-Ville; it was a kind of a small mountain that you went up from the road and that's where we lived.

Ishmael Reed: Was that the Villa Creole?

Boadiba: No, but like the Villa, it was a family hotel at the top of the hill.

Ishmael Reed: Where'd you learn all this stuff about Haitian religion? You know a whole lot.

Boadiba: Well, I know from talking to people who know more and later much later

from reading books that confirm what I had intuited. I think I started knowing in my teens from the lifelong desire to be close to nature, and my connection to animals. Then in my twenties, I met this Vodou priest who was also a famous painter. His name is Andre Pierre (*Note: Paintings by Andre Pierre appear on the cover of this issue*). He became kind of my spiritual father who provoked many new trains of thought, many questions that contributed to my developing equilibrium since I was a very disturbed young woman in that I didn't believe in anything. I didn't accept any religion, but I was still really indignant at the way Vodou was being treated as if it was so different from the other religions; while for me spirituality was slowly beginning to emerge as our birthright as humans, still I was suspicious of organized religions.

Ishmael Reed: Who was treating it that way?

Boadiba: The society people and all the other Christian converts... They were always ashamed of Vodou. They always said that it was devil worship and I was saying to myself, "No, it's just the same God, for all the religions it's the same God so there shouldn't be any religious wars. That's what I believed...."

Ishmael Reed: Were these Catholics?

Boadiba: Yeah. Catholics, Protestants, and now Muslims. Everybody. They've always equated Vodou with Satanism.

Ishmael Reed: That's what the Puritans said about the Native American religions. Devil worship.

Boadiba: Yeah, it's like "other people" all practice devil worship, so I kept thinking that when the Vodouists say "Bon Dye" the Good God, they do not mean the Devil because they have a different word for Devil. They don't call the Devil the Good God.

Ishmael Reed: Eshu. So isn't Eshu considered the Devil by the Catholics?

Boadiba: I don't know what the Catholic hierarchy thinks, I suspect they know damn well Good God doesn't mean Devil, but I know that their converts think that all of Vodou is devilish. They don't know enough to realize that in the prayer that starts every Vodou service, the first Spirit that's called down that opens up the ceremony before the drums even begin, that prayer says: "Lapriyè n ape lapriyè... twa Patè, twa Ave Maria... je crois en Dieu ki ba nou lavi a... N ape lapriyè lapriyè pou Ginen yo." meaning "Praying we are praying... three Our Fathers, three Ave Marias... I believe in God who gives us life... We are praying, praying for the Spirits." Yeah, I believe in God who gave us life. They are praying to God for the Spirits who are manifestations of God, the ones who help us in this plane of existence

where we are now. Because Vodou does believe in many planes of existence like parallel universes; all this quantum theory thing, that's part of Vodou.

Ishmael Reed: When they say Maria they're talking about Erzulie, right?

Boadiba: Yeah, but they're also talking about the Virgin Mary who is one of the avatars of Èzili, a later human incarnation...

Ishmael Reed: What do you mean?

Boadiba: I mean the Eternal Feminine is a divine aspect, right, a principle, a force. Yeah and the principle of Love, Èzili, that's just one of the faces of this Eternal Feminine, right? She's the virgin, a word which came into use much later to describe Mary, the original word, before the Latin translation, being: unmarried woman. She's the archetype of the Free Woman, she's the Mother, she's the Crone. So she is all three manifestations, the three ages of us. The Spirits all have many aspects. They exist on a continuum and are all manifestations of the divine power which cannot be contained, but they can and they do meet us on this plane in which we're living and this is how God meets us on this plane. They are manifestations of God, part of creation, and Vodouists call the Spirits Angels, Saints, Disciples, Guardians, Guides...

Ishmael Reed: What about Loas?

Boadiba: Also Loas. This word means Spirit in I don't know which African language. They are also called the Invisibles, the Mysteries...

Ishmael Reed: How many are there?

Boadiba: Too many to name.

Ishmael Reed: About four hundred, five hundred?

Boadiba: No that's just finite but God is infinite. Infinite manifestation of Divine Power. This is why in the Jewish Religion God is a plural word, the Elohim...

Ishmael Reed: So what happened? How is the spirit created?

