



# Introduction

## Introducing Yemoja

*Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola*

Mother I need  
mother I need  
mother I need your blackness now  
as the august earth needs rain.

—Audre Lorde, “From the House of Yemanjá”<sup>1</sup>

“Yemayá es Reina Universal porque es el Agua, la salada y la dulce, la Mar, la Madre de todo lo creado / Yemayá is the Universal Queen because she is Water, salty and sweet, the Sea, the Mother of all creation.”

—*Oba Olo Ocha* as quoted in Lydia Cabrera’s *Yemayá y Ochún*.<sup>2</sup>

In the above quotes, poet Audre Lorde and folklorist Lydia Cabrera write about Yemoja as an eternal mother whose womb, like water, makes life possible. They also relate in their works the shifting and fluid nature of Yemoja and the divinity in her manifestations and in the lives of her devotees. This book, *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*, takes these words of supplication and praise as an entry point into an in-depth conversation about the international Yoruba water deity Yemoja. Our work brings together the voices of scholars, practitioners, and artists involved with the intersectional religious and cultural practices involving Yemoja from Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and South America. Our exploration of Yemoja is unique because we consciously bridge theory, art, and

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1 practice to discuss *orisa* worship<sup>3</sup> within communities of color living in  
2 postcolonial contexts. We also explore the ways that gender and sexuality  
3 inform these communities' religiosity.

4 The contributors in this volume examine Yemoja and her relation-  
5 ship to the construction of gender and sexuality in society and culture  
6 through essays and creative works. Some of the creative works in  
7 the book include poetry, website production, photo essays, and artists'  
8 statements. All of the works are organized into two sections: "Yemoja,  
9 Gender, and Sexuality" and "Yemoja's Aesthetics: Creative Expression in  
10 Diaspora." These two areas of focus share the evaluative lens of cultural  
11 critique that pushes the boundaries of our understanding of how Yemoja  
12 traditions situate gender and sexuality in society as transformative and  
13 fluid modes of being and doing. Our two unique areas of exploration  
14 fit into existing and emerging theoretical, cultural, and historical under-  
15 standings of Yemoja.

16 Our foremost goal in this volume is to facilitate scholarly and  
17 artistic investigation into the connections among *orisa* religion, art, and  
18 practice in interdisciplinary and transnational ways.<sup>4</sup> Our volume uncovers  
19 work being done on the discourse and practice of Yemoja traditions  
20 and their connections to national identity, gender, sexuality, and race.  
21 Indeed, *orisa*-worshipping communities are sites where subjectivities are  
22 creatively produced within social and cultural contexts. The chapters and  
23 other works in this volume also illustrate the ways that ritual, narrative,  
24 and art about Yemoja help to transform these contexts into several  
25 important sites of negotiation.

26 One set of negotiations we emphasize occurs within the African  
27 Diaspora, between Afro-Atlantic and Latina/o understandings of Yemo-  
28 ja. Communities that lay claim to Yemoja traditions often inhabit the  
29 multiple cultural, social, and racial locations that these descriptors sug-  
30 gest. Therefore, in this volume we are especially interested in addressing  
31 and exploring the geopolitical and cultural border crossings that Yemoja  
32 religious practices reveal both in daily life and in theoretical terms. To  
33 do this, we must examine how the discourses of fluidity found within  
34 African and African Diaspora Yoruba religious practices and arts emerge  
35 in their many historical and cultural contexts. Here fluidity includes a  
36 notion of flexible traditions that are open to hybrid and variable spaces  
37 found through Yoruba, and especially *orisa*, itinerant cultural logics and  
38 variable aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, many of the contributors pre-  
39 sented in this volume seek to uncover the ways that Yemoja is under-  
40 stood and reconstructed to reflect, respond, and challenge colonialism  
41 as well as the legacy of slavery in the African Diaspora, Latin America,  
42 and the Caribbean.

