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**Bakalářská práce**  
**VOODOO IN LOUISIANA**  
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**Bakalářská práce**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval(a) samostatně a použil(a) jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

*Plzeň, srpen 2012*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The theme of my bachelor thesis is Voodoo in Louisiana. I chose this theme after having watched an American movie *Angel Heart*. This movie presented Voodoo as a magical force. Then I searched for other references of Voodoo in popular arts, especially in movies. Almost every movie presented Voodoo as part of black magic and a possibility of manipulating people to one's bidding. Therefore, I was inclined to find the truth. In the United States, it is the state of Louisiana where Voodoo is culminated the most. Voodoo is not just magic, but it is mainly religion that has a long history originating in West Africa. This religion is a mixture of African ethnic groups and traditions. In almost every state of the United States, we can find different religions, derivations of these religions and sects. There are religions of almost every nation that has ever been to the United States. These religions and traditions mixed with each other and affect each other. Afterwards they have influence on most people. They are passed on from generation to generation, and Voodoo is just one of them.

## 2 HISTORY OF LOUISIANA

The state of Louisiana and its capital city New Orleans are very multicultural thus for better understanding of its citizens and their habits and behaviour it is crucial to know the history and the origin of their creation.

### 2.1 French rule

Louisiana is a former French colony so many places especially in New Orleans have French names there and it is not unusual to meet people with French accent there.

The date which led to the creation of Louisiana was recorded as 1677 when French king Louis XIV assigned an explorer René-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle to discover a water passage through North America. After exploring New France, La Salle took off to find a shorter way to China which he believed was the Mississippi River. On April 9 1682 La Salle reached the river's mouth where to honour French king he built a cross and a column with king's name on it. The territory was called La Louisiane. After returning to France and gaining support of the king to colonize the territory, in 1682 he sailed with four vessels and a crew of 250 men to rediscover French Louisiana. La Salle was met with many difficulties and he never reached his destination and he was killed on March 19, 1687 by his mutinying crew. [1]

As France was facing its own problems in form of England and Spain, the governance of La Louisiana was yielded to administrators in Quebec. French did not see of much importance in the territory and were concentrating on their holdings in Caribbean, but Quebecois wanted to use the potential of fertile soils alongside the Mississippi. In 1699 Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville and his brother Pierre d'Iberville were sent to reclaim the territory. They reached a place that is now Biloxi where they built a bulwark protecting them from Spanish and English invasion. During their journey they saw a maypole on which fish and game were

hung by native Indians and they gave the place a name “Bâton Rouge”. After the death of d’Iberville, the colony was facing difficulties and a loss of support but Bienville kept his people alive. Upon realizing a vulnerable position against possible attacks of Indian, English and Spanish troops, Bienville decided to set up a new capital on the high ground in a crescent bend in the Mississippi and in 1718 the construction on La Nouvelle-Orléans started in the today’s French Quarter. [2]

Even though conditions around New Orleans were favourable for agricultural purposes like growing sugar, tobacco, cotton, and rice, the colony lacked a labour force. To solve this problem, the colonists started to import slaves from Africa. While most of African slaves imported to the East coast of America originated from Bantu and Kongo, sixty percent of the slaves imported to Louisiana came from the Senegambian. Not only they brought with them the knowledge how to cultivate the rice that helped the colony agriculturally, but they also brought their own cultural knowledge which was later integrated to the culture of New Orleans, such as their bamboula dance and beat, Malian melodies and scales, gerregerys which be called gris-gris, and the nkombo (okra or lady’s fingers) which became one of the main ingredients in the New Orleans food called gumbo. [3]

Still, the colony did not prosper well, so there were financial schemes how to gain profit from the colony as well as to attract farmers. Shares of Mississippi Company were being sold in exchange of dividends of gained profit. At the beginning the scheme was met with success but a promised gold was not found and farmers were discouraged by reports of the heat, mosquitoes, humidity, and disease. The settlement of the colony was being ensured by “volunteers” from jails and debtors’ prison, and “ladies of ill repute”, however this act earned New Orleans a bad reputation for absence of law and prostitution that remains until today. After the Mississippi bubble burst in 1720, a large amount of French investors were bankrupted. With the growing hatred of Louisiana, the immigration



virtually stopped. The need of labours increased the importation of slaves. The lack of suitable French women resulted in mixed marriages and an increasing mulatto population. Mulatto people were called free people of colour who established their own culture. With three coloured groups, the three-part social order was developed. [4]