Boadiba: The same way we all are. Mystery we endeavor to comprehend. You know, I read this book by a woman named Deita (Mercedes Foucard Guignard) and it's the most beautiful of the books on Vodou mythology. It addresses all these questions. It's called *La Legende des Loas du Vodou Haitien*, or in English, *The Legend of the Loas of Haitian*

Vodou, and I translated that book. It's about 400 pages. It took me years, during weekends and holidays.

Ishmael Reed: When was it published?

Boadiba: In the eighties? I can't remember when the first edition was published. (*See Boadiba's follow-up at the end of this interview for further information.*)

Ishmael Reed: Was it published in English?

Boadiba: It was published in French and I translated it into English.

Ishmael Reed: Where is that translation?

Boadiba: I have it all on CDs. I translated it orally, so I didn't write it down, but I need to transcribe it and I'm a slow typist. I had a verbal agreement with Deita to do it this way to make my work go faster and she was supposed to have it transcribed but she died before that happened. It's the only book of its kind.

Ishmael Reed: You know, we've talked about the Spirit Bridgit. She appears in my novel.

Boadiba: The granny? Yeah, Baron Samedi's wife.

Ishmael Reed: The reviewers and endorsers of my novel *Conjugating Hindi* tended to be Indian and Pakistani.

Boadiba: Yeah, there's still a lot of misunderstanding about us children of Guinea [Editor's note: Vodouists often refer to "Guinea" as the residence of the Spirits. It is not a precise geographical location], and there are so many dimensions to that religion, that way of life, that philosophy, that system of medicine, of mental and physical health. There's so much, so many levels to it.

Ishmael Reed: Well, there's a revival here in the United States. You know, we published a book called *Hoodoo Medicine* by Faith Mitchell in the 1970s. She said all of a sudden there's a run on that book and people are calling themselves Root Doctors and stuff. What do you think?

Boadiba: Yeah, I know some young White boys who became Vodou priests, and also a young African American dancer who became a priestess. They went to Haiti to get initiated and rise up the levels of knowledge. Now they live in New Orleans, in New York, in Oakland or wherever they live, and they practice...I do love to think that some of them might be children of Christian missionaries...

Ishmael Reed: Are there any other White Spirits outside of Charlotte and Bridget? Bridget's got an Irish connection, right? Because Bridget is Catholic.

Boadiba: Yeah, Brijit, the granny, but I don't know Charlotte. I thought the White connection was a Viking connection. It's probably all the same; European or African travelers throughout history and even pre-history. I think the wrecked ships of ancient Vikings, who did trade with Africans, washed up on the beaches, and the Africans finding the figurehead that was the sculpture at the prow of the ship, remember? associated them with a Power that looked similar. I could have read that somewhere. So they have that connection with water, Mama-Wata in Africa, Brijit in Haiti and the Spirit of the sea, our earth mother's womb, in Haiti is the masculine admiral, Agwe, is also a White blue eyed Loa, married to the feminine element, the Siren, also fair skinned. As are some of the fresh water Spirit family, the dreadlocked Simbis and the Simbas, the feminine beauties combing their long orange hair on the big boulders in the river. The first time that as a teen, I saw these types of sculptures, they were made out of driftwood and they were hanging on the walls of a bar that stood right next to the port in Port-Au-Prince. As we mentioned earlier, one of the aspects of Èzili, Mistress Èzili Freda Dahome is the White Lady, the Virgin Mary, who in the Catholic faith also has many faces: young virgin, mater dolorosa cradling her fallen Christ... Another aspect, her sister Èzili Dantò, mother of a fatherless child, the widow, is the origin of the Black Virgins. Note though that many mulattos look white. After the 20-year American occupation of Haiti some more white Spirits showed up, but I don't know them either.

Ishmael Reed: Well how did Bridget get a Black husband?

Boadiba: She married Baron Samedi. In that book I translated, *The Legend of the Loas*, she is not enchanted about being queen of the underworld but she loves her family. She is the Vodou Persephone. The premise for this book is that Deita, the author, wanted to know all about the Loas of Haiti and she was hoping that one day she would meet Boukman. You know Boukman who sparked the Haitian war for independence at the ceremony in the Bwa Kay Iman (in the Woods at the Imam's). She wanted to know the real story behind that ceremony and one day, and this is how her book starts, she has this near accident where she almost falls in the waters of the Artibonite River and this man saves her, but she can tell that this man is more than a man and it turns out that it's Boukman, manifested to her on our earthly plane, who becomes her guide and brings her to meet all those different Spirits in their realm. He guides her through an interdimensional trip.

