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Chapter 16

Ritual Dissociation and Possession Belief in Caribbean Negro Religion⁴

The Caribbean is a region of particular cultural complexity, distinctive in its history and geography, which may serve us as a laboratory for testing a variety of hypotheses concerning cultural change and cultural integration. The distinctiveness has been pointed out by anthropologists approaching the area from rather different theoretical vantage points. Thus, Herskovits (1941) stressed the common African Heritage which Caribbean Negroes share and which also relates them to Negroes in the rest of the Afro-American area, including in particular the United States and Brazil. M. G. Smith, forsaking this view of cultural homogeneity, instead has focused on the region as one exemplifying cultural pluralism (Smith 1960, 1965). Mintz (1966), on the other hand, characterizes the region as having a series of common societal features (such as being multi-ethnic immigrant societies, having colonial status, one-crop economies, and so on) accompanying great cultural variety, as well as some widely shared cultural elements.

Perhaps nowhere are both variety and similarity demonstrated better than in the area of religion, the area which Herskovits (1958) considered to be the cultural focus of Negro societies. If we concern ourselves, as we shall see in the following pages, with the religion of the Negro masses of the Caribbean region, we are, in fact, limiting ourselves to only one aspect, albeit a major one, of the total religious situation in the area. Catholicism, Anglicanism, and the various major Protestant denominations officially hold sway everywhere. Spiritualism has made significant inroads, particularly in Puerto Rico (Rogler and Hollingshead 1961, 1965). Where Indians, Chinese, and

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Indonesians have appeared in large numbers, as in Trinidad and in the Guianas, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism play major roles (Depres 1967; Klass 1961).

Our concern, however, is with a more circumscribed field: we wish to examine the role of dissociational states and possession beliefs in two types of religious groupings among the Negro lower class populations throughout the region. The two types are the Afro-American, Afro-Catholic spirit cults on the one hand and the independent fundamentalist Pentecostal churches on the other. We may consider them to be polar types with regard to their cultural affiliations. The former are widespread in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, and the Guianas. Haitian vodû may serve as the prototype to be examined most closely in the following pages.⁵ The churches, on the other hand, are found in the Virgin Islands and throughout the (British) West Indies. The Spiritual Baptists ("Shakers") of St. Vincent may serve us as a prototype for this group.⁶

The phenomenon referred to as "spirit possession" is the central experiential fact in lower class Negro religious life in the Caribbean, whether we deal with the Afro-American syncretic spirit cults or with the independent fundamentalist churches. (It also plays a major role, of course, in the growing spiritualist movement.) Because this phenomenon is, in fact, surrounded by a great deal of conceptual and terminological confusion, it may well be worth our effort to examine it in some detail before dealing with our specific examples.

What is generally spoken of as "spirit possession" actually involves two distinct aspects, two distinct levels of ethnographic "fact": an observable behavior pattern and a system of cultural beliefs and interpretations. These, however, in turn structure expectations and therefore behavior. In the following paragraphs, we shall restrict the

term "possession" to native beliefs concerning certain potential relations between human beings and postulated spirit entities. The behavior itself, and the psychophysiological state exhibited through it, will be called, where appropriate, "dissociation" or "trance" (Bourguignon 1965; 1968a). Other terms which have been suggested are "altered states of consciousness" (Ludwig 1968) and "exceptional states" (Ausnahmezustände, Pfeiffer, ms.).

We know from a world-wide survey of data that not all beliefs concerning possession refer to dissociation; indeed, as we shall see this is also true of the Caribbean, where other possession beliefs exist as well. Furthermore, not all states of dissociation find their native explanation in possession belief, and this too is true in the region under discussion. It thus behooves us to consider the native theory and the observable behavior each in its own right, without committing the anthropologist to native beliefs. Because, as was indicated above, beliefs do structure behavior, this is at times difficult. In what follows, we shall refer to dissociational states, expressing belief in possession, as "possession trance," in order to distinguish such states from other types of trance and other types of possession beliefs as well. This usage corresponds rather clearly to that of Haitian and French authors who speak of "crise de loa" (e.g., Mars 1946).

It must be pointed out that these terminological distinctions merely state the obvious, yet any search of the publications in this area will rapidly reveal the verbal and conceptual chaos which exists even in recent writings. Some of the sources of this difficulty have been analyzed elsewhere (Bourguignon and Pettay 1964), but the fact that possession belief is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of the Western observer,

going back to both Hebrew and Greek sources, makes it particularly difficult to establish order and objectivity in this area.