## 2.2 Cajun country

After the end of the Seven Years' War, also known as French and Indian War, in 1763 Louisiana was met with another population group, the Cajuns. Their place of origin is found in Canada's Nova Scotia or L'Acadie. The Acadians found a refuge in Canada after the Thirty Years War. The Acadians lived outside the major centres like Quebec and Boston and became somewhat an isolated and united society. They maintained neutral during ongoing French and English conflicts. In 1713, L'Acadie was yielded to British and citizens pledged loyalty to the king. It was agreed that Acadians would remain neutral in case of French-English wars, and they would be able to continue practicing Catholicism. However, everything changed in 1750 after the death of Governor Philipps when Acadians refused to declare their unconditional loyalty to king George III and change their status of neutrality as well as their faith. This resulted in expulsion of fourteen thousand Acadians who were transported to Georgia or to England as prisoners. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris ordered Acadians to leave English colonies, they were given eighteen months to fulfil the order. They found a new home in Louisiana and they were given the land by new Spanish rulers. They settled in bayou outside New Orleans and this country was named Acadian territory which in the Acadian dialect is Cajun country. Even though Cajuns did not get along with New Orleans Creoles, they shared their herbal and magical secrets with them. The Cajun society shaped a form of Louisianan countryside. [5]

### 2.3 Spanish rule

While negotiations to end the Seven Years War were taking place, French king Louis secretly offered Louisiana to his cousin, Spanish king, Charles III. The agreement was contained in the Treaty of Fontainebleau. Officially Louisiana became a part of Spain in 1764 when the acquisition of Louisiana was announced. However, citizens did not accept Spanish rule and they rather left the colony. At first, Spanish arriving to Louisiana brought with them ninety soldiers which resulted in the lack of military power. With lacking financial power, Spanish tried to cooperate with French leaders residing there. After the attempt to forbid the sale of wine Bordeaux, the first governor Ulloa was faced with outraged crowds and he escaped to Cuba. In 1769 general Alejandro O'Reilly arrived with two thousand soldiers and quickly overtook control of New Orleans. The reins of colony were turned over to Spanish authorities residing in Havana. During the thirty years Spanish rule, several fires destroyed French architecture in New Orleans; the only remaining building in a French style is the Ursuline Convent which is also the oldest building in Mississippi Valley. The city was rebuilt in Spanish and Creole style. The Black Code was not followed strictly and the New Orleans slaves were given several rights. It was possible to earn money and buy own freedom; they could establish their own market. They were given the free movement in the city, the possibility to attend public dances and to meet other African and free people of colour who were recognised by the authorities. Despite the Spanish efforts, Spanish rule was not able to have an influence on New Orleans culture and the New Orleans citizens still identified themselves with French. Nevertheless, descendants of natives of the Canary Islands, Isleños, who settled there between 1778 and 1783, can be found St. Bernard Parish that is located southeast of New Orleans. The Spanish rule ends in 1800 when the Louisiana was secretly purchased by Napoleon but Spain was left in the charge. In 1803, Louisiana was purchased by the United States. [6]

### 3 VODOO

Voodoo has its origin in West Africa in Dahomey and is based on the Damohean religion of vodu which is a very structured religious and magical system. Voodoo has three main spiritual aspects: god, spirits and ancestors. The god is the creator but does not interfere in human lives. Humans have direct interaction with spirits. Ancestors who deceased become spirits. [7]

### 4 ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD VODOO

The word voodoo means spirit and deity in the Fon language, a main language in Dahomey, and it has its origin in the word vodu which meant the god and then it was altered to several terms: voudou, vaudau, voudoux, vaudaux. Also many Afro-Americans use the term hoodoo. The word vodu included not only the god and the sect, but also its rites, practices, rituals, duties, symbols, priests, priestess and adherents. Several etymologists have different theory of the origin of the word. They trace the origin to the Waldenses or Vaudois who were followers of Peter Valdo who was believed to practice human sacrifices. [8]

### 5 VODOO IN NEW ORLEANS

The first mention of the word and system of voodoo appeared in North America in 1619 when Africans landed in Jamestown where they became indentured servants<sup>1</sup>. The number of voodoo worshipers was increasing as more and more Africans arrived, first as indentured servants and later as slaves. [9]The slave trade established a link between Africa and North America so the sold slaves brought their culture and religion to the New World. Slaves who brought voodoo religion to North America originated from Dahomey, a country in West Africa that is now The Republic of

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<sup>1</sup> People who contracted to work for a fixed period of time, usually free to seven years, in exchanged for transportation, food, clothing etc. during the term of indentured servitude, they were not paid cash

<sup>2</sup> The term indicates a large group of islands that consist of the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles and the

Benin, and Senegambia that was under the rule of Islamic Almoravides Empire. [10]

A big wave of arrivals took place about 1720's when the African coast was raided and Africans were sold into the West Indies<sup>2</sup>. In 1719 the first slaves arrived in Louisiana. There are three phases that morphed voodoo to today form: African, Creole and American. [11]

