

*Whose Stories Are We Telling? Qualifying Caribbean Cosmopolitanism*

Aisha Khan, Dept of Anthropology, New York University  
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*The Caribbean is by definition cosmopolitan.*

Stuart Hall

The Haitian Revolution is a master symbol of the Americas, encompassing and projecting the major aspirations and potentials, fears and antipathies, not just of the society that Haiti became but, for centuries, of the entire hemisphere. Like all symbols, the Revolution has numerous and contradictory connotations. It was “unthinkable even as it happened,” in Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995:73) critique of the limitations of Western epistemology; it constituted the moment in which “West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people,” as Trinidadian intellectual C.L.R. James (1989 [1963]:391) expressed it in his writings on Caribbean consciousness and identity; for late-19<sup>th</sup>-century American tourist Ida Starr, echoing the sentiments of the colonial and postcolonial world’s privileged and apprehensive stakeholders, it was the event that sounded “the death-knell of civilization” (Starr 1903:42).

Irrespective of the tenor of particular reconstructions or interpretations of the Haitian Revolution, among the most salient of its moments—apocryphal or not—is its catalysis into action that is attributed to a local leader, known in the history books as “Boukman.” At a secret

meeting of fellow slaves in Saint Domingue’s Bois-Caiman forest on the night of August 14, 1791 (e.g., Dayan 1995: 29; Dubois 2004: 99), Boukman purportedly held a “voodoo ceremony,” which presumably included strategizing, and, as the narrative goes, thus launched the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Boukman is celebrated as a Haitian religious and political leader whose skill, charisma, commitment, and knowledge helped to change history and assert the dignity and authority of Vodou in the face of its detractors. This representation of Boukman—as a Haitian Vodou priest—is pervasive. However, Boukman also had a relationship with Islam. Scholars of the Atlantic World have contributed much good historiographic work on the presence of African Muslims in the Caribbean, but, with only a few exceptions of which I am aware, surprisingly few works explore a more rounded portrait of Boukman, reflecting the complexities and ambiguities that characterize both Islam and Vodou.

Among the scholars who do comment on Boukman’s Muslim identity are Susan Buck-Morss and Sylviane Diouf. In what reads like a fascinating bit of detective work among slim source materials, Buck-Morss (2009) and Diouf (1998) recount that Boukman was in actuality an English-speaking Jamaican, brought to Saint Domingue by a British slaver. “Boukman” was the French approximation of his moniker in English: “Book Man” (with perhaps the surname of “Dutty” [Gomez 2005:90]). He was called this because he was literate and was also associated with a particular book—“*the Book*”—of which he evidently owned a copy. This was not, as one might expect, the Bible (Buck-Morss 2009:141); rather, it was the Quran (Diouf 1998:153). “Boukman”/“Book Man” was one of the “people of the book,” those belonging to the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In Africa, Diouf tells us, “people of the book” was

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<sup>1</sup> Laurent Dubois suggests that the religious ceremony associated with this meeting probably took place the following week, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, rather than on the 14<sup>th</sup> (Dubois 2004:100).

a reference to Muslims (Diouf 1998:152). Although only somewhere between four and fourteen percent of all Africans who crossed the Atlantic were Muslim (Buck-Morss 2009:141), African Muslims evidently were disproportionately involved, particularly as leadership, in New World slave rebellions (Reis 2001; Buck-Morss 2009). They included the famous Haitian maroon rebel Makandal (Fick 1990:60), and Boukman's contemporary, the *manbo* (Vodou priestess) and presumed Muslim, Fatiman or Fatima (Buck-Morss 2009:141; Diouf 1998:229, fn#26; Dubois 2004:100), who is also said to have been present at the Bois-Caiman meeting.<sup>2</sup>

Diouf tells us that there is “compelling evidence” that Makandal and Boukman “were not only Muslims but also *marabouts*,” an Arabic title designating a religious scholar, teacher, and religious leader (Diouf 1998:153). As *marabouts* they could provide both military guidance and “spiritual and occult” assurances to those in revolt (ibid: 153). These specialists emerged from a 17<sup>th</sup>- to 19<sup>th</sup>-century West African context rife with reformist jihads directed toward the culling and modification of various sorts of local syncretisms. Religious syncretism (also called “creolization” in the Caribbean) and leadership skills were thus already characteristic of West African societies before being transported as part of enslaved Africans’ cultural repertoire to the “New World.” On both sides of the Atlantic, out of these local debates and tensions forms of leadership became increasingly visible and important. Although Africans of all ethno-linguistic and religious groups both led and participated in slave revolts, African Muslims connoted a particular association with uprisings. As just one example, in Saint Domingue, Laurent Dubois (2004) tells us, “for fearful masters, Makandal came to symbolize the danger of a mass uprising that would destroy the whites...A 1779 memoir presented Makandal as a ‘Mohammed at the head of a thousand exiled refugees’ who imagined ‘the conquest of the Universe’” (2004:56-57).

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<sup>2</sup> There are different spellings of *manbo*. The two most frequent are “manbo” and “mambo.”

Importantly, marabouts were also associated with the production and use of *gris-gris*, or amulets, which figured prominently in the Caribbean, in Saint Domingue, and in the Haitian Revolution and beyond. Protection by amulet is common in both Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> These objects typically consist of small pieces of paper with Arabic writing, folded up and sewn into a small leather pouch or other receptacle that can be worn. They also might consist of other materials: one Antoine Dalmas, for example—Boukman’s contemporary in Saint Domingue and the only one to write about Bois-Caiman at the time—reported that the Bois-Caiman insurrectionists used hairs from the pig that was sacrificed as part of the religious rites as “a kind of talisman that... would make them invulnerable” (Dubois 2004:100). As “part of the occult sciences, which include astrology, divination... and other categories of magic” (Diouf 1998:129), amulets invoke supernatural powers in providing protection to their wearers. They are also literal conveyers of writings in Arabic that may have communicated messages among Muslims during uprisings, as Diouf (1998:129), for example, avers.<sup>4</sup> As such, amulets may be seen as a kind of contact zone between Africans, African Muslims, and indigenous Afro-syncretic religions, drawing together, and imbricating, Islam and Vodou.

Another indication of the imbrications of Islam and Vodou is Laurent Dubois’s (2004) mention that those assembled at the Bois-Caiman meeting “took an oath of secrecy and revenge,

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<sup>3</sup> In the Indo-Caribbean (among both Muslims and Hindus) they are typically called *tabeej*, and serve similar purposes of protection from uncertainty, harm, or misfortune.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth considering the question of what extent amulet wearers were able to read Arabic, especially its translation into complex (militarily strategic) messages; moreover, as anthropologist Allyson Purpura points out, amulets, especially those made by marabouts, are comprised of esoteric, symbolic script that typically is indecipherable even to those who do read Arabic (email communication, 9/26/10, University of Illinois Urbana). My primary interest here is in the tying together of African Muslims, amulets, and insurrection.

sealed by drinking the blood of a black pig sacrificed before them. It was a form of pact probably derived from the traditions of West Africa” (Dubois 2004:100). Dubois tells us that the same commentator, Antoine Dalmas, “portrayed it as the ultimate expression of African barbarism” (ibid: 100). Dalmas’s observation reveals an obvious Euro-colonial racism that from the vantage point of current scholarship is not surprising. What is surprising is that Dubois himself makes no comment about how the oath was reportedly sealed. One has to wonder what kind of Muslim, not to speak of marabout, would drink animal blood, especially that of a pig. I am not suggesting that Boukman/Book Man and his comrades could not possibly have done this—perhaps they did, we will be unlikely to ever know for certain. What I am pointing to here is the way in which Boukman’s identity as a “Muslim” is overshadowed by his identity as an “African” (e.g., the slave rebels are associated with West Africa, separate from Islam). The way “Islam” looks and what it means (to both practitioners and observers) is variable, depending on a given historical moment and social context, as well as scholarly perspective. It is therefore useful to look closely at any currents of Islamic belief and practice that may have shaped hegemonic forms, as well as at the way we measure the effects of those currents.

Diverse and often ambiguously categorized peoples populated the Caribbean, linking the colonizing “West” of Europe with the colonized “East” of Africa and Asia. The heterogeneity of these groups, and the initial “strangerhood” (Olwig 2010: 422) that characterized their encounters and relationships gave rise to the perception, among Caribbeans and others alike, that this region is the New World’s definitive symbol of cosmopolitanism, and that cosmopolitanism defines the Caribbean. The meanings and significance of cosmopolitanism are contingent on particular moments in time and place, but scholars of the Caribbean and Caribbean politicians, artists, and the lay public have interpreted the region as possessing for centuries the salient

qualities of cosmopolitanism. As this paper's epigraph asserts, "the Caribbean is by definition cosmopolitan" (Hall 2008:351).