Ishmael Reed: Well, he was also a Muslim.

Boadiba: He was and was called "Boukman" because he carried the book, the Koran he read from in Arabic and orally translated into Creole for the people. He was their Imam, thus the name of the ceremony: kay (the house of) Imam.

Ishmael Reed: So Haitian religion can accommodate Islam and Catholicism, all these things?

Boadiba: Yeah, yeah because when you're Vodou, a child of Guinea, you don't have to renounce any other religion that might have come from your family, for there resides the ancestral power. Vodou is the original religion as Africans are the original humans. Whatever race you consider yourself to be, everyone has an African root, whatever religion came afterwards incorporates elements of Vodou because you know, all the other religions had to gather what they could from anterior religions: Valentine's Day is the feast of Mistress Èzili Freda Dahome. but it's called Valentine's Day after this I think Italian priest during the Renaissance or the Middle Ages who was protective of Love and people in love. That man was for sure beloved of the White Lady who is the principle of Love.

Ishmael Reed: Right. St. Patrick is Danmbala because he's associated with snakes.

Boadiba: Yeah, because of the snakes and his power to enchant them, he's associated with Danmbala but traditionally these associations are also a way to hide, to protect Vodou. Let's have an image of Saint Patrick on our altar then they won't destroy it, but they do. Danmbala's feast is Saint Patrick's day, so the Catholics wouldn't persecute us, but they do.

Ishmael Reed: So is that why they say that Haitians are ninety percent Catholic and a hundred percent Voodoo?

Boadiba: I guess, but now because of the growing Empire of the Protestants, you know with more and more Protestants sects going to Haiti and all kinds of missionaries funded by the U.S. and England, things have changed especially among the poor. The foreign Protestants' Haitian converts are known to be extremely hostile to Vodou and to uphold only one Loa, Jesus Christ, who is their God and in the name of this Guard (guardian, a Spirit who was once human) who was once a man of peace, they still kill our people and destroy our temples. Kill and destroy in the name of Jesus that is the behavior of these Christian soldiers, and not even in order to defend him or themselves, for no one is attacking them. Yet because during the Haitian revolution, the Haitians called on their Spirits to help them live free or die, they are accused of being devilish. What is these Missionary sects' motivation? To destroy a natural basin by cutting down the centenary trees surrounding it in order to serve Jesus by stopping the rituals that take place at their roots? To destroy the ecology of a river and the livelihood of the people of the area with the excuse of serving Jesus by stopping a ritual that takes place once a year? To want so badly to stop the cleaning, the yearly upkeep of the basin, for this is what this particular ritual was about, that they make the basin disappear. It's not just religion, it never is. When I was a kid I used to hear the drums every night in the hills around my house. They rocked me to sleep. Now, we hardly hear them and we miss them. Those missionaries who hang speakers on trees during

nighttime revivals stop whole neighborhoods from sleeping; it's like psychological warfare. Those missions give the government money in exchange for the right to operate freely in rural and urban impoverished areas. Those missions that compel you to convert so you can partake of the gifts they bring: clinics and schools as they so generously take over the government's neglected work.

Ishmael Reed: Catholics are more tolerant. In New York, they have a ceremony for a Cuban spirit. In the Catholic Church. They accommodated a Cuban spirit which comes right out of the Yoruba religion.

Boadiba: Are they more tolerant? They certainly also have a history of cultural appropriation, but they still consider Vodou a business competitor. Believe me, both kinds of missionaries imprison and burn our drums yet use our rhythms to make themselves attractive by grafting their own lyrics on top.

Ishmael Reed: The Catholics?

Boadiba: The Catholics and the Protestants. They overlay them with their own words, then use that music to attract people; so they make use of that part of the culture they need to make use of. You know, they still destroy the drums, they still destroy the temples and they still kill Vodou people also, in veritable pogroms. They are still doing it especially during times of catastrophes, natural or political.