We begin our discussion by comparing the possession trance as it appears in Haitian vodû and in Vincentian Shaker ritual. In vodû, possession trance is the central ritual action, the focus of attention of both participants and foreign observers alike, and a great deal has consequently been written on the subject. Vodû is based on a belief in a large number of anthropomorphic spirits who are summoned, on ritual occasions, to participate in the dancing and feasting, at times to offer advice or perform a cure. Many of these spirits have names and attributes which are recognizably and obviously West African, most specifically derived from Fon or the neighboring Nago and other Yoruba groups. The spirits are grouped into "nations" called Rada, Nago, Ibo, Congo, and so on. At the same time, they may be represented by chromolithographs, depicting Catholic saints and referred to by the names of those saints. These correspondences, which are also found in Cuba, in Trinidad, and in Brazil, have been the subject of a number of studies (Herskovits 1937a; 1937b; Métraux 1959; Courlander 1960; Simpson 1962, 1965 among others). While some spirits are clearly African, others appear to have arisen or been invented locally, a process which is still going on under the eyes of observers (e.g. Menneson-Rigaud 1946). The African and Catholic elements sharply reveal the syncretism that has been the subject of so much discussion (Herskovits 1937a; 1937b; 1941; 1958). Other aspects of the identity of the spirits directly reveal the present Haitian social structure and the self-perception of cult members: spirits are identified with respect to power and class position and skin color and other racial attributes. Their tastes in food and clothing, their speech patterns, and their specific

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powers reveal them to be reflections of the society in which the vodûists live. Spirits are believed to be interested in human beings and to be responsive to their appeal, specifically to drum rhythms, songs, and food offerings. In response to these they may "mount" individuals, displacing their personality temporarily and using their bodies as vehicles. The person is then referred to as the spirit's "horse," a term which, incidentally, is also found in similar contexts in various parts of Africa and Asia (Bourguignon 1964). Facial expressions, bearing, patterns of behavior and of speech, and the like, are transformed and the individual's own presence is obliterated by that of the possessing spirit. Indeed, male spirits may possess women and, less frequently, female spirits may possess men. "Mounting" by the spirits is preceded by a brief period of intense concentration or of distraction, and is frequently followed by a moment of collapse or unconsciousness. Métraux wrote (1959: 121-122):

The symptoms of the opening phases of trance are clearly psychopathological. They conform exactly, in their main features, to the stock clinical conception of hysteria. People possessed start by giving the impression of having lost control of their motor systems. Shaken by spasmodic convulsions, they pitch forward, as though projected by a spring, turn frantically round and round, stiffen and stay still with body bent forward, sway, stagger, save themselves [sic! Mistranslation, should read: "run away," EB], again lose balance, only to fall finally in [i.e., into, EB] a state of semi-

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consciousness.

It should be noted, however, that there is a very great individual variation both in respect to which of these symptoms are exhibited and in their violence. These factors are related, or are supposed to be related, to the nature of the possessing spirit and in particular to the "horse's" relationship to the spirit. Extreme violence reveals the spirit's anger. The symptoms also appear to be related to the degree of habituation-- i.e., the more frequently the subject has experienced possession trance, the greater the ease with which he attains the state. Haitians also say that persons who resist possession will experience a more violent seizure, and this does indeed make good psychological sense. It is expected that there will be no memory of the events that take place during the minutes or hours that possession trance lasts. In some people it is possible to observe a brief period of disorientation as they regain consciousness.

A number of important points must be stressed here. During the state of dissociation, the individual plays a complex role or roles, indeed often veritable short plays are enacted. He (or more often, she) has a large inventory of roles available from which to "choose." Not only are many spirits known, but new ones may be introduced; furthermore, there is expected to be individual variety in the aspects and behavior manifested by a given spirit "in the head" of two or more persons. Some people may be possessed by several spirits, often in immediate succession. This is quite at variance with the possession trance pattern as it is found in the cognate Fon-Yoruba group of societies. There, each cult house concerns itself with a limited number of spirits of a single group, and each devotee is dedicated to only one single spirit. Innovation seems

to be far more limited and individual choice much more severely restricted. Indeed, the very susceptibility of vodû to innovation appears to be one of its most distinctive characteristics. As has been indicated, there also is great leeway for individual variation. Some people, for example, have spirits whose character resembles their own, while in other cases the spirits behave in ways totally opposite to those of their mounts. Consequently, there are great personal differences not only in the manifestation of possession trance but also in the personal significance of the experience. There are also considerable differences in any given individual's level of dissociation and the violence of his seizures from occasion to occasion. To play complex roles satisfactorily the individually expressive and the socially patterned must be well harmonized; awareness of social cues must be maintained during dissociation, while at the same time experiencing an alteration of self-perception, self-control, memory functions and a variety of sensory modalities. The character of a given spirit personality is expected to remain fairly constant from one occasion to another. The result is frequently a structure of multiple personalities as striking as any recorded by psychiatrists. I have elsewhere suggested how such opportunity for dissociational role playing enlarges the individual's field of action (Bourguignon 1965).