The multifaceted practices and uses of Islam in the Atlantic World suggested in the historical record, however, are not reflected in the portrait of Islam drawn in the contemporary period. Despite historiographical and ethnographic recognition of Islam's globalism (its breadth and duration), heterogeneity (its internal variations), and universality (envisioned as appropriate for all)—qualities that inform the notion of "cosmopolitanism" in common parlance today—these qualities carry a different register in the context of the New World and of contemporary perspectives. Rather than foregrounding the "cosmopolitan" character of Islam, representations of the consummately cosmopolitan Caribbean interpret Vodou, embodied in the revolutionary context of Boukman, Makandal, and their comrades, as a harbinger and indicator of cosmopolitanism. Yet these representations of Caribbean cosmopolitanism also leave an ambivalent space for Africa; in the contemporary moment, so does the representation of Caribbean Islam.

This paper explores the role of cosmopolitanism, so pervasive and multilayered an emblem of regional identity of the Caribbean, in shaping the historiography and imagery associated with Muslims in the region. Looking at representations of Islam, the Caribbean, and Muslims in the Caribbean and in the U.S., the paper inquires into the way cosmopolitanism defines the Caribbean (with its emphasis on modernity and creolization) and invites an eliding of African Islam, despite Islam's being historically approached as cosmopolitan in ways not typically employed in discussions of Vodou. What is it about the configuration of the concept of cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean that has resulted in marginalizing or eliding Islam in the

historical record? In exploring these issues, the paper calls for new ways to hear silences and see invisibilities.

The title of this paper reiterates the idea that the Caribbean is North America's "backyard," a familiar image at least as old as the Monroe Doctrine. Yet it is also intended to convey another sense of "backyard"—something outside, secondary, and possibly hidden. By "hidden" I do not mean to imply the common connotation of "fifth column, enemy within" but rather to signal forms of silencing that can occur in both formal and popular historiographies. I am not suggesting that the idea of recognizing Islam in the Caribbean is "unthinkable," in the way that Trouillot, building on Pierre Bourdieu, conceptualizes the historical silences about the Haitian Revolution. For Trouillot, the unthinkable is "that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives" (1995:82). Freighted with different sorts of meanings and implications than those of the Revolution, the Muslim presence has not been *unthinkable* so much as thinkable auxiliary to other, prevailing narratives which rehearse particular moments and features that ostensibly constitute the Caribbean's identity and place in the world. Thus this silencing is not about lacking adequate instruments to be conceptualized (ibid 1995:82); it is about being quieted as a consequence of other priorities. If "mentions and silences are...active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis" (Trouillot 1995:48), then these silences evoke broader questions about authenticity, belonging, and the production of knowledge as category formation.

*Ummah* is an Arabic word broadly connoting the community of believers in the Muslim world. It is not typically used in reference to the Americas, although current events involving Muslims and "the West" have both brought it into more common parlance and raised questions

among academics, other pundits, and people in general about what it consists of and whether it actually exists. The ummah as symbol can be positive, suggesting the strength of Muslim unity and faith. It can also be used to explain allegedly weak nationalist loyalties due to a greater identification with the substantial and powerful global community of Islam than with fellow nationals, leaving aside the major issue of what constitutes this powerful global community. The ummah can also be conceived of as a “myth” and an “ideology” rather than an “actual world community,” as was posited in a recent panel discussion on “The Cosmopolitan Idea and Religion” at New York University (April 14, 2010). The title of this paper, then, asks us to think about the Caribbean backyard figuratively in terms of a periphery and the peripheral vision that is typically trained on peripheries. And it asks us to think about the ummah as a metaphor for the attempt to consolidate and generalize the potential, uncertain, and shifting identities of Muslims and their interlocutors on the ground. Framed by the relationship between Boukman and Book Man, these broader questions point us toward considering the ways Islam is conceptualized as a world historical phenomenon, the ways Islam is conceptualized in Africa and in the Caribbean, and the ways our analytical vocabulary is freighted with implicit assumptions.

### *Recovering Histories*

Tackling these questions of how Islam is conceived of in the world, in Africa, and in the Caribbean entails some key conceptual challenges. I will reiterate two already noted above: that “Islam” and “Vodou” are not distinguishable in terms of essence but only in terms of contingent classifications, which themselves depend on the perspectives and personages of a given moment; and that the simplification of ambiguity can produce historiographical silences, as particular aspects of phenomena are highlighted over others. Another challenge is that Muslim peoples—



Africans and Asians—in the Caribbean have, respectively, four and two centuries of articulation with the West, and, on a global scale, have almost fourteen centuries of interaction with the West (dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). Even if not direct or immediate, articulation occurs with such quasi-knowledge as stereotypes, rumors, and misrecognitions. This raises a fourth challenge, asked in many ways in other contexts by numerous scholars, notably from the Caribbean (e.g., Rodney 1972; Williams 1964 [c.1944]), about how “Western” (i.e., singular, autonomous) the “West” is, being so deeply dependent upon “non-Western” sources as formative influences. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000) point that Third World nationalisms have participated in promulgating the idea of Europe as the apex of progress further underscores both the agency of subalterns and the dialogic relationship that exists among colonizers and colonized. As Barbara Weinstein (2005) points out about Latin America (and I would add the Caribbean), the “region’s long history of colonialism and contact” has given rise to “ambivalence about Western vs non-Western identity” (Weinstein 2005:89).

Each of these challenges serves to remind us why categorical distinctions take special effort, and encourages us to revisit the canonical principles that have gone into fashioning the Caribbean into an entity that is putatively more receptive to certain forms of cultural and religious creativity than to others. Why, even in “contact zones,” “frontiers,” or “hybrid spaces”—all of which have been employed to characterize the Caribbean—where presumably everything is breaking up and becoming rearranged, do some orthodoxies remain? As Weinstein (2005) further pushes the point, since the social sciences and humanities have confronted the “teleological tendencies of the master narrative of the Western/liberal tradition,” and since, as a consequence, the “instability” of the subject, along with the very meanings attributed to our terms and categories, is now given, “whose story are we telling?” (Weinstein 2005:72-73). In

other words, by what means do we identify and pin down our subjects without, to again reference Chakrabarty (2000), giving in to either the “hyper-real”ness of the West or eschewing the moral universals that combating social injustice requires?

With these cautioning challenges in mind, let us begin by looking at what we do know about African Muslim presence in the Caribbean. With the exception of the studies cited here (and a few others), what is known about African Muslims in the Caribbean is not abundant, and the limited reportage that does exist must be weighed in terms of perspective and accuracy. The history of the Caribbean began with massive labor projects involving the coerced and voluntary displacement of millions of people.<sup>5</sup> Although these projects were characterized by different forms of organization, success rates, and consequences, as part of the development of European capitalism and empire, they can be divided into two broad ventures: slavery and indenture. Resting on the labor of enslaved peoples of West and Central Africa, Caribbean slavery is most commonly associated with Africans, as is, in this period in the Americas, Islam. One example of this association is that found in an 1840 narrative written by a Society of Friends group of travelers. They describe meeting in Trinidad a “Mahometan priest,” who, they relate, regularly sought out the “Mandingoes” on board incoming slave ships. The Friends counted “several hundred of them at present in this island,” who “continue their form of faith and worship” (Truman et.al. 1844). Such tantalizing hints are often brief; today the “Mandingo” Muslim legacy in Trinidad is limited largely to such place names as Mandinga Village, a small community in the southwestern part of the island, and to the local Trinidadian slang term for

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<sup>5</sup> Caribbean history may also be said to have begun with the multiple arrivals of indigenous Amazonian peoples who sailed by canoe from the Orinoco Delta into the Caribbean Sea thousands of years prior to the advent of Europeans and Africans. But relative to what would follow from 1492, this record is often treated as pre-history.

Muslims: “Madinga.” A more general awareness of four centuries of African Muslims’ presence in the Caribbean, along with a history of Islam among ancestors in Africa, prompts Afro-Trinidadian Muslims to refer to themselves as “returnees” rather than as “converts” (Khan 2004). But as Brinsley Samaroo (1988) and Carl Campbell (1974) have argued, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a lively and effective African Muslim presence in the Caribbean had ebbed.