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Finally, the entire volume considers how constructions of gender and sexuality are deeply connected to Yemoja traditions. Our authors explore the complexity of these constructions within a variety of religious and creative contexts. Thus, this volume emphasizes how images of Yemoja in art, literature, and ritual question what kinds of aesthetics and counter-aesthetics determine the contours of gender and sexuality performed through the figure of Yemoja.

Yemoja is a deity known in Yoruba-based Afro-Atlantic religious cultures for her ability to dominate natural phenomena, especially aquatic zones of communication, trade, and transportation such as oceans, rivers, and lagoons. She is also associated with women, motherhood, family, and the arts. One translation of her name in Yoruba is “mother of fish,” metaphorically capturing her essence as the mother of all living things. In transnational contexts, she is also known by multiple names: for example, Yemayá in Cuba and Yemanjá, Iemanjá, and Janaína in Brazil. She is also associated with other water deities, such as Olókùn in Nigeria and Mami Wata across West and Central Africa. Scholars have explored her close relationship to the river deity Oshun.<sup>6</sup>

Anthropologists and art historians have also connected Yemoja to the Gelede festival of Ketu, especially in relation to gender and female power in *orisa* art and performances.<sup>7</sup> As the ancestral “mother” of the Gelede masks and the spirit children they embody, Yemoja is also necessarily connected to the powers of the *aje*, “our mothers”: powerful and hidden female spiritual forces that are especially propitiated during Gelede.<sup>8</sup> Since Yemoja is noted as a primordial female *orisa*, she is central to how Yoruba religious discourses enact the power of performing gender as a reflexive critique and satire of these roles in society and culture. In this regard, Oyeronke Olajubu’s study of women in Yoruba religion, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, helps us to consider how religious practices can be gendered through multiple narratives of traditionality that co-exist within the layered tapestry of *orisa* religious practice.<sup>9</sup>

A unifying consideration of this volume is how gender and sexuality are central to Yemoja’s fluidity and to the performance of religious agency among her followers. We are interested in showing how post-colonial feminisms and queer theory can provide new and meaningful readings of Yemoja representations and practices. As Jacqui Alexander asserts in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, outspoken and anticolonial expressions of gender and sexuality in vernacular religious traditions are especially vexing to official religious and secular institutions.<sup>10</sup> In this spirit, the queering of Yemoja traditions discussed in this volume further question the naturalization of ideologies of neocolonialism, patriarchy, and homophobia that sometimes mark Afro-Atlantic practices in ways that



1 lead us away from the religious cultures' transformative powers. Indeed,  
2 many of the chapters in this book grapple with the negotiation of what  
3 could be considered subaltern communities within these very traditions.

4 Before discussing the specific contributions to the volume, it is  
5 important to examine how scholars have understood gender, sex, and  
6 race in how *orisa* religious cultures are represented. Scholars such as  
7 Karin Barber and Margaret Drewal have looked at Yoruba religious per-  
8 formances such as *oriki* and ritual dance from the perspective of women's  
9 performative agency within an aesthetics of fluidity and play.<sup>11</sup> Although  
10 the study of gendered aesthetics remains an accepted way to think  
11 about Yoruba performances, debates continue about whether gender  
12 indeed exists as an ontological category in Yoruba traditional thought,  
13 language, and religious discourse.<sup>12</sup> For example, in *The Invention of*  
14 *Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyeronke  
15 Oyewumi argues that Yoruba linguistic registers do not account for  
16 gender. The construction of gendered discourses, and the hegemonies  
17 that they imply in the West, she argues, were part of the British colonial  
18 project but also have manifested in contemporary Western feminist and  
19 anthropological work on *orisa* religions. Her main argument is that biol-  
20 ogy, like gender, is socially constructed in its mutability and that Yoruba  
21 concepts and performances of both gender and biology are guided by  
22 social relationships.<sup>13</sup>