Possession trance may also occur outside the ritual context in two situations: in situations of crisis and fear in which, as it were, the personality of the protective spirit comes to the rescue. Dissociation may then help to master pain and fear. Spontaneous possession trances of a more disorganized type also may occur, particularly at first possessions or possessions of non-initiates and may indicate the need for a ritual of initiation. The absence of detailed patterning along traditional lines in such first seizures

is underscored by the fact that divination is called for in order to identify the spirit that must be responsible for these states.

Haitians do not, however, limit their definition of possession by spirits to those manifested in trance states. For example, it is believed that speaking in one's sleep is an expression of possession and that the words are those of the spirit. The head washing (lavé tête) initiation ritual fixes a person's principal spirit in his head, so that, theoretically, possession is a permanent attribute of the initiate, although the presence of the spirit is manifested only during trance states or, as just indicated, during certain moments of sleep. In fact, a spirit established in a person's head in this manner must be removed after the "horse's" death by a special ritual called dessunin. (This view of the permanent presence of the spirit in the person's head is concurred in by certain Protestants who drive it out by striking the head with a Bible!)

The background of the Haitian possession trance practice and possession belief in this context is clearly West African. As we have indicated, similarities can be and have been traced in vocabulary, in the specific attributes of certain of the spirits, in details of rituals, musical rhythms, dance steps, and the like. M. G. Smith has argued (1957c: 36), although not specifically with respect to Haiti, that not all African societies exhibit possession. It is therefore interesting to note that in a sample of 114 societies representing all parts of sub-Saharan Africa, 82% exhibited institutionalized forms of dissociational states, 81% some type of possession belief, and 66% possession trance (Bourguignon 1968b).

Vodû and other Afro-Catholic syncretic cults share a particularly significant feature with the spirit cults of the Fon and the Yoruba: initiation into these cults is not prompted

by illness interpreted as arising from possession. This is quite different, for example, to the Ndoep cult of Senegal (Wolof, Lebu, Serer) (Zempléni 1966), or the Zar cult of Ethiopia and neighboring areas, to which yodû has been specifically compared (Leiris 1958a). In Haiti, illness may precede initiation and the spirits may be blamed for it, but it is not called possession, but rather being "troubled" (kembé) by them. The distinction is of some importance, for the Fon-Yoruba group of cults were not marginal, therapeutic societies ("cults of deprivation," as Lewis [1966] has phrased it) but cults of worship, linked to the power structure and the establishment, whether of kingship and the state or of the kin group and the ancestors (Herskovits 1938; Mercier 1954; Verger 1957; Bascom 1944; Frobenius 1913; Simpson 1962b; Parrinder 1953).

On the other hand, no patterns of possession trance comparable to those of Haiti and its cognate societies are found in the European Judeo-Christian tradition. Demonic possession trance, unlike the Afro-Haitian pattern, is a feared pathological phenomenon which is treated ritually by exorcism (Oesterrich 1922; Lhermitte 1946-7, 1963).

Before proceeding with an examination of other applications of the terms "possession" and "trance" to the Haitian situation, we should compare what has been said so far with the "spirit possession" of the enthusiastic Pentecostal churches, with special reference to the Spiritual Baptists ("Shakers") of St. Vincent. This group appears to be the source for the Spiritual Baptists ("Shouters") of Trinidad (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947a). However, while the Trinidadian groups have had contact with shango cults and there has been some borrowing between these groups (Simpson 1965), no spirit cults exist on St. Vincent and no such influences have been exerted on the Shakers.

Shakers experience dissociational states in the course of their lengthy prayer meetings. These states are induced through prolonged preaching, testifying, and singing. There is no dancing and there are no musical instruments, but a strong beat is marked by hand-clapping, foot-tapping, and beating a leather strap on a table serving as an altar. Behavior during dissociation is individualized, although a choral phase of joint rhythmic moving and breathing patterns has been identified. The trancers tremble and perspire, they may move vigorously, hyperventilate (over breathe), shout and speak in tongues. Such states are believed to be manifestations of the Holy Spirit who shakes the trancers and causes these various forms of behavior. Awareness is constricted and although individuals say they are conscious of their surroundings, they are attentive only to the actions of the Spirit, and later have only a blurred memory of what happened during their trance states.