The number of identified “Muslims” who settled in the Caribbean between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was certainly small relative to the millions of peoples in multiple diasporas; nonetheless, their presence was felt, if minimally documented, in ways that belied their numbers. For example, Reis states that after Brazil’s abolition of slavery in 1888, “formerly enslaved Muslims could still be found as isolated practitioners of their faith” and that some of these Muslims “became well known as makers of amulets.” While Reis observes that the making of amulets reflected “a very unorthodox Muslim way of life” (Reis 2001:308), he does not draw the conclusion that this unorthodoxy necessarily spelled the end of a “Muslim way of life,” however that might be defined. However, beyond the significance of amulets “and the sporadic presence of Islam in the symbolic realm of Afro-Brazilian religions, mostly in fragmented form, Islam was unable to penetrate the national Afro-Brazilian community,” which Reis states “developed a pluralistic worldview combining Catholicism and African ethnic religions” (Reis 2001:308). At the same time, Reis has already indicated the influence of amulets on the world of the occult in Brazil today. Moreover, although I agree with Reis that it is wise not to overestimate presences of any kind or to imagine them where they do not exist, the notion of “fragmented” forms presumes that fragmentation is both self-evident and necessarily weaker in effect. But how might that effect be measured? And given the hybrid character of Islam, as Reis describes it, both in West Africa and the Americas, would it not also be “pluralistic”? Might this perspective on

orthodoxy and fragmentation reflect the premise that the pluralism of Afro-Catholicism is coherent, while the persistence of Islamic forms is fragmented?

To add to this “pluralistic” conglomeration, when slavery was abolished in the Caribbean, colonial plantocracies needed replacement labor to work the sugar plantations.<sup>6</sup> In the British Caribbean’s post-emancipation era, beginning in 1838, the British colonial government wrestled with ways to meet the needs of sugar plantation production, particularly with respect to providing cheap and ready labor. Several strategies were debated among members of parliament and other officials, both in England and in the colonies. After some trial and error, and dealing with problems in India of social unrest, natural disasters, protestors at home, and other challenges to colonial rule, the labor scheme that was operationalized was to bind Indians—largely from Oudh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh—to labor contracts and ship them to Caribbean sugar plantations: to British Guiana in 1838 and then to Trinidad in 1845 (the “bound coolie” system lasting until 1917).<sup>7</sup> Caribbean indenture primarily depended on these “willing” subjects in India.

The Victorian tendency was to treat religion as metonymic of culture and civilization: Hinduism and India were perceived as one, and Islam was considered a phenomenon of the Middle East—an “Orient” distinct from India (e.g., Said 1979). However, all Indian indentured labor in the Caribbean were “coolies,” a colonial category for the most part identifying Hindu

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<sup>6</sup> The British West Indies abolished slavery in 1838, the French possessions in 1848, the Dutch territories by 1863, Cuba in 1886, and Brazil in 1888.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to British Guiana and Trinidad, indentured Indians went to Jamaica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, and Surinam (and in trickles to other territories in the region).

and Muslim together as “Indian.” “Indians” were symbolized in broad strokes: turbans, loincloths, and unlettered manual toil. When distinguished, they were homogenized into “Hindoo” and “Mahometan Hindoos,” or Muslims (e.g., de Verteuil 1858). Probably the most important context of their differentiation was in identifying religious rites, which colonial authority needed to control (so as to not impede production) and, in some cases, to permit. Colonial ideology also distinguished Indians from Africans, notably in terms of cultural “progress”: inferior to Euro-Christians, Indians in general still ranked higher than Africans on the evolutionary scale.<sup>8</sup> Given what appears to be their statistically small numbers relative to others of the multi-million migrations of the Atlantic slave trade, and what was more certainly a fusion of practices and beliefs difficult to pin down as necessarily distinctly belonging to one religion or another, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the profile of Afro-Muslims in the Caribbean had receded, giving way to an association of Islam with Indian immigrants and their progeny.

A process of what we might call ideological homogenization occurred in this Indo-Caribbean diaspora, where the regional, linguistic, and religious diversity of Indian immigrants was reduced to a selected few identifying categories, reflecting in part the demographic majority of certain regional, linguistic, and religious forms. But the preponderance of certain forms—for example, Sunni Islam—that expressed themselves in diaspora came from the same kinds of syncretistic processes that were occurring in Africa: the overlapping of cultural forms that made distinguishing among *kinds* in order to produce categories often an iffy business. Nevertheless,

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<sup>8</sup> However, not all subcontinentals were equal. Victorians traced the ancestors of the allegedly wild and savage, so-called “black races” of Southern India to Africa, whose beliefs were akin to “African Voodoo” (Bolt 1971:168-169). In the British West Indies, Victorian ideology held that the dangerous and deplorable belief in sorcery was a characteristic shared by laboring-class Indians and Africans.

Caribbean Indians, or Indo-Caribbeans, became known to be “Hindu” or “Muslim,” “Sanatanist” and “Sunni,” with a racializing of religion such that, by the time slavery and enslaved Africans were no longer part of living memory (although alive in historical consciousness), “Muslim” in the Caribbean indicated “Indian” rather than “African.”<sup>9</sup>

### The Puzzle

While Islam eventually came to be seen as Indo-Caribbean, it is also worth asking why its African traces are acknowledged in such limited fashion. If fragmentation—and the syncretism, pluralism, creolization that is said to follow it—is allegedly a hallmark of the Caribbean (in Derek Walcott’s famous metaphor, for example, the region is “a shipwreck of fragments” [Walcott 1993]), then why are the combinations of Christianity and African religious traditions understood to constitute a meaningful presence in the Caribbean while a kind of silencing is being produced about Caribbean Islam with the assumption that somehow its fragmentations and unorthodoxies cannot have similar outcomes? This question in turn leads to others relating to what “Muslim” is and means. The signification processes that tie “marabout” to “Muslim” in Muslim minority societies, for example, are flexible and not necessarily predictable. C.L.R. James tells us in *The Black Jacobins* that as “a legendary figure, [Makandal’s] name became identified with almost all forms of fetishism [amulets], with poisoning, sorcery, and slave dances. Thereafter, the *houngan*, or voodoo priests, were often referred to as ‘makandal’; to possess certain powers or simply to practice voodoo was to be a ‘makandal’...voodoo talismans

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<sup>9</sup> Javanese Muslims in Surinam do not figure into the dominant portrait of Caribbean Islam, which has to do both with their absolute numbers and the less than prominent place that the Dutch territories have in Caribbean scholarly discourse, which tends to be dominated by Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanophone studies.

[sic] were therefore often referred to as ‘makandals’” (James 1989 [1963]:63; Dubois 2004:51).<sup>10</sup>

This association between ritual talismen, or amulets, and Makandal the man was undoubtedly strengthened by Makandal’s being convicted of “‘mingling holy things in the composition and usage of allegedly magical packets’. One of those he made included a crucifix, and Makandal invoked Allah, Jesus Christ, and God when he created them” (Dubois 2004:51). It seems there was a mutually shaping overlap among an African Muslim man’s leadership skills and commitment to fighting the system of slavery, which drew from his Muslim worldview (already “syncretic” in Africa before ever arriving in the Caribbean); his practice of an Islam in Saint Domingue that undoubtedly took on Afro-Christian dimensions; and his broad capitalizing on the power of the sacred, spiritual, and supernatural, which inspired him as well as his fellow revolutionaries. In the loose application of the name-term “makandal” to mean houngans (a role indigenous to Saint Domingue but magnetizing various kinds of elements), of amulets (virtually universal cross-culturally), and of sorcery (a phenomenon on both sides of the Middle Passage), we lose sight of any clear discrimination between “Islam” and “Vodou.” What power, then, is in a name to suggest an identity, and is there necessarily an isomorphic fit between the *name* and the *thing*? What (and who) decides what the preeminent qualities of that thing are? These questions are key to the ways that the relationship between Islam and Vodou—to each other, to Africa, and to the Caribbean—is construed.

Another issue concerns the fact that when Muslims in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Americas are mentioned in most academic literature, it is virtually always in the context of resistance—either as African Muslim leaders or rank-and-file rebels in the cause of subverting domination

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<sup>10</sup> According to Dubois, Makandal’s name “may have been derived from the Kongo word for amulet, *mak(w)onda*” (Dubois 2004:51).

with the goal of freedom.<sup>11</sup> Yet this romanticized image of resistance requires scrutiny: representations of resistance are shaped both by the perspectives that define it as such and the contexts from which resistance is said to emerge. That leaders of New World slave rebellions were often Muslims is known “but not attended to,” Buck-Morss observes (2009:142), making the point that “highlighting their presence plants a small intellectual bomb causing the politics of Western interpretation to bifurcate almost immediately” (ibid 2009: 142). Distasteful aspects of slave rebels’ behavior, she says, can be attributed to the influence of Islam; the same rebels were motivated in part by two centuries of West African jihadist reform movements, and identification, at least at some level, with being Muslim (ibid 2009:142). “The political question emerging from this historical encounter, that urgently needs to be addressed,” she asserts, is “how is it that the revered Euro-American revolutionary slogan, ‘Liberty or Death’, came to be cordoned off in Western thought and practice from the allegedly infamous tradition of Islamic jihad?” (Buck-Morss 2009:143). In other words, on what epistemological basis does a double standard such as this rest? The issue is that somehow our attachment to the idea of historical African Muslims as resistance leaders overshadows seeing African Islam in other, perhaps salient ways. At the same time, in the West today Muslims are associated with a different sense of resistance, one with a negative valuation (terror, terrorism), hence the difficulty in legitimately recognizing them.