Ishmael Reed: Well, these are White supremacist religions. The Catholics have had Black popes. The Protestant religion seems to be more White supremacist.

Boadiba: I went to a Catholic convent school. Like the Greeks, the Spanish and all those Europeans whose countries were occupied by the Africans (the Moors), the Italians might be mulattos but the Catholic clergy were my first introduction to racism even though I did not know what to name it. The Protestants back then were associated with the poor. Now that too is changing as they convert the upper classes. But in the countryside, it's still the same blueprint: First of all, they go to villages that are pretty remote and they set up shop there, find out the basis for the local economy and set out to destroy it. They convert a lot of people who are Black Haitian people. The most intelligent ones are chosen to go to school. They give them scholarships to the States and then they reintroduce them back to Haiti as pastors or they give them schooling in Haiti, whatever, but they become pastors, or they might go into the legislature as the bright young hopes of their regions. They become deputies, you know government representatives, they become judges who craft the new laws and then they help the Blan (Whites, as all foreigners are called) destroy Vodou, destroy nature, destroy Haiti.

Ishmael Reed: Well, maybe they've created the same kind of class here. They send them to

Harvard and Yale or places like that, which are Christian schools.

Boadiba: They get out of there, those same converts, to become enemies of their own families. If their family has a vodou temple, then there are no more descendants for that temple to continue because the most promising sons and daughters have become Protestants. Now the Protestants are really more prevalent than ever; when you got into a plane to go to Haiti you used to see one or two missionaries. Now it's the festival of all kinds of missionaries. It's really bad and the people accept them because they bring to them what the State doesn't, they do the work that the State is supposed to do in exchange for receiving taxes but doesn't do. You can't get your kids vaccinated or educated if you don't buy your conversion card, yeah, the one which officially states that you've renounced Vodou. Oh yeah that was started by the Catholics, long ago. It's called the "rejete" (rejection) and is still very popular among the imported religions in Haiti.

Ishmael Reed: This is not the first time there's been a crackdown on African religion. How do you think it still survives?

Boadiba: Look what's happening now. I'm telling you what's happening here now. There are so many people in America and all over the world embracing Vodou, thirsty for that kind of spirituality. This new generation doesn't hide anymore that they're Vodou, whether they are White or Black, they are becoming part of the family. Ah the missionaries' daughters and sons...

Ishmael Reed: It's growing very rapidly in the United States because the Cubans, Puerto Ricans and others are coming here.

Boadiba: Yeah, and Haitians.

Ishmael Reed: Right, absolutely right.

Boadiba: My previous housemate, a Jewish-Italian I was never able to consider a White boy, went to Haiti two summers ago to get initiated, to do his first initiation as a houngan, so he's now like an apprentice Vodou priest. After the COVID shelter-in-place measures, he lost his job and he couldn't hang anymore in California. So he went over there to New Orleans because that's where his Vodou family is. The Haitian temple in New Orleans is connected with the temple in Haiti where he lived through the ordeal of his first-level initiation into priesthood. His Haitian family now helped him get back on his feet from the Covid ordeal. He found a place to live. He's sharing it with another Vodou priest who I think may be Cuban but also learning the Haitian rites. They're both practicing, active in the Vodou community. So there is a positive back-and-forth with Haiti going on in the main cities you know, New Orleans, New York, Boston, Miami, San Francisco Bay Area.

Ishmael Reed: They have Botanicas in New York and San Francisco.

Boadiba: Over here in the Bay they don't have Haitian Botanicas. They have Cuban, Puerto Rican, Jamaican...

Ishmael Reed: Well they're still African religions.

Boadiba: Yeah, they're all the same in essence.

Ishmael Reed: So, how do you make use of these spirits? How do you use these principles in everyday life? And do you get visited by some of these Loas? What's the most recent one?

Boadiba: To these persons with whom I've become close who are connected to Spirit and are also studying the science, I am grateful for demystifying Vodou. I've been lucky in the type of persons I've met in this arena. The life principle I learned from my spiritual father Andre Pierre was also promoted by the Guard we call Ti Jean Petwo, the Divine Entity whom, amalgamated with his cousin John the Baptist, makes the great light of Christ, who used to be the man the Christians call Jesus of Nazareth. He preached love for our fellow humans, and I extend it to the whole of nature. As for the Spirits I see them in my dreams and they manifest themselves in my life by turns of event that seem incredible, fortuitous, lucky, out of the blue, in the nick of time...