It may be justifiable to call both the Haitian and Vincentian phenomenon "possession trance," but the differences must be stressed as well as the similarities. While the Haitian impersonates specific, well-delineated anthropomorphic entities, with complex personalities and a great range of possible activities, the Vincentian does not. The Haitian trancer sings and dances, smokes, drinks and eats; he may climb trees or dive into water and otherwise carry out a variety of actions. The Vincentian jerks, rocks, trembles, but there is no patterned choreography and he does not move far from the spot on which he was standing or sitting when the trance began. He sings hymns and he shouts and speaks in tongues but his range of action is restricted. Most importantly, while the Haitian interacts with others during his possession trance, with spirits possessing people and with human beings, the Vincentian does not. Even his speaking

in tongues is his communication, his "telephone" to God, and no specific message is transmitted to himself or to others. The attention of the Vincentian trancer is drawn inward to his interaction with the Spirit, which shakes him and all other trancers in his group. They participate in a common experience as members of a group and each as a separate individual. The Haitian trancer, on the other hand, interacts with others from the standpoint of a personal transformation. The Vincentian may feel happy, purged of sin, a child of God, as a result of his experience; but he has not modified his position in relation to his fellows through the intervention of a possessing spirit, as the Haitian may be able to do. The Haitian, in fact, affirms his individuality by his temporary transformation; the Vincentian shows himself a worthy member of his group, of his church. Both experiences are, undoubtedly, cathartic as well as ego-enhancing, but the manner of operation is distinct in its formal and in its ideological features.

The differences between the Haitian and Vincentian manifestations of possession are so great that the use of the same term for the two phenomena can be questioned, particularly, in its application to the Vincentian case. The German word Ergriffenheit has been suggested as more appropriate (Pfeiffer 1968; Benz 1968). However, this term for which there is no good English counterpart, other than the very approximate word "seizure," has been given a rather special meaning by Frobenius (Jensen 1963:54,56). Our justification in speaking of possession trance with reference to the Shakers is this: their beliefs and practices very clearly derive from traditional Christian, particularly early Methodist, beliefs and practices. In Protestantism, the term possession represents standard English usage. Thus, we read in Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible (rev. ed., 1963:782) that possession is "the coercive seizure of the spirit of man by another spirit"

and that "the Holy Spirit may also seize and possess a man." The authors of the article furthermore cite both Old and New Testament sources for their statements. Similarly, the report on glossolalia of the Episcopal Diocese of California (1963) uses the term in this sense of seizure by the Holy Ghost, and raises the theological question of whether people speaking in tongues may be considered to be possessed.

In any comparative study, a variety of native formulations of the notion of possession must be recognized, which share, however, a core of significant features. Among these is the idea of substituting an agency (one or more spirits or powers) for at least part of that control which the self normally exerts over itself-- over the body, the personality, the will. That is, what underlies any idea of possession is a conceptual separation of such elements of the self as the body, the personality, and the executive functions into elements that can be isolated from one another; this is then often phrased as a temporary removal of one or more souls to be replaced by some other force. This basic animism accounts apparently in part for the very wide distribution of the concept of possession in its many diverse forms. That is to say, once it is admitted that there is a body and one or more separable principles which activate and animate it, it is possible as well to admit of a substitution or addition of some other principle or agency for one or more of those "normally" associated with the body in the native view. The conception of the nature of the principle which is removed, or in temporary abeyance, varies widely, as we know, and so does the conception of the substituted principle and the actions for which it is held responsible. A more detailed examination of these considerations, however, would take us too far afield and is not quite germane to our present concerns.

As already indicated, formal similarities to the Haitian pattern of possession trance

as well as evidence of its origins can be found in other Afro-American and West African spirit cults; the origins of the Vincentian pattern, on the other hand, are to be found easily in the history of Methodism. The Shakers claim their religion was founded by John and Charles Wesley and, indeed, Methodist missionary activities began during the lifetime of John Wesley. While Methodism later gave up its appeal to emotionalism in its search for converts, the early history of Methodism is marked by violent conversions and dramatic seizures, both in Europe and America. Descriptions of seizures among English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish converts are very similar to those reported by converts among the Negro slaves in the British West Indies islands. Thus Wesley's biographer, Southey, writes with obvious disapproval (1925: II: 170; orig. 1825):

...like Mesmer and his disciples, he had produced a new disease, and he accounted for it by a theological theory instead of a physical one. As men are intoxicated by strong drink affecting the mind through the body, so are they by strong passions influencing the body through the mind. Here there was nothing but what would naturally follow when persons, in a state of spiritual drunkenness, abandon themselves to their sensations, and such sensations spread rapidly, both by voluntary and involuntary imitation.