In his work on African Muslims in the Americas, Michael Gomez observes that in the Haitian Revolution, Muslims “made common cause with others of African descent,” both as “soldiers and as mallams or holy men who called upon the forces of the Islamic sciences in

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries this association with resistance would be recast in predominantly negative terms as terrorism.



pursuit of their cause” (Gomez 2005: 87). That said, he highlights Makandal as emerging “as the quintessential *houngan* [Vodou priest]” because he “absorbed a number of non-Muslim influences,” with “everything about [his] life point[ing] in the direction of religious synthesis” (2005:89); thus, Makandal formed “the epicenter, along with Boukman, of folklore celebrating the ideal of the *houngan*” (2005:89). Gomez bolsters his position that in this context Islam was superseded by more influential religious traditions with the observation that, as respected Vodou leaders, Boukman, Makandal, and Cecile Fatiman would have had difficulty explaining their behavior to Muslim reformers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West Africa (2005: 90). In all likelihood, Gomez posits, many of their practices would have amounted to *shirk* as interpreted by Sunni Muslims (2005:89), and therefore probably not [have been] “the kind of legacy a Sunni or orthodox mallam would want to leave behind” (2005:89-90).<sup>12</sup>

The difficulty of drawing precise lines around our categories renders these issues vexed to start with. Moreover, even if Gomez implies more finality than is necessary, the implications of his assertion that “African-born bearers of Islam would be swept up (and away) by the events of 1791-1804” (Gomez 2005:90) warrants consideration.<sup>13</sup> What does that sweep entail and what might its consequences be—for Caribbean cultures and histories and, for my purposes in particular, for our knowledge of them? Gomez’s points that Muslims were too small a population, too integrated with the rest of the Saint Domingue population, and too religiously syncretic to sustain a “viable” (2005:87) Muslim community are well taken. Even if viability is a difficult and subjective calculation, however, it is certainly the case that “Muslim” in the

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<sup>12</sup> In Islam “shirk” is the association of others (people, things) as equal to Allah—inarguably incorrect practice.

<sup>13</sup> 1804 is the conventional date indicating the end of the Haitian Revolution.

Americas is a multidimensional category, as other scholars have shown. For example, Joan Dayan (1995) observes that many of the early African arrivals in Saint Domingue were from the kingdoms of the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique and “had been both affected by ‘Islamic propaganda’ and ‘inculcated with ideas of catholicity by the Portuguese,...around the fifteenth century’” (Dayan 1995:245). Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Haitian writer Jean Price-Mars surmised that the majority of Africans brought to Saint Domingue “were pious peoples attached simultaneously to the Muslim and Dahomean faith, and even slightly Catholic” (Price-Mars 1930:126-127; quoted in Dayan 1995:325 fn#149). And in his work on African Muslims in Brazil, Joao Jose Reis reports that the earliest Muslims in Bahia, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, were small populations about whose religious practices little is known beyond their association with “the famous *bolsas de mandinga* (Mandinga pouches), a kind of Islamic amulet” that became synonymous with “witchcraft” in modern Brazil (Reis 2001:306). The “great wave of African Muslims” arrived in Brazil during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were primarily Yoruba and Hausa, but also included Nupe, Bornu, and Fulani (Reis 2001:306). Both Haitian and Brazilian examples reveal heterogeneous populations of African Muslims in the Americas, and, as we have seen above, diverse ways of being Muslim.

We have seen so far that in the Caribbean (as everywhere else), religion is refractive and syncretic, and the religious identity of Boukman/Bookman and Makandal, and Muslims in general, is ambiguous, symbolized largely in terms of the Revolution’s religious-military leadership and production and use of amulets. But it is also worth asking why these Muslim aspects were so apparently rather easily diminished. One could instead emphasize the Islamic shaping of Afro-Atlantic religions, or at least caution that we can only speculate about these processes of creolization. In either case, we would need to probe our speculations—any

teleology inhering in our historical narratives—as well as revisit our analytical categories.<sup>14</sup> The latter would include even “orthodoxy” itself: for example, Gomez approves of what he reads in *The Black Jacobins* as James’s “correct judgment” to “sublimate” Makandal’s Muslim background, given that “in the New World [Makandal] was no longer living life as a Muslim, or at least as an orthodox one” (Gomez 2005:88-89). But the very contexts of non-Muslim influences that Muslims in Saint Domingue (and in the rest of the New World) undoubtedly did absorb are precisely why such categories as “orthodoxy” require unpacking, as well as “orthodoxy”’s relation to what form(s) of “Islam.”

In tackling the tension between real people and their representation, Diouf takes a different tack from Gomez. She argues that although “Muslims were essential in the success of the Haitian Revolution,” their “role and contribution have not been acknowledged” (Diouf 1998:129). Diouf advises us that although Boukman “has passed down in history as a voodoo priest,” this “does not mean that he was one. Because the Muslim factor has largely been ignored, any religious leader of African origin in the Caribbean has been linked to voodoo or obeah” (1998:153).<sup>15</sup> Diouf offers an interestingly provocative view. Although I do not think Muslims have been deliberately expunged from the archival record, the overshadowing of Muslim “Book Man” by Vodou “Boukman” is meaningful as both an accident of history and an artifact of historiography—the two, history (what happened) and historiography (what is said to have happened), never being entirely distinct, in any case.

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<sup>14</sup> By teleology I mean that we want to avoid predetermined cultural or other endpoints.

<sup>15</sup> Obeah refers to magical practices involving supernatural powers. In the Caribbean it derives from West African, South Asian, and European, divination and healing practices.

A key aspect of the relationship between history and historiography is what cosmopolitan societies are imagined to be, and how they produce cosmopolitan persons.<sup>16</sup> Who might these people be and how do they merit being conferred this appellation? It seems to be the case that “historical” African Muslims fulfill the requirements for cosmopolitanism, in terms of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, diversity of exposure to multiple others (in West Africa and in the Caribbean), and hybridity (in religious practice), if not explicitly in terms of the kind of modernity that most scholars of the Caribbean agree emerged there (e.g., James 1989 [1963]; Mintz 1996; Scott 2004; Palmie 2002). As “historical” Africans become “contemporary” Afro-Caribbeans, however, Africa becomes a different sort of symbol in this (Caribbean) modernity. No longer having a significant association with African Muslims, “contemporary” Africa becomes a symbol of (Afro-) Caribbean indigeneity and blackness (its authenticity represented by, among other things, Vodou). Certainly in the colonial Caribbean, Euro-colonizers associated Africa with blackness, but perceptions of blackness were denigrating, largely unconnected to Europeans’ ideas about modernity except as its antithesis. In the postcolonial era, however, Caribbean intellectuals and scholars of the Caribbean saw modernity, and one of its key features, cosmopolitanism, as emerging from, and thus defining the region through, Afro-Euro articulations of one sort or another.<sup>17</sup> In the relationship and cultural dialogue between Africans and Europeans in the Caribbean that produced the region’s special defining qualities (modernity,

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Fairweather makes a similar comment that it would be interesting to explore what the relationship is between “coming from a culture that has a cosmopolitan history and being a cosmopolitan individual” (in Hall 2008: 359).

<sup>17</sup> As many scholars have commented, the meanings of “postcolonial” are variable and not always precise. I use “postcolonial era” here to indicate a period of time beginning with the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was prior to Caribbean countries’ independence, and continuing into the present, post-independence era.

cosmopolitanism, creolization, diaspora), Africa was configured as either at the center or as an equal partner with Europe. But this Afro-Euro interlocution did not meaningfully involve Islam. This would not have been an automatically logical move, in any case, given Islam's compartmentalization into the historical envelope of slavery and its forms of resistance, and its particularization as an Indo-Caribbean phenomenon. That is, as long as Islam's principal connotations were certain forms of resistance in the context of slavery, it was both compartmentalized and particularized—occupying a certain conceptual space and possessing certain definitive features.