African phase lasted from 1719 to 1830 and voodoo practitioners were Africans. They brought their language, their dances and their practices from African. Voodoo remained the form of voodoo in Africa except few various traditions caused by mixing of slaves from different African countries. In 1808, a new law banned the import of slaves outside the United States which led to cessation of direct African influence. [11]

Creole<sup>3</sup> phase was boom of voodoo in Louisiana. It is dated from 1830 to 1930. African languages were replaced by Louisiana French. Voodoo queens started making appearance and gris-gris was being used. This phase constituted to jazz because of the specific sounds of dances and rituals. During the Creole phase there was an integration of different cultural elements as European folk magic, Native American spirituality and herbalism, African Voodoo, and Catholicism. It was said Voodoo doctors and Voodoo queens integrated Catholicism, but not as a mean of disguise. [11]

American phase started in 1930 and has lasted to the present. Because of the movie White Zombie that was broadcasted in 1932, voodoo became a good business. Hollywood scriptwriters find voodoo an interesting theme for horror movies that are raising curiosity among its audience so voodoo became a tourist attraction. The real voodoo is receding into privacy and the belief of spirit is continuously fading. [11]

Voodoo was spreading rapidly and colonists were afraid of it. In 1782 governor of Louisiana Bernardo de Galv ez, who was in office from 1777

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<sup>2</sup> The term indicates a large group of islands that consist of the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles

<sup>3</sup> Descendent of French and Spanish colonial settlers in Louisiana

to 1785, banned the importation of Africans from Martinique and a decade later slaves from Santo Domingo were also prohibited. It was believed they were deeply engrossed in voodooism and they would endanger lives of the citizens. [12] This obstacle resulted in slowdown of bloom of voodoo. Adherents and Louisiana voodoo had to face other problems on its path.

Africans under Spanish and French rule suffered. From dawn until dusk, they had to work on plantations while still in chains and they were often beaten and whipped. For the night, they were locked and heavily guarded so they could not have secretly met and gone against the law that prohibited gatherings for dances and any other reasons. If they were caught, they would be severely punished. The punishments were also introduced for their owners. According to governor of French Louisiana, Marquis Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnal, any slave owner who allowed his slave to gather for any reason with other slaves upon his property would have to pay one hundred crowns to the treasury of the Church, and for the next offense he would be sentence to life work on the galleys. Slaves could not gather to participate in voodoo and they were not allowed to practice any religion, there were exceptions when they could convert to Catholicism. In 1803 law against the import of slaves were lifted so slaves from Santo Domingo started to arrive in New Orleans. It was the beginning of organized voodoo. Before this year voodoo was a suppressed force. [13] The reason lies in the laws but also in the positions of plantations. After the arrival of slaves from West Indies and refuges from Haiti after the slave rebellion that started in 1791, voodooists were gathering to practice their religion.

### 5.1 The recreation of New Orleans Voodoo

In the beginning of the twentieth century, New Orleans started to struggle financially, the infestation by a beetle boll weevil that feeds on cotton buds greatly affected the cotton trade and consecutively even the

American trade. Mostly New Orleans was struck by the Great Depression. After the murder of Huey Long, a governor of Louisiana, then a senator, in 1935 who held a chance for Louisiana to come back, New Orleans found itself further in economic despair. As crime rates were growing and opportunities were disappearing, many of the citizens went in search of better life in California, Chicago and other cities. The only industries that remained strong were entertainment and tourist ones. Ghost stories, secret rituals, curses have become the main attraction of New Orleans. In this era, Voodoo served as a tool to gain much-needed income. The new allure to New Orleans attracted a vast amount of charlatans who saw an opportunity to earn money there. However, some scholars took a real interest in Voodoo and some of them contributed to create a new form of Voodoo by mixing several African traditions. [14]

## 5.2 New Orleans Voodoo hoodoo

As several traditions were mixing and blending together, a new form of Voodoo was created. New Orleans Voodoo is unique because of this melange. The term usually used to describe this new form of New Orleans Creole Voodoo is Voodoo hoodoo. The term refers to blending of religious and magical elements. Some practitioners prefer an original version of Voodoo, mostly those who are not from New Orleans, however, the separation of religion from magic has not taken place in New Orleans. It is up to practitioners what elements they will integrate to Voodoo, as there are no set rules or guideline how to practise Voodoo. The fact that several practitioners integrate Catholic elements does not necessary means they practise Catholicism. New Orleans Voodoo is not only seen as religion but also a way of life. [15]

*“In New Orleans, in religion, as in food or race or music, you can’t separate nothing from nothing. Everything mingles each into the other – Catholic saint worship with gris gris spirits, evangelical tent meetings with spiritual church ceremonies – until nothing is purely itself but becomes*