The seizures experienced by those who listened to the preaching of Wesley and his followers appear, on the whole, to have been unpatterned but relatively violent.

Wesley's own descriptions are found in his journal, as for example in the following entry for Sunday, July 1, 1739:

Some sunk down, and there remained no strength in them; others exceedingly trembled and quaked; some were torn with a kind of convulsive motion in every part of their bodies, and so violently that four or five persons could not hold one of them. I have seen many hysterical and many epileptic fits; but none of them were like these in many respects (quoted in Sargant 1959: 87).

Sargant discusses these reports in the context of conversion and brain-washing, and speaks of the neuro-physiological significance of these violent experiences. It seems clear from the materials provided by him and by Southey that these were single dramatic events in the life of an individual, the experience of conversion, rather than recurrent ritual events.⁷

The patterned, repetitive trances appear to have evolved only somewhat later, where the ecstatic experiences became institutionalized. Methodism abandoned these practices, however, even in the lifetime of Wesley. The opportunity thus existed for a variety of distinct patterns to arise in different communities, as for example the type known as "Jumpers" which developed in Wales in the eighteenth century (Southey 1925: II: 100-101). In the Caribbean area we consequently find some differences in the details of patterning of the trances among the Methodist-derived churches as we move from island to island. Moore, for example, writing of Jamaican revivalists, speaks of

"trumping" and "laboring," a pattern of hyperventilation linked to a dance step. The dancers expel the breath on a deep forward bend and suck it in with a grunting sound as they straighten up (Moore 1965: 64-5; see also Simpson 1956). This serves to induce possession trance; however, it is also continued during the trance itself. Such a pattern of induction is absent in St. Vincent, although hyperventilation occurs during the trance.⁸

It is also likely that prior familiarity with African patterns of possession trance set the stage, as it were, for the slaves, to whom the Methodists appealed in particular. We know very little of the religious beliefs and practices of the slaves in the British possessions, such as St. Vincent, prior to the arrival of the Moravian and Methodist missionaries in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Anglican Church, generally, did not address itself to them. However, there is some evidence to suggest that African-derived religions did exist during the eighteenth century in areas where they are no longer to be found today.⁹ Thus, Goveia writes (1965:247-48, references are to Caines 1804:I:130-35):

The persistence of the African traditions was also reflected in the religious and magical beliefs and rituals of the Negro slaves in the Leeward Islands. Caines notes the use of dancing in their religious ceremonial, and the high place accorded to spirit possession- "the most envied condition at which a confusist can arrive"- as a form of religious experience. Confu was said to be a sect of the cult of Obeah, which was still very widespread among the Negroes,

though Caines thought that its influence was declining somewhat due to the spread of scepticism or of the Christian religion.

With reference to St. Vincent and with respect to the pre-Methodist period, we know that the slaves were not welcome in the Anglican Church. We also know that slavery was originally introduced by French planters and that Catholic missionaries did work among the slaves. To this day, many Shakers receive their first religious training in the Catholic Church, and certain minor Catholic influences are to be seen in their practices: the references to saints, the use of chromolithographs representing various saints, and the use of a bell during the ritual being perhaps the most noteworthy.

In addition to the possession trance to be seen in public ceremonies, St. Vincent Shakers experience another type of dissociation. This occurs during a retreat, called "mourning," which is undergone by individual members to further their spiritual growth and to advance in the hierarchy of the church. The experience is likened to a spiritual journey undertaken by the candidate, a journey of visionary revelations. The mourning ritual has been analyzed by Henney (1967), who compares it in detail with experiments in sensory deprivation, which have often been reported to produce hallucinations and other pseudo-perceptions. The mourning ritual, which lasts an indeterminate number of days, is undergone individually under conditions of restricted movement, reduced diet (which may cause hypoglaecemia), and other elements of deprivation. It is linked not only to specific expectations of rewards, but also to considerable fear about the outcome. An individual may be found to be unworthy or revelations may not be

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forthcoming, or may not be accepted by the cult leader. Some individuals-- sinners-- have been known to go insane during the period of seclusion.