23 J. Lorand Matory responds vehemently against this argument in  
24 *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy*  
25 *in Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. He argues that gender and sexuality do  
26 indeed exist in Yoruba culture, especially in Yoruba religious cultures,  
27 and that these aspects of social identity are coded within the paradigms  
28 of the performance of transnational imagined communities.<sup>14</sup> He goes on  
29 further to suggest that traditions of secrecy in *orisa* religious cultures are  
30 the matrix by which gender and sexuality are reinterpreted for a variety  
31 of transnational political ends. Thus, "Yoruba" transnational allegiances  
32 hinge on how gendered ritual histories have been reinvented with an  
33 idea of a cosmopolitan authenticity at their base.<sup>15</sup> Clark likewise grapples  
34 with the concept of gendering *orisas* and *orisas* gendering practitioners  
35 in ritual practices like spirit possession, in the context of Santería.<sup>16</sup> How  
36 feminism, postcolonialism, and race are to be negotiated in multiple  
37 contexts whereby *orisa* religious culture performs important work in  
38 these three areas is at the heart of these debates.

39 Queer theory also thinks through the shifting manifestations of  
40 gender and sexuality within *orisa* performances.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note  
41 here that seminal lesbian and queer women writers, theorists, poets, and  
42 activists like Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Lydia Cabrera devoted

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important sections of their lives’ work specifically to Yemoja (Yemayá).<sup>18</sup> 1  
 Indeed, though often depicted as the eternal mother, Yemoja can per- 2  
 form different kinds of gender roles, and she has the power to shift, 3  
 change, and display an ambiguous sexuality in mythology and ritual. 4  
 Yet Yemoja also reminds us that marking gendered and sexual difference 5  
 has real consequences within *orisa* religious cultures that grapple with 6  
 the historical and social legacies of patriarchy and homophobia.<sup>19</sup> Thus, 7  
 this volume presents provocative essays that connect Yemoja aesthetics 8  
 and mythology with the legacy of gendered hybridity found in ritual, 9  
 art, and writing about Yemoja from queer and feminist perspectives that 10  
 have been understudied thus far. 11

Poet Pedro R. Pérez Sarduy opens the discussions in the book as 12  
 an invocation with his poem “*En busca de un amante desempleado* / 13  
 Searching for an unemployed lover.” The piece brings us into Havana, 14  
 a city bordered by the sea. It is a lyrical love song to the “Queen of 15  
 the Sea” revealing the bittersweet material realities of contemporary 16  
 Cuba and relating the island’s history of conquest and colonialization 17  
 to Yemayá’s imagery and mythological messages. Sarduy reminds us that 18  
 the transnational and transcultural contexts of Yemoja arts are marked 19  
 by the converging histories of conquest and encounter that traversing 20  
 the ocean suggests.<sup>20</sup> 21

The book’s first section “Yemoja, Gender, and Sexuality” explores 22  
 how representations of Yemoja are gendered, sexed, and racialized in Afro- 23  
 Atlantic ritual, literature, and art. Sometimes represented in the form of 24  
 the voluptuous, dark mother, Yemoja has been recast in a variety of images 25  
 that reflect a kind of *tropicalization* of her character in the Caribbean 26  
 and the Americas—here she becomes racially black in both a discursive 27  
 and historical sense.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Pérez explores how represen- 28  
 tations of black women as mothers move throughout the Afro-Atlantic 29  
 world. Pérez’s piece, “Nobody’s Mammy: Yemayá as Fierce Foremother in 30  
 Afro-Cuban Religions,” unites queer and postcolonial theory to challenge 31  
 representations of Yemayá in Afro-Cuban religious cultures that fix her 32  
 within the colonizing gaze of the “mammy” figure. Her interpretation of 33  
 the queer term “fierceness” disturbs representations of the “mammy” in 34  
 ways that recall Jose Muñoz’s formulation of disidentifications whereby 35  
 nuanced performances of mimicry and satire trouble stereotypes of race, 36  
 gender, and sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Pérez’s comparative fieldwork in Cuba and the 37  
 United States reveals how economies of race, gender, and sexuality within 38  
 Afro-Cuban religions include queer communities who express their own 39  
 “fierceness” in performing spiritual and cultural work. 40