### *Cosmopolitanism*

As current work on cosmopolitanism indicates, this concept has meanings and significance attached to it that reflect different moments in time. Perhaps the most basic distinctions are the reference points that it addresses, and the contingent symbolism of hope and promise as opposed to caution and doubt that the concept carries. As Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco (2009:1) explain, “cosmopolitanism remains largely a prescriptive concept concerning the development of a new world order or a descriptive concept that enables one to label and distinguish between cosmopolitans and non-cosmopolitans.” I find this a useful differentiation, although I would suggest that the concept is necessarily simultaneously prescriptive and descriptive rather than being one or the other. It prescribes the should's and describes the is's, but the latter are putative, given the tricky relationship between is and ought to be. The most relevant aspect of cosmopolitanism for the purposes of my discussion is that current, predominant versions of cosmopolitanism privilege tolerance and diversity, making it a fashionable lens for assessing Islam.

Even given the most specifically laid-out template for what constitutes “cosmopolitanism,” the concept is still always variously interpreted from differing vantage points. Hence, the concept can at the same time be imbued with utopian connotations and suggest “an unpleasant posture of superiority” (Appiah 2006: xiii); this is unavoidable, perhaps, given that it “is really the latest phase of capitalist modernity operating on a global scale” (Hall 2008: 346). Contemporary globalization, Stuart Hall observes, produces two kinds of cosmopolitanism, one from “above,” associated with circuits of global investment and capital, and the global entrepreneurs who follow them, and the other from “below,” the “vernacular cosmopolitanisms” that comprise those who are “obliged to uproot themselves from home, place and family” (Hall 2008:346). The latter populations form culturally variegated new settlements whose way of life and forms of consciousness are “diasporic” and whose “diasporic dilemma” is a question of identity—how is the sense of self understood when one’s lived reality is movement among places, histories, cultures, religions (Hall 2008: 347)? Hall sees this existential conundrum as “inevitably the site of what Du Bois called ‘double consciousness’” (ibid: 347). These discussions suggest that we look at cosmopolitanism as a way of *being in* the world (that reflects the lived experience of unequal relations of power) and as a way of *thinking about* the world (that reflects the moral aspiration to level those inequalities through dreams and deeds).

The recent revival of scholarly interest in cosmopolitanism of which Nowicka and Rovisco (2009) speak may be related to its new 21<sup>st</sup>-century incarnation, which particularly emphasizes “empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values” and “reaching out across cultural differences through dialogue” (Werbner 2008:2), and which, as social theory, battles “the politics of disillusionment” (Fine 2007: xvi). Upon closer inspection of any given position, however, we are reminded that each is linked to a particular vantage point, a reflexivity

that slants interpretation. For example, as I have discussed in my work on Trinidad (e.g., Khan 2004), *callaloo* is a kind of local political expression of “cosmopolitanism” that is promoted by the state in reference to building a national identity and nationalist agenda; it is viewed askance by many Indo-Trinidadians as in practice being preferential and exclusionary rather than inclusive. In a sense, for these Trinidadians, the prescriptive and the descriptive of cosmopolitanism talk past each other.

In the current zeitgeist, deployment of the concept of cosmopolitanism—a way of being in and thinking about the world—can result in some interesting judgments of both Islam and Vodou. In the examples below, Islam (ostensibly extracted from specific locations) retains its profile as beneficial in some distant historical past and is negated in the current moment as malevolent. Vodou, here now an explicit foil rather than an ambiguous companion of Islam, retains its popular image as historically murky and contemporarily malevolent, but the latter more in the sense of self-destructive rather than harmful outside itself (read: harmful to us-U.S.). When looked at through the contemporary Western realpolitik lens of cosmopolitanism, Islam is seen as malevolent to others, Vodou as malevolent to its own people. Hence the concept of cosmopolitanism is as much a projection of its purveyors as it is a complex of features identifiable in certain contexts and populations. In other words, “cosmopolitanism” is a conditional category, not a categorical condition.

The question of how societies shape people, how people respond and in turn shape their social milieus, and the kinds of characterizations that emerge about those societies and their members has become of late far more freighted than solely an academic question, given the “enemy within,” “sleeper cell,” and “anchor baby” narratives familiar in the current moment of

scrutinizing the relationship between Islam and the West. Reference to Muslims is not necessarily any less pointed when emerging from untypical comparisons with unlikely others. We can see these characterizations of self-destructiveness and malevolence in interpretations of recent events. Recently *New York Times* op-ed columnist David Brooks (Brooks 2010) joined numerous other so-called pundits in trying to explain the degree of destruction of Haiti's January 12, 2010 earthquake. In his brief essay, "The Underlying Tragedy," Brooks stated that this tragedy signaled the time to "rethink our approach to global poverty," which requires acknowledging "a few difficult truths"—the underlying causes of the devastation. The third of his "truths" caused something of a firestorm in the popular media. "It is time," he said, "to put the thorny issue of culture at the center of efforts to tackle global poverty. Why is Haiti so poor?" Comparing Haiti unfavorably with Barbados and the Dominican Republic—which Brooks views as analogous to each other, mentioning variables he finds sufficient bases for comparison ("history of oppression, slavery and colonialism")—he turns to Lawrence Harrison's (2006) exposition on Truth for an explanation.

Harrison's analytical lens is trained on "culture," treating religion as its principal explanatory device. He states that

"some religions do better than others in promoting the goals of democratic politics, social justice, and prosperity. As an example of a religion that is highly resistant to progress, consider again Voodoo, the dominant religion of Haiti and a surrogate for the many animist religions of Africa, the birthplace of Voodoo. Not only does Voodoo nurture irrationality; it also nurtures a sense of impotence and fatalism and discourages the entrepreneurial vocation. ..It is also essentially without ethical content, at least in the sense of the Golden Rule behaviors... Voodoo



has made a major contribution to the sociopolitical pathology, including poverty and extremely low levels of trust, that has plagued Haiti's history" (Harrison 2006:87).

My interest here is not in rebutting Harrison in detail but in underscoring his all-too-common invocation of democracy, justice, prosperity, and progress as a kind of expansive vision of charitable optimism, a universal form of consciousness and sense of self that contrasts with the alleged myopia and taciturnity of inward-looking and amoral/immoral—failed—Haiti. In stark contrast to scholars of the Caribbean, Vodou for Harrison seems simply beyond redemption. In Harrison's portrait, Haitians implicitly are not cosmopolitans; if they were, they could have reasonable expectations to become modernized and cease being "progress-resistant" (Harrison 2006:119). In Harrison's portrait, as well, Vodou's various inadequacies make impossible his teleological goals of Western (read: American) democracy.

Interestingly, Harrison has a somewhat more generous appraisal of Islam. Although "Islam has fallen behind the Western religions and Confucianism in virtually all respects," and the "data for Islamic countries reveal a strong resistance to modernization," these disappointments are "in striking contrast to the vanguard role of Islam during its first several centuries" (ibid 2006:97). Over the course of time, unfortunately, the world witnessed "Islam's transformation from progress prone to progress resistant" (ibid 2006:119). In charting Islam's alleged devolution, Harrison alludes to aspects often equated with cosmopolitan qualities, notably exposure to diverse others and duration over time. Harrison's judgment of Islam's "falling behind" its own early precociousness is, implicitly, a nod to its fifteen centuries and counting. This staying power is also acknowledged elsewhere with quite different messages in mind. In a brief essay in *Time Magazine*, for example, Ishaan Tharoor's cursory yet sympathetic

rundown of “a more advanced, more powerful Islamic world” reiterates Islam’s admirable qualities of diversity and longevity but does not see its Harrisonian demise. Tharoor writes that “for centuries” Islam “haunted the imagination of snow-bitten Christendom” (Tharoor 2010). Distinguishing Islam, a “world religion,” from such allegedly negligible, small and backward (rather than enormous and grand) religions as Vodou, commentators tend to presume the higher value of extensive geographical spread, encounters with numerous others and increasing internal heterogeneity, orientation toward entrepreneurial vocations, and a universalist vision of rights and mode of living, all of which, according to such critics as Harrison, are not found in Vodou but are found in Islam—at least at one time (long ago), a fact that would seem to hold out the hope that Islam can be rescued from itself by Western/American example.