Similar rituals are reported for the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947a:204-209; Simpson 1965, 1966) and for the revivalists of Jamaica (Simpson 1966). I am not aware of any Christian or specifically Methodist precedent for this practice. No visions or spiritual journey are found in Haitian vodû, related Afro-Catholic cults elsewhere, or in the detailed relevant writings on the Fon and Yoruba cults (Herskovits 1938; Verger 1957; Bascom 1944). On the other hand, in Haitian vodû and in the cognate cults in the New World as well as in West Africa, we do find a pattern of retreats and isolation linked to a theory of spiritual death and rebirth. In Haiti, specifically, this is found in abbreviated form prior to the head-washing ritual of initiation (lavé tête) and in greater complexity in the longer retreats preceding the kanzo ritual and the ritual of "taking the asson" (i.e., becoming a priest or priestess). As indicated, it is said that a person dies when he goes into the retreat and I recall seeing a woman and her relatives weep bitterly at the moment of the preparatory ritual when she was being led away into the sanctuary. However, there was none of the dramatic falling to the drums, which Verger has so brilliantly photographed in Dahomey and in Bahia (1957 photos 13-15, 16-21). There is no prolonged state of catalepsy and no pattern of extreme regression during which the initiate must be socialized again with a new personality (ibid., photos 38-40). Quite to the contrary, in Haiti the retreat is also conceptualized as a marriage between the candidate (most often a woman) and the spirit for whom the initiation is undergone. She must buy a trousseau-- a white dress and shirt-- new sheets to lie on the ground on a mat, and acquire a vodû necklace which is likened to a

wedding ring. The spirits call women initiates "my wife." As among Vincentian Shakers, the candidate is alone much of the time, lies on the ground, may not freely move or speak, communicates with an attendant by using a bell, and receives a reduced diet of acassan without sugar and calalu (okra) without salt. Yet during this retreat a series of rituals are carried out: special herb baths are given to the candidate, cuts are made in the scalp. Relatively little is, in fact, known about this period which is shrouded in a certain esoteric secrecy.¹⁰ However, visions and trance states are not expected, nor are they reported in writings on Haiti or of the cognate cults elsewhere (see also Bastide 1958, 1961b for Brazil). It may be questioned, however, whether dissociations of the hallucinatory kind do not actually occur during this period of seclusion, or whether it is that they have either not been discovered or reported by anthropologists. It may well be, in fact, that they do occur at times as a result of the relative deprivations and the heightened emotional state and attendant tensions, but do not represent an expected and patterned phenomenon, and have therefore tended to escape detection. As I have indicated elsewhere, at least one informant reported a confused state developing as a result of the experiences of a short retreat. She stated that the spirits were speaking the esoteric cult language in her head (Bourguignon 1965:50).

Ludwig (1968) has classified altered states of consciousness (i.e., what we are calling "dissociation" or "trance") according to how they are induced. Like the "experimental sensory deprivation states" which he lists, and to which we have referred earlier, Vincentian "mourning" trance belongs to the category of states resulting from a "reduction of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity" (Ludwig 1968:71). Possession trance, on the other hand, whether among Vincentian Shakers, Hatian

vodûists, or the Yoruba and Fon spirit worshippers, rather results from an "increase of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity and/or emotion"(Ludwig 1968:72). It is interesting that the cateleptic trance state, which is an integral part of the beginning of the retreat prior to the initiation among the Yoruba and Fon and their Brazillian counterparts, is interpreted as not arising from possession but from death of the former self and is induced in the course of a public ritual. It is not associated with a " reduction of exteroceptive stimulation and/or motor activity" but is induced by the very factors which induce possession trance in others: dance, music, expectations, and crowds-- i.e., an increase in exteroceptive stimulation together with both motor activity and emotion. It would appear, then, that the categories into which trance-inducing factors may be grouped cut accross the manifestations of trance; forms as distinct as the passive cateleptic trance and hyperactive possession trance may be induced by the same set of stimuli, in fact in the very same situational context. Ludwig (1968:77-85) also points out that the types of altered states of consciousness which he distinguishes share a series of characteristics, in spite of their great apparent diversity. Among these characteristics are changes in thought patterns, a disturbed time sense, loss of control, changes in emotional expression, and a number of others. Furthermore, he has found it possible under experimental conditions to transform one type of trance into another through altered hypnotic suggestion-- e.g., a hyper-alert, hyper-kinetic state induced by appropriately active methods into a relaxed hypokinetic one (Lyle and Ludwig 1964). These observations justify our contention that it is desirable not to discuss possession trance, as has often been the case, without taking into consideration other types of trance that may also exist in the same society or group. Furthermore, as we shall see in

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a moment, it is also necessary to consider what other applications of the concept of possession may exist. And third, we may wish to know whether, particularly in relatively complex differentiated societies, there may be other (or competitive) institutional settings for dissociation than the one on which we happen to focus.