Afro-Cuban religious cultures place Yemayá at the center of dis- 41  
 courses about race, gender, and homosexuality.<sup>23</sup> Yemoja is believed to 42  
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1 protect gays and lesbians, and her companion, the duck, *el pato*, is a  
 2 telling figure in her cosmology. “*Pato*” is used as a derogatory term in  
 3 Latin America and the Caribbean for a homosexual man, making it an  
 4 especially interesting symbol to analyze in this regard. Aisha M. Beliso-  
 5 De Jesús uses ethnography and cultural criticism to explore the episte-  
 6 mology of the duck in her illuminating piece, “Yemayá’s Duck: Irony,  
 7 Ambivalence, and the Effeminate Male Subject in Cuban Santería.”  
 8 Beliso De-Jesús reveals how representations of *el pato* and Yemayá in  
 9 Santería create discourses of masculinity and homosexuality in the tradi-  
 10 tion—inside and outside the island.

11 In a similar vein, Solimar Otero shares her fieldwork and a close  
 12 textual reading of Cabrera’s *Yemayá y Ochún* in her piece “*Yemayá y*  
 13 *Ochún*: Queering the Vernacular Logics of the Waters.” Otero explores  
 14 how ritual practices and mythological discourses found in the relationship  
 15 between Yemayá and Ochún in Cuban Santería reveals coded knowledge  
 16 about gendered and queered locations in the religion. She particularly  
 17 looks at how vernacular speech genres, like gossip, can impart certain  
 18 kinds of information about *orisa* religious knowledge through unauthor-  
 19 ized, veiled, and infectious registers.

20 In a related manner, the transatlantic nature of Yemoja rituals  
 21 and mythology highlight her important role as a symbol of a gendered  
 22 traditionality in transnational postcolonial contexts. Issues of authenticity  
 23 and hybridity in Afro-Atlantic religious terms also resemble Afro-Atlantic  
 24 philosophical arguments about aesthetics, knowledge, and values in com-  
 25 paring Western and African epistemologies.<sup>24</sup> The questions that the idea  
 26 of “authenticity” in Yemoja traditions evokes are at the very heart of  
 27 how Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic religious communities are reconfiguring  
 28 their beliefs about the nature of society, culture, and even personhood.  
 29 This last point is a significant issue in terms of thinking how embodi-  
 30 ment and subjectivities work in *orisa*-worshipping communities in terms  
 31 of gender and agency.

32 Along these lines, there is a diversity of ways that Yemoja’s gen-  
 33 der roles are understood in Afro-Atlantic *orisa*-worshipping communi-  
 34 ties. Her roles among Yoruba communities in Africa are fluid as well;  
 35 for example, Yemoja’s role can shift between wife and mother with  
 36 regards to her relationship to the *orisa Sangó*.<sup>25</sup> This method of nar-  
 37 rative transculturation in Yemoja’s mythology appears in how religious  
 38 cultures in diaspora are experienced and expressed. The two final chap-  
 39 ters in this first section on gender and sexuality are “A Different Kind  
 40 of Sweetness: Yemayá in Afro-Cuban Religion,” by Martin Tsang, and  
 41 “Yemoja: An Introduction to the Divine Mother and Water Goddess,”  
 42 by Allison P. Sellers. Both pieces wrestle with the tensions found in  
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transnational Yemoja religious practices that simultaneously value cultural fluidity, innovation, and the idea of tradition as the main grounds for ritual and mythological discourse. These two contributions illustrate the multiplicity of Yemoja's traditions in Africa and in the African Diaspora. Both Tsang and Sellers also reveal how the idiom of authenticity in religious rituals works to "traditionalize" much of the innovation, contradiction, and ambiguity found in *orisa* religious cultures. Their work is especially useful in extricating how ritual performances reinforce and subvert gendered scripts like mother and wife through differently gendered and sexed bodies.<sup>26</sup> This kind of performative play can especially be seen in the religious cultures of Cuban Santería and Brazilian Candomblé.<sup>27</sup> However, these religious traditions themselves illustrate a Yemoja-like fluidity in how they generate multiple transnational diasporas of practitioners.<sup>28</sup> As Yemoja traditions continue to move, so too will the ways that her religious practices embody subjectivity and negotiate place, gender, sexuality, race, nation, and culture in diasporic contexts.