*part of one fonky gumbo. That is why it is important to understand that in New Orleans the idea of Voodoo – or as we call it gris gris – is less a distinct religion than a way of life.”[16]*

### 5.3 Hoodoo

Hoodoo is not considered religion even though hoodoo includes elements from several religions. Hoodoo is also called conjure. Hoodoo came into existence in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by mixing African folk magic with Native American botanical knowledge and customs and Christian, Jewish and pagan folklore from immigrants arriving from Europe. Hoodoo practitioners are called root doctors, as hoodoo is not religion, priests and priestess are not found there. The knowledge is passed from one practitioner to another. The main goal of root doctors is to help their clients. Magical properties in hoodoo are ascribed to herbs, roots, minerals, animal parts, the personal possessions, and bodily effluvia of people. Typical magical traditions were jinxing, hot footing, foot track magic, crossing, and crossroads magic. [17]

The practice of Voodoo in New Orleans is free which means the initiation is not necessary for practice. New Orleans Voodoo is not orthodox, practitioners may honour whichever spirit they want. The ways of honour differ from practitioner to practitioner, since there are no set rules. Practitioners may find several guidelines that may help them but these guidelines are not compulsory. The list of loa, laws, orishas and spirits is everlasting because Voodoo is adaptable and it incorporates spirits of other religions. The practitioners believe there is one God who created everything but not interfere to the daily life. Below the God there are spirits who are called upon during rituals if needed and they take daily life matters in their hands. New Orleans is a mixture of several different African traditions as well as other religious tradition. Elements of hoodoo

were integrated to New Orleans Voodoo. For this reason, New Orleans Voodoo differs from original African Voodoo. After the American phase and the commercialization of Voodoo, New Orleans Voodoo became an underground practice.

## 6. INFLUENCES ON NEW ORLEANS VOODOO

### 6.1 Catholic influence

Due to several influences of other religions in New Orleans these religious elements can be found in New Orleans Voodoo. Catholicism belongs to them. The first steps of Catholic influence pertain to Louisiana's Code Noire or Black code. The purpose of the Code was to control behaviour and religious practices of slaves and to exile Jews out of the colony. Thus all Jews were expelled from colonies and all slaves had to be introduced to Catholicism. The code tolerated only one religion which was Catholicism. The practising of Voodoo was punished by penalty of death. To avoid death, beating, whipping and other form of physical punishment, African slaves used Catholic saints to disguise their spirits. In the public, it appeared that slaves celebrate saints but in reality they honoured Voodoo spirits without the fear of being punished. It can be considered Voodoo survived under the pretence of Catholicism. Even the Catholic prayers were accommodated to meet needs to honour the spirits. The Code defined the condition of slavery; the status of slave passed through mother, not the father. [18]

The catholic elements are evident and easily recognised in Voodoo in the form of using psalms during healing and magical works, matching the image of saints to spirits.

Several Catholic prayers are used in Voodoo rituals and ceremonies. The Litany of Saints, Hail Mary, the Rosary for the Dead, Our Father, and Apostle's Creed often precede the opening of Voodoo ritual. [19]



*"The Apostle's Creed*

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
the Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:  
Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended into hell.  
On the third day He arose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty,  
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen." [20]*

*Hail Mary*

*Hail Mary, full of grace  
The Lord is with thee  
Blessed art thou among women  
and blessed in the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for our sinners  
Now and in the hour of our death,  
Amen. [20]*

## 6.2 Native American influence

Those who had a share in influencing a form of New Orleans Voodoo were Native Americans who were among the first Louisiana slaves. The tribes residing in the area were: the Natchez, Choctaw, Cherokee, Tunica, Tamira, Chaouchas, Chickasaw, Illinois, Houma, Arkansas and Miami. Native Americans were captured and enslaved, later in Louisiana they were joined by African slaves. Together, they organized a series of escapes, by doing so they bonded even more. [21] It was natural that they shared knowledge and influenced each other.

From the beginning, New Orleans Voodoo was influenced by other nations, religions and beliefs. Usually the causes were natural, as in Native American case when knowledge was shared because of the contact between African slaves and Native Americans. However, the Catholic influence was rather forced. African slaves were forced to practise only Catholicism; violation of the order was punished mainly by death. Voodoo was able to survive due to disguising Voodoo spirits as Catholic saints.