Concerning this last point, we might mention that there are some pentecostal groups in Haiti, although they have not been the subject of systematic study. Vodûists who have seen rituals of the Pentecostals, interestingly enough, attribute their possession trance to "mounting" by vodû spirits and find the contrasting explanation of Pentecostals (when they are on speaking terms, to get such an explanation) meaningless. In Trinidad, possession by the shango "powers" sometimes appear in the context of Spiritual Baptist ritual, is a slightly embarrassing situation" (Simpson 1965:115). This is possible because of the close contact between the two groups, even to the point of overlapping membership. Thus, whatever the observable and historical differences between possession trance in the Afro-Catholic cults and in the Pentecostal churches, there is an underlying kinship in these forms of behavior and experience which is felt and perceived by the participants.

As indicated above, in addition to possession trance and other forms of trance we must also concern ourselves with possession beliefs in other contexts. In Haiti we find a belief in possession by the dead, which unlike vodû worship, exists in a context of sorcery and is probably shared more widely among the population than vodû practices. The same thing can be said for possession belief in St. Vincent. In vodû ritual, worshippers are possessed, as we have seen, by individualized spirits and this possession is acted out in dramatic trance performances. The spirits are welcomed and

their appearance in a ritual context is generally encouraged. Furthermore, they come, it is believed, on their own volition. In the form of possession under consideration here, neither trance nor dramatic performance is involved. Rather the concept of possession by the dead serves as an explanation for certain apparently intractable types of illness, particularly when an enemy can be identified. In fact, the motive behind dispatching one or more spirits of dead persons against a victim is to cause his death, not merely illness. The diagnosis is made by divination and the cure involves exorcism, compelling the possessing spirit or spirits to depart. However, contrary to the Judeo-Christian or Moslem practice of exorcism, the spirit is not questioned or identified. The aim of the divination is to identify the enemy, not the spirits, who appear to be credited with little volition. The spirits of the dead are not individualized and no roles are played. Also, this type of possession is distinguished terminologically and conceptually from possession by spirits associated with the possession trance of vodû ritual.

A similar category of possession illness resulting from sorcery exists in St. Vincent. The belief is not linked to Shakerism, however, but exists generally in the population; formerly, it appears to have been more widespread. Again, as in Haiti, a sorcerer can send a spirit (possibly a ghost) called "jumby" against a person; such a jumby then invades a person and must be exorcized. Little detail is available on this pattern, but it appears similar to the one found in Trinidad (Simpson 1965:76-8).

In recent years, another fundamentalist group has appeared in St. Vincent. This is a Dutch healing cult, known as Streams of Power, which stresses faith healing, glossolalia, and other manifestations of the spirit. Periods of glossolalia are very brief but involve light trance states and constitute an important part of their public prayer

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meetings. While they thus engage in possession trances, they disapprove of the behavior of the Shakers. They do not experience visionary trances but do believe in demonic possession, which causes illness. Streams of Power represents an alternative pattern of possession trance and possession illness beliefs of the Shakers.

Thus, in Haiti and St. Vincent we find possession trance occurring in public ceremonials, and induced through an increase in exteroceptive stimulation. The difference lies in some of the specific behaviors exhibited and in the underlying belief system. In both places we find two stages of initiation preceded by periods of seclusion. However, while there are patterned expectations of visionary experiences in St. Vincent, there are no such expectations in Haiti. Shakers in seclusion experience visionary trances on which their future status in the group depends. In Haiti such occurrences, if they exist, are not patterned and not reported. They play no significant role in the life of the cult. In both places we find possession by harmful spirits linked to sorcery practices and beliefs rather than to the spirits and practices with activities that center on worship. In fact, Haitians distinguish between these two sets of activities as those of the right hand and those of the left, and a vodû priest who also engages in sorcery is said to serve "with both hands."

IMPLICATIONS

We may now pause briefly to examine the implications of these descriptive materials. Haitian vodû and St. Vincent Shakerism represent, as already indicated, polar types on historic grounds. Vodû has close African affinities, known both to