The second half of the volume, "Yemoja's Aesthetics: Creative Expression in Diaspora" centers on how Yemoja's imagery offers a visual language through which to discuss slavery, colonialism, and history. Our first piece in the section traverses the borders between Chicana/o and Afro-Caribbean representations of the water goddess through theory, art, and poetry. In "Yemaya Blew That Wire Fence Down?: Invoking African Spiritualities in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and the Mural Art of Juana Alicia," Micaela Díaz-Sánchez explores Yemayá as a central figure in Chicana/o theory and art in the works of writer Gloria Anzaldúa and muralist Juana Alicia. Díaz-Sánchez's provocative chapter invites us to witness how Yemayá helps Anzaldúa obliterate the colonizing and objectifying "wire fences" that alienate women, queers, and people of color. Díaz-Sánchez explores the ways Anzaldúa contests indigenous/Spanish dichotomies by placing Yemayá on the Mexican-U.S. border. Díaz-Sánchez also argues that Alicia's artwork represents this important incorporation and moves Yemoja into new visual narratives. In this manner, communities of color that embrace Yemoja's hybridity and fluidity become connected through her spirituality.

In this regard, we can align Sarduy's poem that opens the volume, "*En busca de un amante desempleado/Searching for an unemployed lover,*" with the other creative expressions in this section because these pieces speak directly to how Yemoja's fluid aesthetics inform our understandings of the legacies of slavery and colonialism. These aesthetics are especially symbolized by the figure of Yemoja as the ocean. The image of the sea in the art, film, and literature discussed in this section becomes

1 a site for witnessing and healing the past in the specific historical and  
2 cultural terrains of an Afro-Caribbean-Atlantic imaginary.<sup>29</sup>

3 Two particular chapters in this section, “Dancing *Aché* with Yema-  
4 ya in My Life and in My Art: An Artist Statement” by Arturo Lindsay  
5 and “What the Water Brings and Takes Away: The Work of María Mag-  
6 dalena Campos Pons” by Alan West-Durán, investigate how Yemoja art  
7 and imagery remembers peoples and cultures lost during chattel slavery.  
8 Lindsay’s piece revolves around the idea of *desaparecidos*, or those who  
9 are missing, to explore the connections among Yemoja, Latin American  
10 political upheavals, and voices, lives, and histories lost during slavery.  
11 His artwork in this book re-imagines the faces and places lost to create  
12 spaces for remembrance, healing, and putting fractured communities  
13 back together again. His meditation on the similarities between miss-  
14 ing loved ones and dispersal in Panamanian and the African diasporas  
15 is especially moving and apt. Likewise, West-Durán explores the visual  
16 and performance art of Cuban artist María Magdalena Campos Pons.  
17 Campos Pons’ work resonates with Yemayá imagery, and her aesthetics  
18 of Santería traditions reflect issues of memory and history in the African  
19 Diaspora. West-Durán aptly invokes Edouard Glissant’s writings on the  
20 sea to help us to place Campos Pons’ oeuvre within a larger Caribbean  
21 aquatic imaginary. Again, meditations on loss and renewal center on  
22 Yemoja’s ability to recover and regenerate through her cyclical fluidity,  
23 and artwork devoted to her forces us to question not only how we  
24 understand the past but also whose history is remembered.