Of course, Islam’s historical “vanguard role” has been lost or negated in much of today’s discourse in the West, with its focus on terror, terrorism, and the war on terror. Yet even in this, the cosmopolitan is sought, perhaps to rescue what was vanguard, and certainly to seek a rapprochement between “East” and “West”—notably with “Easterners” *in* the “West.” So, as just one very recent example, there are numerous reassurances that the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque” is actually “more akin to a YMCA,” with its “swimming pool, auditorium, and other amenities,” than to “a dedicated house of worship” (Marbella 2010), and that the cleric promoting the mosque project (Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf) is “a consummate moderate” who admires the era in Spanish Andalusia when Muslims, Christians, and Jews “co-existed for centuries in an extraordinary flourishing of culture and science” (Tharoor 2010). The issue I am underscoring here is not whether certain “acceptable” and “tolerant” Muslims (descriptors which have appeared in the media) are *really* cosmopolitans or not. Rather, the issue is the language (which forms the discourse) that is being used: the acid test is Western values and priorities, not,

for example, Islamic ones—which may (or may not) be different. In fact, it is interesting that discussions of Islamic tolerance and coexistence with other groups—for example, Spanish Andalusia—to an extent reflect late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century notions of multiculturalism and the tolerance it ostensibly embodies.

According to the prevailing discourse, this Spanish Andalusian era (c. 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries) represents cosmopolitanism and Islam at their best, unless one looks even further back in history. In contrast to Harrison's (2006) notion of a "progress resistant" premise of culture/religion, there is a good deal of excellent research on the first few centuries of Muslim histories and societies that emphasizes the global reach and heterogeneity of Islam as it is embodied in lived experience—yet absent the position taken by commentators like Harrison about what Islam putatively has become. Two particularly interesting examples come to mind: the work of Amitav Ghosh (1992) and, more recently, Enseng Ho (e.g., 2004). Ho turns to the 1570s, to *The Gift of the Jihad Warriors in Matters Regarding the Portuguese*, a book written by a Muslim jurist in Malabar, India. Cataloging "Portuguese atrocities against Muslim communities in Malabar and elsewhere across the Indian Ocean," this 16<sup>th</sup> century cleric details the composition of Malabar society (Ho 2004:222). In addition to Muslims, under attack by the Portuguese were Brahmins and Nayars, carpenters and fisherfolk, and caste relations, along with the Christians and Jews who lived among the Brahmins and Nayars (2004:223). Malabar society was thus "a civic, commercial, urban realm, a string of cosmopolitan port-cities," where "merchants of different religions engaged in peaceable long-distance trade" (2004:223). The cosmopolitanism of this place and time seems to lie in two key aspects: its diversity and its tolerance of diversity. Going back at least to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then, scholars identify as dimensions of cosmopolitanism shared consciousness, individual actors, tolerance toward difference, universal rights, and a

“positive freedom” kind of agency (e.g., Mahmood 2005: 9; Rapport 2006), along with hierarchy-based forms of evaluation. Hence they are not unique to either of the last two centuries of discourse about it.

Equally significant for understanding cosmopolitanism, however, is the “new cosmopolitanism”’s interrogation of the very premises of this concept, its twin pillars of universalism and modernity. This interrogation rests on what Hall calls “the paradox at the heart of the Enlightenment—the particularism of its conception of universality” (Hall 2008: 349). That is, the Enlightenment (Kantian) version of cosmopolitanism represented itself as universal, but that universality was yoked to the West, never coming to terms with being embedded in a specific historical moment and intellectual tradition. This tradition assumed the West as the ones “whose civilizational duty and burden it was to enlighten...the unenlightened, the non-cosmopolitan” (ibid: 349). In a sense, the universal is always vernacular and thus always ultimately slanted toward the self-serving in some fashion. To borrow from Renato Rosaldo’s notion of “useful fictions” (1989: 217), “the West” itself is a useful fiction rather than a self-evident source. However, for the Caribbean intellectuals and activists who have interpreted the Caribbean as being “by definition cosmopolitan,” these definitions have particular objectives, and consequences, that do not necessarily look askance at Enlightenment thinking as itself representing “fictions.” While those to whom I now turn were anything but naïve or superficial in their reflections, critiques, and aspirations, the hope and self-identification they had for cosmopolitanism, as they understood it, produced certain characterizations of Caribbean (or Atlantic World) identity whose universalist visions both transcended African particularities (like religious traditions, ethno-linguistic groups, etc) and yet drew upon symbolic Africas as part of

the cosmopolitan equation.<sup>18</sup> These visions gave voice to some and may have (inadvertently) silenced others. Despite contributing to the historically cosmopolitan Caribbean, African Muslims do not stand out in conceptualizations of the contemporary cosmopolitan Caribbean; their Muslimness recedes into their Africanness (their race), and Africa itself does symbolic work that does not require (or is even hindered by) being particularized. In the Afro-Euro dialogue that constitutes cosmopolitanism, Indo-Caribbeans—who in the contemporary moment signify Caribbean Islam—find no place, their Indianness receding into their Muslimness (their religion). And in connection with their Indianness, Indo-Caribbeans' Muslimness is not construed as possessing cosmopolitan attributes, or those attributes make no contribution to the cosmopolitan character of the Caribbean.

### *Caribbean contours*

In the Americas, a post-Enlightenment place and peoples filtered through Enlightenment valuations, the concept of cosmopolitanism took on an emphasis on modernity, a quality (i.e., a state of mind, a capability of agency) that was not of great concern to 16<sup>th</sup>-century commentators, much less to earlier ones. Ideas about Caribbean cosmopolitanism tend to be organized in ways that elide or overlook Islam—in part because Africa's symbolic importance often supersedes (and otherwise is equal to) its being a site of particular histories and cultures. Cosmopolitanism in the Caribbean is characterized by certain features that have long been fundamental to the ways

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<sup>18</sup> Although in Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic*, for example, Africa has a minimal role (given his greater interest in routes than in roots), his arguing against African essence is not tantamount to arguing against African presence. The representation of Africa in the scholarship on, and creative arts in the Caribbean is diverse, a major topic in its own right. As such, it is outside the purview of the present discussion.

peoples of the region have understood themselves, and have been understood by others, in relation to being modern. It is to these features that I now turn.

The whole point of cosmopolitanism is to transcend boundaries, but neither the territory left behind nor that reached can ever be neutral ground. In her discussion of cosmopolitanism in the Americas, Camilla Fojas (2005) focuses on Latin American political movements that fostered the idea of an international community of equal rights and justice, and literary movements of shared aesthetics. From early visionaries such as Simon Bolivar (whose ideal of southern hemispheric unity derived from Enlightenment universals reconfigured in concert with notions of anti-colonial sovereignty<sup>19</sup>), to the fin de siècle emergence of the OAS (Organization of American States), to the international writers who throughout the century “attached their ideals to the utopian conception of a world-wide literary cosmopolis and the aesthetic principles of cosmopolitanism” (Fojas 2005:2), *internationalist* aims reflected regional—that is, particularly Latin American—sensibilities and concerns. These writers were not simply in search of new forms of justice but, linked to this, also in search of modernity, and the consumption and display of luxury goods (ibid 2005:3). In this search, they were “captivated” by “the metropolises and culture of Europe and the Americas—Paris, Rome, Chicago, New York, Mexico City, Havana, Bogota, Buenos Aires” (ibid 2005:13). Rather different sensibilities, meanwhile, are emphasized in the argument that the notion of democracy and “the West” itself are products of the “cosmopolitan spaces” (Graeber 2005: 290), or “spaces in between” (ibid 2005:299), found on Caribbean pirate ships. These vessels constituted small societies (as opposed to the urbane

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Bolivar’s (1965 [1815]) *Carta de Jamaica*, or Jamaican Letter, which arguably exemplifies cosmopolitanism in its presentation of a panoramic vision of a hemispheric “America” comprised of diverse yet united independent republics.

metropolises of Latin and North America) whose ethnically diverse members engaged in dialogues about collective governance that drew from a mélange of customs and traditions. Here, cosmopolitanism, as a key ingredient of democracy itself, is tied to a different site, the Caribbean (or what is represented by the Caribbean, the “Atlantic World”), rather than to Latin America.<sup>20</sup>

Linking the Caribbean to a cosmopolitan argot is the work of Trinidadian intellectual and activist C.L.R. James. Counting James along with Martinicans Aimee Cesaire and Frantz Fanon as among the Caribbean’s greatest thinkers, Edward Said argued that James represented a “model for the postimperial world [that] depended on the idea of a collective as well as plural destiny for mankind, Western and non-Western alike” (Said 1989: 224). Said’s statement is both a point of fact about shared birthplace and a symbolic association between the Caribbean and the concept of cosmopolitanism. This association is not via pirate social organization or encompassment by international projects such as Du Bois’s interests in Pan-African and Pan-Asian movements, but through the political philosophies of a few of its most illustrious native sons.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Based on her work among contemporary West Indian immigrants in New York City, as just one example, Mary C. Waters (2001:202) suggests that Afro-Caribbeans are “perhaps the quintessential postmodern peoples” due to their engagement with capitalism, the preponderance of cultural mixing in the region’s “created societies,” and the importance of migration in their lives. Huon Wardle’s work is the only Caribbean ethnography I am aware of that explicitly tackles the notion of cosmopolitanism, finding a “creolized Kant” in the Jamaican worldview (Wardle 2000: 4).