Ishmael Reed: What's the most recent one?

Boadiba: I can't remember the details. I think it is a series of dreams that left me with a sense of peace and, as always, of being loved. The most recent ones are dreams of consolation because we're living through a time right now that's so trying and so fraught with fear and danger. Especially as I'm facing a home eviction through the Ellis Act which is a loophole for landlords to get around rent control; our lawmakers did not think of protecting us during this crisis against this particular one. My most recent Vodou dreams have been dreams of nature; nature restored, where the spirit you see in your dreams, is not necessarily coming to give you a specific message because even they admit they don't know the hidden core of the times we're living now, but still they're upholding you energetically, showing you that they're walking with you in beauty.

Ishmael Reed: Who is your personal Loa?

Boadiba: I don't know because I never got initiated in a temple. So I don't know who my main Loa is, the master or mistress of my head, my psyche. But I know I have a relationship with all the Loas who introduced themselves to me: Atibon Legba whose Catholic avatar is sometimes Saint Peter because like Peter, Legba has the key to the Spirits' domain. He opens

the portal from the visible to the invisible world and must be called whenever you need to communicate with any other Loa. Danmbala Wedo, the principle of the white prismatic light whose wife is the rainbow Ayida Wedo. Those ancient Loas who come from Africa and also those born as a result of our great need to honor our ancestral memories and break our chains in Haiti, the Petro Loas, issued from the wound of slavery and associated with the war for independence... I salute them all. Throughout my life I've had these dreams that I never forgot. They are the backbone of my spirituality. I talk about this in the poem "Holy Week," in that collection of my poetry you published, *Under Burning White Sky*.

Ishmael Reed: What about the Rouge, the red sect?

Boadiba: I don't know much about them but that's what I was about to tell you before when I talked about liking to get up in the middle of the night and walking up to that hotel to go swimming. One night I found myself on the road, a familiar scenario. I'd gotten out of bed as usual and with my pajamas on, left the house, started walking towards the hotel and then I heard this music you know that you associate with the drums and the Vodou songs but it wasn't like any music I'd heard before and also it scared me and usually, when I heard the drums from the ceremonies at night, they never scared me. I used to walk and go towards the drums and be at the ceremony as a child, right, and they would give me some food because they would be serving the Spirit, but this one really scared me. So I hid under a bush, right, and then this long arm came under the bush and just dragged me out by the neck and stood me on the road and I saw that it was a band of people carrying long whips and straw bags and that's where I felt that they were going to take me and put me in one of their straw bags and I was really, really, really scared but suddenly this luminous being appeared among them, took a stone from the side of the road and threw it at them and dispersed them and then I woke up in my bed. I'd thought that it was real that I was really going through this but then I woke up and realized oh my God, that's a dream, but in the morning, that morning when the sun was shining, I heard the servants, two of them, fighting loudly. One of them, Da, used to be my personal Nanny when I was younger, but she was now my brother's and sister's nanny and the other one was Ita, the governess at my grandfather's house. We lived in the yard of my grandfather's house then. And so those two were screaming at each other and one of them, the one from my grandfather's, was accusing the one from my house of having tried to eat me. "Last night you tried to eat this child. Look at all this blood under her window." They were throwing great buckets of water under my window and Ita was saying that there was all this blood there and that was because Da tried to eat me and Da was saying "I would never try to eat that child. I love her like my own child. It wasn't me. I didn't do it," and Ita was going, "Yes, it was you, because you come from that place in the south where they have a bunch of those lou gawou," and that's the red sects you know, their generic name, lou gawou, werewolves. What do they call them? The Sanpwèl, the Bizango who are the warriors from the Haitian war of independence, the Vlengbendeng, the Makandal... Well, you know, that was my introduction to them who scared me stiff, but it was also my introduction to Danmbala as this luminous angel who dispersed them, as a protector... I didn't know why the

women were talking about blood under my window, but I could hear them throwing water from the bucket and I was like I didn't want to say anything that would alert them to what I had been up to because if I said something about my dream they might stop me from going out at night you know, they might start really keeping an eye on me and I didn't really want that. So I just stayed quiet and I absorbed this knowledge about the blood under my window, but it was only when I came to live in the States when I was in my 30s and that incident must have happened when I was maybe twelve or something, so after I came to the States, I was starting to read stuff about Vodou, talk to people and I finally found out the meaning of the blood. Deita has a whole series of books, not only the *Legend of the Loas*, where she talks about the red sects and stuff like that to, you know, the people, us people.