25 In this regard, Teresa N. Washington explores the central nature of  
26 Yemoja imagery in a transatlantic framework in “‘The Sea Never Dies’  
27 Yemoja: The Mother-Force Flowing Infinitely in Africana Literature and  
28 Cinema.” This piece looks at how seminal works in Africana literature  
29 and cinema, like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Julie Dash’s *Daughters*  
30 *of the Dust*, explore Yemoja’s ocean symbology.<sup>30</sup> Washington’s piece  
31 works nicely within other kinds of narratives that unpack Afro-Atlantic,  
32 especially African American, expressions of *orisa* worldview and symbol-  
33 ism in literature and film.<sup>31</sup> As with Lindsay’s work, the *orisa* expres-  
34 sions Washington reveals through her interpretative work call on ritual  
35 histories to open up a creative space of remembrance for the lives lost  
36 during the Atlantic slave trade.

37 Yemoja’s healing powers are renown in the Afro-Atlantic world,  
38 especially in Brazil, where children, people with AIDS, and other vulner-  
39 able communities turn to Yemoja for acceptance and dignity in *Candom-  
40 blé* religious practices.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Jamie N. Davidson and Nelson Eubanks  
41 explore Iemanjá as a formidable force in Salvador Bahia in their piece  
42 for the volume, “A Sonic Portrait with Photos of Salvador’s Iemanjá  
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Festival.” This chapter uses personal reflections and photos to give a rich and layered portrait of the Iemanjá festival. Their work focuses on how website construction opens up new ways of presenting ethnographic work, especially in the areas of religious street performance and ethnomusicology. The authors invite readers to interact with their work in the field by visiting their website.<sup>33</sup> The site is dedicated to a “sonic portrait” of the Festa de Yemanjá held in February every year in the Rio Vermelho neighborhood of Salvador, Bahia. Davidson and Eubanks followed the well-known religious group Filhos de Gandhi in 2010, 2011, and 2012, whose musical sounds dedicated to Iemanjá filled the streets in waves that mimicked the ocean. Their site adds a level of texture and resonance to our exploration of Yemoja, especially in terms of how deeply held traditions and beliefs about this fluid and transnational deity affect entire communities in Bahia’s urban environment. Their focus on community building through a range of media, like music and virtual sites, allows us to see how the figurehead of Iemanjá acts as a conduit for forming kin in both traditional and innovative ways.

Another site of transcultural negotiation appears among alternative religious cultures in the United States. Erin Dean Colcord is an artist and neopagan priestess of the Come As You Are (CAYA) Coven headquartered in Berkeley, California. Her coven is an important site for religious admixture between African diasporic and neopagan religions.<sup>34</sup> Her piece “Yemaya Offering a Pearl of Wisdom: An Artist Statement” shares her experiences with Yemoja as a spiritual guide and artistic inspiration. The statement describes how spiritual and cultural exchanges deeply inform her artwork as a mode of religious work. Another piece of art by Colcord, “Mermaid Playing with Merbaby,” vividly depicts a mermaid and a “merbaby” that Colcord created for her friend, a priestess of the American Magic Umbanda House in Oakland, California, as she prepared to dedicate her life to ritual service in the name of Yemoja. Colcord’s art and statement reflect how Yemoja’s fluidity inspires all kinds of vernacular religious cultures and how she opens up spaces for religious and cultural exchange and borrowing in the United States, especially among feminist, nonmainstream religious cultures. Here again, culture and art produced for Yemoja challenge us to think through and across the boundaries, borders, and contours of religious and artistic expression.