## 7 SPIRITS

New Orleans Voodoo or Voodoo pantheon contains a large amount of spirits with different origin. The reason is because of forced mixing of various tribal groups resulted by slavery. It is considered a success that these different religious practices were able to be combined into one Voodoo practice, however Voodoo cannot be longer considered pure. The spirits in New Orleans and Haiti are called loas, lwas, mystères, and invisibles, and orishas in Yuruba and Santería. They are rather compared to saints or angels. They are not deities. They act as mediator between the Creator and humanity. New Orleans Voodooists honour original spirits as well as borrowed spirits; this might include Haitian lwas, the orishas,

the Catholic saints and archangels, Native American spirits, zombie spirits, and the spirits of ancestors. Each spirit has a different role and also his own preference which means that he has an individual sacred rhythm, song, ritual, dance and symbol. [22]

The Voodoo pantheon is organized in accordance with nations; two of the main nations are Rada and Petro. The two nations differ by their role and origin. [23]

Rada loas are traced to Dahomean Voodoo and they guard morals and principles, while Petro loas are linked to New worlds, the origin of Petro loas is assumed to be in Haiti. Other nations are Congo, Nago and Guede. Each spirit has its own traditional colour. [24]

Spirits in New Orleans were not served with *vévés*, the beautiful drawings on the floor by scattering a powder-like substance, commonly cornmeal, wheat flour, bark, red brick powder, or gunpowder that symbolized *lwás* in Haiti, however, they were honoured by images of Catholic saints and Catholic prayers. The prayers were however somewhat modified to carry hidden meanings. [25]

## 7.1 The Seven African Powers

One of the most important groups of loas is called the Seven African Powers or *Las Sietes Potencias*. They are honoured by the prayer. [26]

*“Oh, Seven African powers, who so close to Our Divine Saviour, with great humility I kneel before you and implore your intercession before the Almighty. Hear my petition that I glory in your powers to protect me, to help me and provide for my needs. Amen.”*[27]

### 7.1.1 Papa La-Bas

Papa La-bas is one of the most important loas. He is also called Papa Legba, Ellegua, Elegba, Liba, Laba, Papa Limba. He is considered the guardian of the gate, the gates of Guinee, that is portal to afterworld, land of spirits. He stands on the crossroads and decides if he grants or denies

permission to speak with spirits. Because of his function, he is always worshiped as the first and last loa in any ritual. To be able communicate with all people he is believed to speak all languages. He is nicknamed the Master of Crossroads or the Old Man at the Crossroads. Because of the role of the guardian of the gate, Papa La-Bas is identified with St. Peter, so Papa La-Bas is portrayed as St. Peter holding the keys. Contrary to the stern characteristic of St. Peter, Papa La-Bas is popular for his cruel sense of humor and mischievous streak. Colors representing Papa La-Bas are red and black. Even if he is one of the most important loas, the festival to honour his name that is held on 1 January is not the biggest. [28]

#### 7.1.2 Ogun, Ogoun

The spirit Ogun is believed to be the warriors' chief and the spirit of war, blood, and iron, these similarities are found in Greek mythology where the spirit is Ares. Ogun is the technology and civilization patron as well as the patron of unemployed. Because of his association with locomotives, offerings often take place at railroad tracks. His link with blood means he is called upon to heal blood diseases. He is used to be identified with Catholic saints such as St. George and St. Joseph, nevertheless in New Orleans, he is associated with Joe Feray. The significant colors are green and black. [29]

#### 7.1.3 Changó, Xango, Shango

Changó is the spirit of passion, fire, dance, lightning and power. He is believed to defeat enemies and win over obstacles, he holds power to gain victory in wars. The object representing him is the double-bladed axe. He is associated with St. Barbara. His colors are red and white. [30]

#### 7.1.4 Obatalá

Obatalá is considered the creator. He is in the power of the mind and intellect, universe equilibrium, male and female. The colour representing him is white and contains all colors of rainbow. [31]

#### 7.1.5 Oyá, Yansa

Oyá is the spirit of wind, hurricanes, lightning, fertility, magic and fire. She is responsible for guarding cemeteries and underworld. She has power to end stagnation and thus start new growth. She is the epitome of female power. All colors except black represent her but colour wine prevails. [32]

#### 7.1.6 Yemayá, Yemoja, Iemanjá

Yemayá is the spirit of oceans, sea water in general. She protects women and rules issues pertaining to women like childbirth, conception, childhood, safety, love and healing. She reigns the dreamtime and subconscious. Her representing colors are crystal and blue.

According to the legend her origin can be found in Egypt as the goddess Isis. It is assumed the Nubian slaves coming back to different parts of Africa that they brought the goddess Isis with them under a new name Yemayá.