Ishmael Reed: You know, to the people of the United States are real Red sect, you know, because in other places they might be using Vodou for healing, but here, it's people putting curses and hexes on people and stuff.

Boadiba: Well they have knowledge of both. As heirs of the African secret societies they can administer justice in a place where there is none, or they can become the enforcers of injustice, they can heal you from curses and hexes and also throw curses and hexes, but sometimes that is biological and chemical warfare really, you know substances involving D.N.A. that they have made into powders, airborne or administered through foods and drinks or through the skin. For example, they can go and take the pieces of the lungs of somebody who died from TB and make a powder out of it and then they can blow it in somebody's face and give them TB and then everyone says oh my God somebody put a curse on him, but they actually are managing to manipulate these micro substances, even viruses.

Ishmael Reed: Would you apply that to COVID?

Boadiba: Definitely. I would because I'm a suspicious individual, because I feel ill at ease with our world power structure, because we've seen time and time again throughout history that our reality should be human happiness on earth yet is that a priority? Because remember the smallpox blankets? Remember the syphilis experiments? The L.S.D. fiasco during the Vietnam War when almost an entire unit died from friendly fire? Our reality should have evolved way past this behavior. By the way it behaves, this Coronavirus, to a dreamer like me, to a teller of tall tales and inventor of stories, it seems like a super sophisticated envoy from a world secret society, something that was manipulated to change and adapt to whatever the weakness of the victim it targets and if "third world" sorcerers can manufacture virulent powders wearing a bandana over their mouth and nose and dark glasses over their eyes and administer them through the beam of a flashlight pointed at their target, would you put it past today's "first world" sorcerers apprentices to concoct something like this smart virus in an ultra-modern lab? So now we've all been cursed for ends we cannot or do not want to fathom but even sorcerers sometimes go down from their own so-called curses. The

powder can blow back into their face if the wind is wrong, you know. I read that in another books of Deita's, called *My Unknown Country*, but I lent those books to somebody and never saw them again, so never lend out your books.

Ishmael Reed: Thank you very much for this. It's great. Thank you.

INTERVIEW FOLLOW UP from BOADIBA

As I have told you, my first encounter with the sectes rouges, at the cusp of adolescence, on the road to my house when the entire neighborhood was asleep, was also my first meeting with the luminous being who protected me from their attempt to catch me, the angel of white light I later learned was called Dambala Wedo, the same snake spirit symbolized by the western physicians' caduceus. An encounter that left me with the feeling that the band of which at the time I knew nothing, would have otherwise captured me and stuffed me in the straw knapsack they wore over one shoulder and across their chest. (Those bags are commonly called macoutes in creole and by extension, the red sects gave their name to the infamous henchmen of the Duvalier dictatorship the Tonton Macoutes). This first dreamtime encounter as I told you, ended with the discovery on the morning after, of blood outside my window.

The second episode came years later when as a young woman I was practicing astral projection every afternoon after work. The morning after I finally achieved the goal of exiting my body without falling asleep, a copious amount of blood was found at the bottom of the stairs leading to my front door. Remembering the incident from my childhood I asked the cleaning woman to throw water from a bucket so it would carry the blood away from the house.

It wasn't until my forties when reading one of Deita's books that I learned that this presence of blood at the entrance or exit of houses is commonly attributed to an attack of the red sects on an individual whose life force they have been made unable to assimilate due to the protection of the victims by their family Loas. This vomiting of blood signals the sect member's violent rejection of the intended victim's life essence. After the second incident I asked my friend Daniel what he thought of the blood on my stairs and he answered, smiling: "Well, yeah those secret societies call themselves masters of the night. They sell passports to those who wish to travel at night, and they don't like ordinary people like us to go flying around in the astral without a license. They feel they should be the only ones empowered to issue it". Rather like the Masons, Rosicrucians, and other secret societies who jealously guard their occult knowledge.