Considering the works in the two sections of this volume, we show how Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic cultural production surrounding Yemoja have been creolized, hybridized, and combined through creativity on a transcultural and transnational scale.<sup>35</sup> The chapters and art in this volume express a broad, integrated understanding of the

1 many avenues of expression touched by Yemoja. The connections among  
 2 Africa, Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean explored in  
 3 this book provide a rich commentary on the ways work and ritual about  
 4 Yemoja require us to become more careful about how we contemplate  
 5 history, religion, performance, art, and gender and their intersection-  
 6 ality. Components of Yemoja worship, and creative expressions about  
 7 her, embed themselves in webs of negotiations that situate community  
 8 identity through an aesthetic of fluidity that mirrors the waters. Like the  
 9 sea, Yemoja traditions are constantly changing in a manner that provides  
 10 a template for understanding social and cultural change, hybridity, and  
 11 reconfiguration. Within these reconfigurations and negotiations, multiple  
 12 aspects of gender are reflected through Yemoja's role in Yoruba diasporic  
 13 mythology as a space for secrecy, creativity, and play in constructing  
 14 subjectivities.

15 *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o Afro-*  
 16 *Atlantic Diasporas* challenges rigid constructions of sexuality, gender,  
 17 and race in profound ways. The conversations found here necessarily  
 18 take into account historic and contemporary sociopolitical contexts and  
 19 cultural realities, all of which contribute to unique expressions of Yemoja  
 20 art and cultural practices. In highlighting the fluid nature of the figure  
 21 of Yemoja, we emphasize the importance of *orisa* religions in creating  
 22 a complicated public discourse with important ramifications for under-  
 23 standing especially Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic diaspora religions on a  
 24 global scale. Yemoja traditions negotiate community identity in bold  
 25 ways that emphasize the shifting nature of belief and cultural practice  
 26 in our world today.

## Notes

- 31 1. Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (New York: Norton, 1978), 6.  
 32 2. Lydia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún* (Miami: Colección de Chicherekú,  
 33 Ediciones Universal 1980), 20. All translations from Spanish to English in this  
 34 introduction are those of the editors. "Yemayá" is the Cuban Lucumí spelling  
 35 of "Yemoja."  
 36 3. *Orisa* here refers to Yoruba divinities found in Africa and the African  
 37 Diaspora.  
 38 4. Sandra Barnes, ed., *Africa's Ogun*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana  
 39 University Press, 1997); Joseph Murphy and Mei Mei Sanford, *Osun across*  
 40 *the Waters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Toyin Falola, Joel  
 41 E. Tishken, and Akintinde Akinyemi, eds., *Sango in Africa and the African*  
 42 *Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Arturo Lindsay, ed.,  
 43 *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art* (Washington, DC.:  
 Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996); Kamari Maxine Clarke, *Mapping Yorùbá*

- Networks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey, eds., *Òrìṣà Devotion as World Religion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008); Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). 1
5. Olabiyi Babalola Yai, “In Praise of Metonymy: The Concepts of ‘Tradition’ and ‘Creativity’ in the Transmission of Yoruba Artistry over Time and Space,” in *The Yoruba Artist*, ed. Henry Drewal et al. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 111–15; Barry Hallen, *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 65–112. 2
6. Cabrera, *Yemayá*, 9–19, 55–69; Murphy and Sanford, *Osun Across*, 2. 3
7. Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 3–18; Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 42–43, 60–61, 256. 4
8. Lawal, *The Gelede*, 49; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 215; Oyeronke Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 27–28; Benedict M. Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu Yoruba Subgroup in West Africa* (Ile Ife: Abafemi Awolowo University Press, 1993); Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 65. 5
9. Oyeronke Olajubu indicates in *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 27–28, that the Ifa divination verse, the Odu *Osa Odu Meji* sets the stage for thinking about women’s ritual power in Yoruba religious discourses: 6
- Nigbati won nbo l’aye 7  
 Awon obirinrin, won ko ri nkannkan yan 8  
 La t’odo Olodumare . . . 9  
 Olodumare lo gbe ase fun awon obirin 10  
 O ni awon aje ko gbodo maa lo lati 11  
 Di ‘ya je ‘nikeni 12
- When women were coming to the earth 13  
 Women had no powers from Olodumare . . . 14  
 Olodumare promised them a power greater than that of men 15  
 Olodumare gave women power over men 16  
 Women were instructed not to use the power indiscriminately 17  
 Olodumare endowed women with the power of aje. 18
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