<sup>21</sup> In his commitment to Pan-Africanism and Pan-Asianism as mutually contributing to global liberation, W.E.B. Du Bois developed a vision of cosmopolitanism and its possibilities that has relevance for the Caribbean, in terms of the resonance of his notion of “double consciousness” (Hall 2008:347), modernity, and creolization, or mixing. A text dealing with some of these issues is Du Bois’s 1928 novel, *Dark Princess: A Romance*. Although, as Gilroy comments, the novel is “often passed over silently or condemned by African-American critics” (Gilroy 1993: 140), it is a fascinating attempt to evoke both a mood and a realistic possibility of an emotionally hopeful and politically healthier—cosmopolitan—future. There is much to say about this novel

James was also involved with Pan-Africanism (the revival of the movement in London) and in the Trotskyite movement (Hall 1992: 7-10), projects whose internationalist agendas and universalist visions are inherent to them. In *The Black Jacobins*, James's embrace of cosmopolitanism is lyrical and unequivocal. "West Indians," he says, "first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution" (1989 [1963]:391). This sense of self, or self-consciousness, emerged from struggles involving justice, rights, and progress, and also, not unrelatedly, from the condition of modernity that James saw as characterizing the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> Arguing that the pattern of life wrought by the slave plantation system was "*sui generis*, with no parallel anywhere else," and "not native in any sense" (1989 [1963]:392), James's Caribbean was not European, African, or (North) American, but "original" (1989 [1963]: 391). At the same time, on the one hand, "the African had to adapt what he brought with him to the particular circumstances which he found in his environment," where "his philosophy and religion proved to be a combination of what he brought with him and what his new masters sought to impose on him" (James 1984:21); on the other hand, Caribbean people were "cut off from all contact with Africa for a century and a quarter," presenting "today the extraordinary spectacle of a people who, in language and social custom, religion, education, and outlook, are essentially Western and, indeed, far more advanced in Western culture than many a European community" (James 1977:25; quoted in Henry and Buhle 1992:xi). As Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (1992) aptly note,

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but most relevant for my purposes is to point to his treatment of Africa and Asia, the former broadly symbolic rather than ethnographically specific, and the latter rendered exotic through the trope of Orientalism. See, for example, Bill Mullen (2003) and Alys Weinbaum (2001) for good discussions of *Dark Princess*, particularly its Orientalist perspective.

<sup>22</sup> Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz has also long made a case for the Caribbean being at the center of modernity as we know it (see, for example, Baca, Khan, and Palmie 2009). Most Caribbeanists today would concur with this Jamesian/Mintzean point of view.



what predominates in James's work are not icons of exile and dispossession but rather "people actively appropriating the modern possibilities left them by a heritage of Westernization" (1992: xi).

Deriving from the Caribbean's plantation mode of production, the modernity of which James spoke has a Janus-faced aspect. The enslaved Africans entered into a large-scale agricultural system that was modern in its industrialization and in its social relationships, which James saw as requiring a closeness far beyond "any proletariat of the time" (James 1989 [1963]:392). He sums up, "The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life" (ibid: 392). It thus was both the "most civilizing" and the "most demoralizing" influence in West Indian development (ibid: 392). James felt that the Caribbean's link to European civilization gave the region a special advantage. Although part of the Third World, the Caribbean had been "universalized" by European influence; and the region's great figures must, James felt, be viewed as part of the great metropolitan tradition, not simply as regionally important (Lamming 1992: 33). Darrell Levi clarifies the distinction James made between Western traditions and Western imperialism: the former he admired, the latter he decried (Levi 1991:489). In his admiring view, "the African" symbolizes a place of origin but, in being the crucible of Westernization, represents a successful and admirable Westerner; he/she is a creolized persona who certainly has identifiable and specific cultural, ethnic, and linguistic features, but these features are the raw material from which cooked (creole) cultural forms are produced. Muslims do not seem particularly relevant to James; as we saw in Gomez's (2005:88-89) remark above, James "sublimated" Makandal's Muslim background. This could mean anything from "redirected" to "expurgated," but the point is that for James, Vodou/Afro-Atlantic religions are perhaps clearer symbols of Africa in the Caribbean.

Where James found “Africa” in the Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean intellectuals from the late 1960s on tended to emphasize what was perceived as the dearth of living ancestral traditions as a source of alienation; others saw the absence of ancestral traditions as only amounting to cultural mimicry and thus a source of weakness (Look Lai 1992:180). As I will discuss below, although not a feature of James’s work (which emphasized potency and vitality), the abiding themes of deficiency and regeneration that accompany discourses of exile and dispossession are nonetheless characteristic of Caribbean reflexivity. Among scholars and Caribbean intellectuals, the tropes of deficiency and regeneration are expressed in the theoretical perspectives, or problematics, commonly known as “the absence of ruins” and “creolization.” While both James and later Caribbean intellectuals looked to Africa, they did so for different reasons. These perspectives have been significant in shaping Caribbean discourses which seek to present the region in terms of certain histories, agents, cultures, and forms of authenticity. These forms of authenticity revolve around an originary moment emerging from an Afro-Euro axis, a foundation to which Indo-Caribbeans are not perceived to belong, except as subsequent historical-cultural additions.<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of his recent Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz (2007) writes that one of his main characters, Beli, “embraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination. Embraced the power of the Untilled. And from it forged herself anew” (2007:258-59). In this brief characterization of the Caribbean, Diaz captures the essence of much of contemporary scholarship’s investment in history, memory, and consciousness in the Caribbean, an investment that has marked the Caribbean as a particular kind of place in the world—where

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Khan (1993), Segal (1993).

the “true history of the New World,” as Derek Walcott sees it, is “amnesia” and where the Caribbean is a “shipwreck of fragments” (Walcott 1974:4), where being West Indian means living “in a state of utter pastlessness” (Patterson 1982:258), characterized, in Orlando Patterson’s lyrical estimation, by an “absence of ruins.” And then of course there is V.S. Naipaul’s famous and more vitriolic charge that nothing was ever created in the Caribbean. It is noteworthy that these sentiments come from literary figures rather than social scientists (or activist intellectuals like James), who have spent entire careers pursuing counter-narratives about Caribbean history, memory, and consciousness—from Melville Herskovits’s (e.g., 1958 [1941]) empirical search for African “survivals” in the Americas to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995) interest in the unequal relations of power that both imagine and silence the past. Fundamentally at issue here are decades of debates about the region’s culture, quantity and quality: how much was allegedly lost by diasporic populations in the Americas, what of the remaining “fragments” were salvaged, and what is the value to each group of their cultural remnants in being counted as present in the region.

Because Caribbean fragments, as the thinking goes, have phoenix-like regenerative possibilities to create new forms, a companionate trope of Caribbean studies attempts to capture these creations. This is the concept of “creolization,” which works in interesting tension with the “absence of ruins”—where ruins represent a loss of Culture (where Culture is the medium of history and the circumstance of consciousness) and creolization represents the surfeit of cultures, heterogeneous groups in ongoing encounters. Creolization typically refers to the forms and dynamics of cultural change that develop over time as culturally diverse peoples come into contact and undergo the acculturation that such encounters engender or demand. Whether creolization is characterized as a contest among equals or as a concession of the weak to the

strong, it always connotes notable cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. But this diversity tends to be spoken of in the abstract, as broad references to different ethno-linguistic and racial groups, which are in turn identified with certain religions. As the demographic majority in the region, Afro-Caribbeans are differentiated according to Old World group history (e.g., Hausa, Yoruba) and culturally authenticated by scholars according to the “creolized” or “syncretic” religions that they brought to, and elaborated in, the New World—e.g., Vodou, Candomble. Islam among these populations was also “creolized” (and, indeed, was never “pure” to begin with) and in some cases was folded into other religious traditions. However, while there is no necessary reason why Islam cannot represent Afro-Caribbeanness—symbolization being a matter of social construction rather than dependent on, say, statistical data, Islam becomes a defining, and culturally authenticating feature of the region only among a subsequent diaspora, Indians from the subcontinent.