Other popular legend tells that Yemalá chooses her students who are then missing for seven years and upon their return they have the knowledge of healing and magic. [33]

#### 7.1.7 Oshun, Ochun, Oxum

New Orleans voodooists celebrate Oshun as the spirit of love, beauty, witchcraft, creativity and dance. It is believed she protects pregnant women and is responsible for safe delivery. She is seen as very generous spirit. She is called upon when love, fertility, prosperity, magic and family are needed. Her colors are yellow and amber. [34]

The Seven African Powers play an important role in New Orleans Voodoo, however there are other spirits of the same importance.

## 7.2 New Orleans Spirits

Among the spirits celebrated in New Orleans, spirits that are unique to New Orleans can be found there.

### 7.2.1 Annie Christmas

She is known as the symbol of woman strength. She is believed to be the female incarnation of Ogun. The offerings consist of a machete, rum, undercooked meat, iron, railroad objects, and clanging metal. Her altar can be found on the floor next to Ogun's altar. [35]

### 7.2.2 Dr. John

Dr. John, under the names as Jean Montaigne, Bayou John or John Montanée, was one of the most important persons of New Orleans Voodoo during the nineteenth century and after his death he became one of the loas.

He claimed to be of Senegalese royal heritage, more exactly a prince, and his ceremonial scars and tattoos across his face encouraged to prove this claim. He fascinated people by telling tales about his life which gained him popularity.

According to his tales he was kidnapped by Spanish and sold to slavery in Cuba where he worked on a sugar plantation. After he charmed his owner to grant him the freedom, he travelled the world as a sailor and ship's cook. Supposedly he even visited his father country Senegal. Settling in New Orleans, he started to work as a cotton roller on the docks and later he was promoted to a position of an overseer because of his frightening appearance that caused black workers to be afraid of him. During this period, he started to show a power of a seer that could make a prophecy by reading the marks on a bale of cotton. As a number of

people willing to pay him for telling them their future was growing, he bought a property on Bayou Road where he had his house built, and he established the Voodoo and divination business. He was sought by a large amount of white rich men as well as women. Others bought gris gris. He was known for his knowledge of healing herbs and plants. In 1840's he was one of the richest men in New Orleans, it was said he purchased female slaves so he was rumored to be a pimp. He claimed to marry fifteen women, and one of them was white, with whom he had about fifty children.

However, his fame and fortune was based on willingness to pay for his goods and knowledge; one session cost from 10\$ to 20\$. It was believed he knew every secret of the best families of New Orleans because he paid the slaves for these secrets and members of these families were either convinced he was reading their mind or they paid for keeping the secret quiet.

One of the Dr. John's confidant claimed that sold potions were made of herbs that were boiled in water. *"I hurt nobody," Dr. John said, "but if folks want to give me fiftz dollars, I take fifty dollars every time!"* [36]

Dr. John declared he taught Marie Laveau herself but was hardly ever seen at a Voodoo ceremony led by her.

The following Litany, written by Louis Martiné of the New Orleans Spiritual Temple, was written in order to honour of Dr. John and to elevate him to loa status. [37]

*"Doctor John.*

*Honor and respect you.*

*I remember your name.*

*I say your name.*

*Before my eyes sits the issue of your hands;*

*in both document and signature.*

*Within me my mind and heart remember you.*

*Doctor John.*

*John Montanée.*

*Born in Africa.*

*Live in New Orleans.*

*Husband to Mathilde and Armantine.*

*Father of John Montennet, born the third November, 1856.*

*And of many others.*

*Owner of a coffee house in New Orleans.*

*Worked as physician and Indian doctor.*

*Passed on August 18, 1885 at seventy years.*

*Doctor John.*

*Loa of New Orleans.*

*Loa of Drummers.*

*Loa of doctors in the spiritual path.*

*Guide my hands on this drum.*

*Guide my hands in this work.*

*Doctor John.*

*Speak in wisdom to my mind.*

*Speak in understanding to my heart.*

*Help me to play the rhythms of awakening to my spirit.*

*Touch and be touched.”[38]*

### 7.3 Black Hawk

Black Hawk, his given name was Mesquakie, was an Indian warrior. He is honour by both the spiritual churches of New Orleans and New Orleans Voodoo. He is considered a Voodoo saint. He is called upon when money, protection, justice, release from prison and victory of court cases are needed. He is represented by a figure of an Indian warrior who is enforced by tomahawk, a spear or a hatchet, usually he is surrounded by sand or dirt. The following prayer is used during his invocation: [39]

*“Prayer to Black hawk*

*Oh Great Spirit, hear my voice, I believe in your power and your ability*



*to defend me.*

*In the name of all that is good, I ask for your help with this battle, my battle, with those who intend to harm me.*

*Oh Powerful Indian Spirit, you are the Great Chief and you know my problems.*

*Help me with your warrior medicine and guide me to safety with your Divine protection.*

*Faithful Indian Spirit, I humbly ask for your protection.*

*With your bow and arrow, protect me from the evil thoughts and actions hurled towards me.*