participants and observers. Shakers reject all possible African ties, and those that may in fact exist-- beyond those to be found in the rhythms of the hymns-- are somewhat tenuous. Several comparative references have been made to Trinidad. Trinidad has preserved strong French and Catholic patterns, but it has come also under British and Protestant, particularly Methodist, influences. Here there exists both an Afro-American spirit religion in the form of shango and a Methodist derived Pentecostal church in the form of the Spiritual Baptists. The shangoists, while preserving strong Yoruba patterns (Simpson 1962b; 1965) have also undergone Protestant influences as evidenced by the fact that Shango is syncretized with St. John the Baptist. On the other hand, unlike Haitian vodû there appear to be fewer fusions of African elements from different sources, so that the picture of Yoruba-Catholic-Protestant mixture emerges rather clearly. There is also a strong trace of African elements in the belief system and the practices of the Spiritual Baptists-- e.g., in the form of animal sacrifices (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947a; Simpson 1965, 1966). Whether this is due to "original" retention of African elements or the borrowing of such elements from shangoists is probably beyond discovery and also somewhat immaterial. The influences work both ways, with shangoists participating in Spiritual Baptist mourning ritual, a ritual which they at times feel they need but which their cult group does not supply.

As indicated above, Trinidadians share with Vincentians and Haitians a belief in malevolent possession caused by sorcery, which is unrelated to the possession trance pattern. It may well be that this malevolent possession-sorcery complex links, in reinterpreted form, African concerns with sorcery and divinatory practices, as well as with the dead on the one hand, to European beliefs in demoniac possession and

practices of exorcism on the other. The evidence on this point is, however, inconclusive. With regard to African-derived features and resulting syncretisms we find a continuum ranging from vodû at one pole with the most evident number of African features and Vincentian Shakerism at the other, with the fewest such features. Shango and Trinidadian Spirituaist Baptists occupy the middle range between these extremes. However, on the basis of our categories of possession, possession trance, and trance, the beliefs and practices of Vincentian Shakers and Trinidadian Spiritual Baptists on the one hand and of Haitian vodû and Trinidadian shango on the other all appear to fall into the same basic pattern. This pattern involves the primacy of public possession trance ritual, seclusion, and sensory deprivation as a part of initiation and a folk belief in malevolent possession associated with sorcery. This pattern, furthermore, is similar to that of the Yoruba-Fon group of cults in that possession illness is not associated with cult initiation, but rather exists as a distinct and unrelated group of beliefs and practices. I have elsewhere attempted to delineate two types of African possession cults (Bourguignon 1969) in which cults of this sort ("West African" type) are distinguished from those of the possession illness variety ("East African" type). Regardless of the degree of African influence that we can discover among the Shakers of St. Vincent, then, all of the groups under discussion here on typological grounds belong to this first, or "West African," type.

While the implications of our categories remain to be explored more fully, I should like to argue that for certain research problems a typological analysis of this sort may prove to be more fruitful than an historical one. For example, it may provide us with insights into the relations between social control, religion, and concepts of folk illness as

that term has been used by Rubel (1964). Thus, in Haiti, possession illness constitutes one type of folk illness. Ideas and practices concerning it are tied in with beliefs and practices of vodû and sorcery and with a complex centering around the concept of the zombi (Bourguignon 1959).

To pursue this point a little further, in Haiti (and elsewhere in the Caribbean) spirits are dichotomized into two categories; on the one hand, those who are potentially helpful and whose presence is experienced in public rituals of possession trance, and on the other hand, those who cause possession illness. These are spirits of dead persons over whom sorcerers have gained control-- because they have been neglected by their relatives-- and can be used to cause harm to human beings through malevolent possession.¹¹ These two types are behaviorally and conceptually distinct and complementary. Spirits who are worshipped are powerful; some are ancestors who, as the Haitians say, have been "canonized." The dead who may be dispatched to cause illness, on the other hand, resemble zombis in that they have not been revered but have been neglected. They are not intrinsically evil, but powerless and at the mercy of a sorcerer. That is, they cause evil to human beings while they are (or because they are) victims themselves. The danger inherent in the neglect of one's duty to the dead resides not only in their potential anger but also in their potential victimization.

Such a view of the world of spirits contrasts sharply with the situation in the "East African" cults in which a single type of spirit can cause both malevolent possession, bringing on illness, and also ritual possession trance as part of cure and of worship, and where, furthermore, a spirit can be transformed from being harmful into being protective by means of ritual manipulation. As we have seen, in Haiti and in the other cases which

we have examined, there exists a system of worship centering about possession trance which finds its mirror image in a parallel system of sorcery in which possession illness is a key concept. Together, they provide not only a structured world view but also a system of defense and attack in an essentially hostile society and a hostile world.

What is required now is a fuller analysis of concepts of folk illness in the Caribbean area, as well as studies of sorcery and other mechanisms of social control. Africanists have pointed the way in this respect (e.g., Marwick 1965; Middleton and Henker 1963). Possession beliefs and dissociational states in their many forms and complex interrelations will then be found to be significantly related to aspects of social control and, consequently, to aspects of social change.

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