As Hall (2008: 350) aptly notes, the idea (and practice) of universalism does not work when viewed as a state of being, but only in terms of a “constantly shifting horizon towards that point where our history ends, and another history begins”; in this overlap, aspects of difference will remain on all sides, reminders that subject position self-sufficiency is impossible, fully defined only by what is left out or excluded—“its constitutive outside” (ibid: 350). It would seem, then, that the Caribbean/cosmopolitan self is ever an incomplete one, necessarily both in reality and in perception of that reality. Not only is the idea of essence a matter of ideology, but this ideology is freighted with Enlightenment-based aspirations to rethink humanity in terms of individuals who are free of the burdens of tradition, thus becoming open to modernity. This aspect of what Hall (2008:353) sees as “liberalism” reveals its own fatal flaw: it has “never understood its own culture”; that is, there is no such possibility as a neutral, liberated ground of

*acultural* existence. Thus essences become invented, “useful fictions” (Rosaldo 1989) in discourses that disallow movement (of encultured bodies, of cultural imaginaries) as loss, as ruins’ absence. And multiplicity can become a substitute for absence (many rather than none), still posing the question of *which* many, representing *what*, and to *what end*?

The Caribbean, as Hall summarizes, is “by definition cosmopolitan” (Hall 2008:351ff), this quality partially residing in the fact of its original inhabitants no longer existing and everyone there coming from somewhere else. These “true diasporic” societies produce a sort of “‘natural’ cosmopolitan” individual by virtue of movement, the movement of bodies across space. But another form of movement is also key in Hall’s logic. The movement of bodies across space results in diverse cultures engaged with each other in new and different ways. What is really indigenous today in the Caribbean is creolization, “the cultural mix of different elements” that constitutes “a kind of cosmopolitanism at home,” where the predominant African presence exists in translation with other cultural elements (i.e., peoples with other cultural heritages). At heart the issue is not about what is African but what “Africa” has become in the New World. Hall goes on to query how one can remain at home and be a cosmopolitan. Despite its difficulty, he says, this is possible “if you understand your history as always a history of movement, migration, conquest, translation, if you don’t have some originary conception of your own culture as really, always the same...you could become a cosmopolitan at home” (ibid: 351-352). Thus it seems that the cosmopolitan Caribbean person necessarily has a history of movement, translation and dialogue with alterity, and a history of self-reflexive thinking about that movement (a consciousness), shaping the formation of regional and personal identity. Yet historical Caribbean Muslims, Africans whose cultural heterogeneity and religious hybridity could lend them such congruence with “cosmopolitanism,” are figures who morph into

contemporary Caribbean Muslims, Indians (despite the presence and, in some cases, visibility of Afro-Caribbean Muslim peers) whose putative cultural homogeneity and religious monochromatism apparently render them incongruent with “cosmopolitanism.”<sup>24</sup>

When associated with African history in the Caribbean, Islam is superseded by racial identification and by the authenticating, syncretic religions that are attached to that race. As the logic continues, Islam may contribute to the cosmopolitanism of worldly and diverse African groups in the Caribbean seeking redress and justice on the basis of an encompassing definition of exploitation (as opposed, for example, to idiosyncratic actions) but it cannot represent the Afro-Caribbean. Book Man becomes Boukman. I am not arguing that Indian indentured laborers under the colonial gaze were considered more “cosmopolitan” than Africans (although they were ranked higher in colonial cultural evolutionary models [Khan 2004]), but I am suggesting that an implicit assumption is that as Islam is creolized, so to speak, out of Africans in the Caribbean, they emerge generations later as, in Hall’s notion, cosmopolitans at home (Hall 2008). I am also not suggesting that scholars and other observers have made any explicit or deliberate elisions to effect a silencing of Islam and its contribution to cosmopolitan identity in the Caribbean—indeed, as we have seen, Muslims’ anything but parochial attributes are part of historians’ and other scholars’ discussions. In relation to the Afro-Atlantic, cosmopolitan Islam adds to the

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<sup>24</sup> Although referring to a different context (the U.S. since the late 1960s), Vijay Prashad makes a resonant comment: “Within the framework of New Age orientalism, the Indian is seen as intensely spiritual and apolitical, as noble but silent, as knowledgeable but not cosmopolitan” (2000:68). Indo-Caribbeans historically have not been equated with being spiritual or noble in the sense that Prashad means (they are too grassroots for that), or with being apolitical or silent (there is too much ethnic/communal politics in the Caribbean for that), or as being knowledgeable in the sense of possessing lofty intellect (but, instead, a crafty shrewdness); still, what is interesting is that a non- or un-cosmopolitan feature of personhood or identity applies to Caribbean Indians as it does to their desi cousins in the U.S.

overall cosmopolitan character of the Caribbean, but this contribution is in specific ways whose possibilities have not been sufficiently explored much beyond Muslims constituting part of the region's early history and its emblematic contemporary diversity. A different image of Islam, one that supersedes race as a symbol of a group, represents Indo-Caribbeans. But this form of cosmopolitanism seems not to come out of, or in tandem with, the modernity that defines the region and that the region defines. In contrast to Boukman's Islam (which overshadows Book Man's Islam), Indian Islam is seen by Indo-Caribbean Muslims and others as (ideally) stable, conservative, and without culture, rather than as multi-cultured.

For James, what matters most is a pan-African and, in a sense, non-specific, African influence, along with Enlightenment modernity. For absence of ruins proponents, the past is at best murky and haphazard, which precludes an enduring Muslim reference point. For such thinkers as Hall, what is most significant is the modern African/Afro-Caribbean diaspora, not the Islamic past. Individual Caribbean actors produce and exchange specific, and visionary, cosmopolitan thoughts, while ordinary Caribbean communities possess a kind of collective consciousness that reveals a particular, shared—diasporic—experience. But the connectedness between the philosophy and the constituency can slip through the concept of cosmopolitanism's cracks. While those outside the Caribbean might look to Islam as a potential partner in cosmopolitanism, in the Caribbean itself it remains outside of cosmopolitanism, something apart from the creolizing energy that defines the region.

### *Some parting thoughts*

In an essay on how contemporary Western intellectuals should respond to Muslim scholars, Pankaj Mishra seems to evoke an image of cosmopolitanism as a kind of

consciousness, in his statement that the “fate of the truly modern nomad is... a ceaseless inner conflict between ways of life and value systems; this very quality has made the nomad an emblematic figure of the contemporary age” (Mishra 2010:70). Perhaps 19<sup>th</sup>-century African Muslims in the Americas “adjusted” too well, that is to say, well enough to preponderate in slave rebellions across the hemisphere. Their reported (yet sparsely documented) inspiration from Islam and creolized (syncretized) religious toolkits seem not to have produced the existential sturm and drang of which Mishra speaks. Despite, or because of this creolization, cosmopolitanism also still seeks authenticity, even though it purports to transcend the limitations of borders. Vodou (and other Afro-Atlantic religions) provides the authenticity sought for the Caribbean, which can redress the “ruins” argument. Vodou represents Africans’ essence and thus is able to symbolize Africa in the Caribbean; Vodou (and other Afro-Atlantic religions) is more habitually characterized as “syncretic” or “hybrid” than is Islam, which is more often treated (implicitly or otherwise), when associated with Indo-Caribbeans, as more predictable: more stable, less in flux. The “hybridity” of the Islam of Africans in the Caribbean did not help it to remain steadfast; in a sense, it was malleable enough to disappear. The “hybridity” of Vodou has somehow maintained its integrity as a recognizable thing. Islam interpreted as “stable” belongs to another component of Caribbean diversity, Indo-Caribbeans, iconic of the region in a different sense than Afro-Caribbeans of any religious connotation. Moreover, despite its acknowledgement as being part of Africans’ *historical routes* to the region, Islam is typically associated with Caribbean peoples other than Africans—mid-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century South Asian indentured immigrants—which also contributes to Islam’s not often being sought to exemplify (confirm) the region’s *historical roots*. While the Caribbean may be aptly characterized as “cosmopolitan,” the latter is a concept, not a condition; hence we need to be clear about: (1) why we desire to envision the Caribbean in that



particular way (since nothing is given, everything is a construction), and (2) the limitations of that image—e.g., in relation to Muslim identity and its historical and cultural significance to the region.

The deep and long-standing roots of Islam in Africa are indisputable. At the same time, it is the encounter between Africa and Europe that is *seen* as shaping the Caribbean, but Islam is not *seen* as inherently African. I have suggested that we inquire into the kinds of premises and perhaps unnoticed essentialisms that go into what both “Muslim” and “African” mean in the Caribbean, and how these premises and essentialisms have contributed to erasures in the history of Islam in the Caribbean. By erasures I mean an absence of certain themes. Muslims do appear in scholarly accounts of Caribbean history, particularly in the earlier periods; their role tends to be emphasized as one of heroic resistance, notably as leaders. One challenge is recovering the multiple ways (historical, cultural) that Africans are “Muslim” and Muslims “African.” Another challenge is establishing who “Muslims” were. Who was Boukman/Book Man?

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