*With your hatchet, cut the chains and ropes that bind me.*

*With your feathers, brush away the negative energy surrounding me.*

*With your peace pipe, create harmony where there is discord.*

*Black Hawk, have my back and be a watchman on the wall.*

*See that no evil befalls me.*

*Fight the battle to destroy those who will harm me.*

*Take revenge on my behalf and destroy the insurrection on the wicked.*

*Protect me from all evil, danger, slander, and threat.*

*In peace and protection walk before me.*

*In strength and wisdom walk beside me.*

*In honor and courage walk behind me.*

*In power and resolve fly above me.*

*In truth and beauty walk below me.*

*This prayer I ask not just for myself but for all of my relations past and present, and for those yet to come,*

*Amen.”[40]*

Indian spirits are seen as protectors who keep danger outside of a chosen place. Hoodooists who want to avoid problems with authorities use Indians head penises over the doors. This technique was used in

brothels. It was not uncommon to see hundreds of Indian head penises on the buildings of bad reputation. [41]

#### 7.4 Snake Worship and Snake Spirit

While the snake in Christian mythology is associated with Satan and the evil as whole, in Africa, this animal is worshiped. African tribes all viewed the serpent differently but still the serpent was honoured. For the Fon-speaking peoples of Dahomey, the serpent Ayida represented the rainbow during the day and the Milky Way during the night. The great water snake Monyoha in Bantu ensured that the water sources would never dry up for those who venerated him. The African and Christian difference in the meaning of snake was shown in the report of English crew who landed at the African port of Whydah. [42]

*“An English Captain having landed some of his men and part of his cargo, they found a snake in their house, which they immediately killed without the least scruple, and not doubting but they had done a good work, threw out the dead snake at their door, where being found by the Negroes in the morning, the English preventing the question who had done the fact, ascribed the honour to themselves; which so incensed the natives, that they furiously fell on the English, killed them all and burned their house and goods.”[43]*

This worship of the serpent was brought to the New World, particularly New Orleans. The snake is considered as the holder of knowledge. Several journalistic reports described Voodoo rituals where a snake played a key role and participants were all nude. Nevertheless, those reports were not taken from eyewitnesses but from the second-hand and even third-hand sources and tales. In view of the fact that the nudity is not part of any African or Afro-Caribbean religious practices, it is believed that it was done for the benefit of paying audience. Even the handling of snakes during rituals was show for the tourists. A usual images of the ritual portraits a dancing woman, Voodoo queen, with a large snake

around her neck. In these dances, the snake represents the spiritual balance between the genders. A report from 1894 in the New York Times describes a ceremony where races mixed in sexual acts. [44]

*“As the strokes of the tom-tom and the banjo quicken, a bacchanalian abandon takes the place of the usually decorous demeanor of the negro. A vigor unknown to polite society characterizes his steps and contortions of body. ... The women tear off their clothing and re-enter the furious revel almost nude, shouting aloud with the rest of the company. ... A naked white girl acted as a Voodoo priestess wrought up to frenzy by dances and incantations that followed the sacrifice of a white and black hen. A serpent, trained to its part, and acted on by the music, coiled around the limbs of the girl, its motions studied by the votaries dancing around or standing to watch its contortions. The spectator fled at last in horror when the poor girl fell writhing in an epileptic fit.”[45]*

Even though the snake in rituals was mainly used for public, the snake Li Grand Zombi was still worshiped. However, the use of the snake power is referred to hoodoo where the snake shedded skin is used for magical objects like gris gris, oils and conjure powders. It is believed that a person thinking he or she has been hoodooed will have a living thing inside its body, often it is assumed the thing is a snake because afflicted person reports snake motions inside their bellies or under their skin. [46]

#### 7.4.1 Li Grand Zombi

Li Grand Zombi is the major serpent spirit in New Orleans Voodoo whose roots originate in Kongo and Bantu religions. Li Grand Zombi associates with the powerful spirit Nzambi. According to the Kongo and Bantu religions Nzambi is the Creator God, the creator of everything. [47] The Kongo legend tells: *“In the beginning only Nzambi existed. It is he who is the eternal one, owner of all mirongas (secret). Nzambi was filled with energy and power, ready to burst at any time. Nzambi decided that he was ready to create. In the glimpse of an eye, millions and millions of*

*pieces of matter swirled counter-clockwise around him, who is the centre. Nzambi had created Ngombe, the universe – stars and planets, and all visible matter. Movement was brought into the universe and the matter Nzambi created began to change and to drift apart. Nzambi decided to create a being that would be able to travel the universe, to travel and mediate between matter and space. Nzambi concentrated on a fixed point and gave life to Exu-Aluvaiá. Exu-Aluvaiá was both man and woman at the same time – a manifestation of the nature of Nzambi.” [48]*