I also want to mention again that Andre Pierre, a Vodou priest who calls himself a mere servant of the Spirits (Loas), an internationally famous Haitian painter who insists that all his inspiration comes from the songs to the Loas he sings before starting each painting, is my spiritual father because he saw me as someone whose spirituality is linked to the natural forces, the manifestations of the Divine Power on earth, the Vodou Spirits. Although I did not come to understand he had been speaking of my family Spirits until many years later, he is the one who recognized and spoke to me of the beings who people my dreams and he enabled me to eventually name them even if by that time I was living in another country.

Another train of thought elicited by your questions and that I want to follow is about the Priyè Ginen, the prayer for all the Spirits of Guinea Africa (the Loas). The invisible being first addressed in this prayer that starts the Vodou service, is God as evidenced by the line: "Je crois en Dieu ki ba nou lavi a" (I believe in God who gives us life). The next line is just as telling: "N

ape lapriyè lapriyè pou Ginen yo” (We are praying, praying for the Spirits). Note: FOR the Spirits not TO the Spirits; in other words, this prayer asks God to continue to infuse the Spirits of Guinea Africa with divine energy so they can access our earthly realm and influence it to improve our lives.

I would like to leave you with this very mundane memory from my childhood, of an event that occurred not long before my first encounter with the band of Sanpwel (secret society, one of the sectes rouges) on the road at night and which colors it. That afternoon my father came home for lunch with an enormous green snake stretched out on the back seat of his 1940's Ford. It was a present he had bought for me in the streets of Port-Au-Prince.

The beautiful reptile seemed to be sleeping as I picked it up and draped it around my neck, which immediately caused me to be enveloped in alcoholic fumes so strong my eyes started to water. “Ouh Papa, it stinks” I remarked and he answered: “You know those snake catchers seduce the animals with kleren (rough Haitian cane alcohol before it becomes rum) to put them to sleep”.

So with the snake's head at my waist on the right and its tail at my waist on the left, I proudly joined my parents at the table from which my mother immediately banished me. I walked out through the long driveway and made my way up the familiar road to the hotel at the top of the hill where I sat at the bar and ordered a lemonade. By then most of the waiters had fled and the tourists too, only the barman smiled and served me a tall glass and told me to keep my money. Next I passed through the laundry yard where all the women screamed and ran but one of them laughed and asked me: “Where are you going like that?” I told her the snake was drunk and I needed a beautiful and calm place so I could sit with it until it woke up.

I followed the path she indicated then left it to cross a meadow carpeted by grass and surrounded by vegetation. When I reached a big tree that shaded a place far from the path I laid my friend down and leaned against the trunk. I sat there for hours watching people pass by without paying any attention to us. At one point I looked down and he opened his eyes. We looked at each other and I told him softly that I didn't know where his home was but I hoped he could make one around here far from people who might harm him (the Christian converts because of this animal's link to Vodou) or catch him to sell him. I talked to him a long time as his head cleared and he listened, still looking into my eyes; I told him all about myself. When he started to leave I touched his head and felt the length of his body glide under my hand as we said goodbye. I waited for him to disappear before I left.

Author of a dozen books on Haitian culture, Deita gave us the seminal tome on the Vodou Loas, titled *La Legende des Loas*, first published in 1988. I have translated the third edition from 2004 orally as a recording in American English as *Vodou Legends*, which is still unpublished. Deita's book is the beautiful unique text of Haitian mythology that rivals the Greek and Roman ones. It could be considered the Vodou Bible although it is used internationally in the original French by students of Haitian Vodou. It is really a shame that for lack of a publisher it is still unavailable in English.

Legends also broaches the subject of the secret societies, further elaborated in volume 2 of Deita's 2003 publication, *Mon Pays Inconnu* (My Unknown Country). For English language info on the Haitian secret societies, also called sectes rouges, read Michel Laguerre's *Vodou: Still A Potent Force in Haitian Politics*, and Wade Davis's *Passage of Darkness*, the scholarly companion book expanding the scope of the more widely known *The Serpent And The Rainbow*.