The Exu-Aluvaiá was given 7 gifts by Nzambi. He can travel between spaces; he has a free will to choose between good and bad; he was given a brain capacity to remember; he is allowed to change the matter created by Nzambi; he was gifted the ability to see the past and the future of all beings except his own future; he has in possession the intelligence to understand all the creatures; and he has the ability to procreate. [49]

Congolese imagined the cosmos as two separated worlds which were *nza yayi* that means this world and *nsi a bafwa* as the land of spirits. A vast ocean, *kalunga*, or other water source that was placed between *nza yayi* and *nsi a bafwa* functioned as portal between living and dead. Because of the nature of snakes that climbed the trees or were found relaxing near water source, snakes were believed to travel between the two worlds. [50]

In New Orleans, Li Grand Zombi was considered a protector and wise teacher. However, non participants associated Li Grand Zombi with orgies or devil worship. The best way to honour Li Grand Zombi is with a live snake so participants usually purchase boa constrictor or python. Due to complicated needs that must be met in caring for the snake, the purchase is often discouraged. Other ways to honour the spirit are by offering snake shedded skin to Li Grand Zombi or to have a snake statue. [51]

After the re-creation of New Orleans Voodoo, Li grand Zombi started to be identified as the great white serpent Damballah, however this identification is incorrect.

#### 7.4.2 Damballahah

The roots of Damballahah originate in the West African cultures that honour the rainbow serpent called Da. Still Damballah plays a role in New Orleans Voodoo, but it is served mainly by insiders and it is not known to public, while Li Grand Zombi serves as leading spirit and is largely known to public. Damballah is considered as a protector of justice and a wrecker of vengeance.

Damballah is sometimes associated with St. Michael the Archangel who works faster and with a greater effectiveness if he addressed by his proper name Mr. Daniel Blanc or Danny or Blanc Dani. Because of this name those who have knowledge of Haiti Vodou associate him with Damballah who is called Blan Dani or White Dani in Haiti. Nevertheless, the appearance of St. Michael does not resemble the serpent since that role has been occupied by Li Grand Zombi. In her writing, Helen Pitkin, a journalist, recorded a Voodoo ritual that called on St. Michael the Archangel with the song: [52]

*“Blanc Dani*

*Dans tous pays blanc*

*L’a commandé*

*Blanc Dani, dans tous pays blanc*

*L’a commandé*

*(Blanc dani,*

*In all white countries*

*He has command*

*Blanc Dani, in all white countries*

*He has command)”[53]*

New Orleans Voodoo works with spirits, loas, lwas. There is a large amount of loas that can be honoured. It is up to each participant who he or she chooses. The honoured spirit varies according to the intended goal of the participant. The spirit is given gift of his liking. In Haiti, spirits are represented by vèvè, however, in New Orleans they are usually represented by the image of Catholic saint who have similar role and characteristic as the spirit. The disguising of spirit by Catholic saint is remainder of slavery and forced Catholicism, however that does not mean Voodooists also practise Catholicism. Each spirit has its own colour. The most important New Orleans Voodoo spirit is Li Grand Zombi, the serpent spirit. New Orleans Voodoo contains spirits that are unique only to New Orleans.

## 8 INITIATION

### 8.1 Initiation in Africa

In Africa, a person who wanted to join Voodoo cult and become a member had to be trained in religious training centres, these centres were called convents. Convents were very important in many parts of Africa, they served as religious institutions. They were located in large cities and villages. Each convent chooses a deity or a group of deities to whom they are dedicated. For example in the village Mahi there were convents for five main deities that contained Azaka, Lissa, Damballa, Sakpata and Hevieso. Novices, or vodunsi, were firstly taught how to serve the deity and then what is the best way to live for the deity. There they learned how to worship the god or the goddess; their learning included all rituals, religious ceremonies, dances for deities, the dress codes and colours for rituals. An individual wanting to join a convent sought a priest or priestess with a little possibility of being refused. Almost everybody is accepted and they do not have to pay any entry fee. Novices had to stay at convents for nine months. During their stay, they were not allowed to see a new moon. It was believed that the new moon had big power over priests, withes and

human emotions so as a result novices secluded themselves for four days to ensure they did not lose their power. The only exception when novices went out during the seclusion period was to be participant in the fetish ceremonies. After the ceremony, they would return. After completing their ninth month, novices became vodunsi, members of a cult. [54]

## 8.2 Initiation in New Orleans

In New Orleans, a major cult was the cult of Damballa, the snake cult which was referred to as Li Grand Zombi or Vodou. The initiation and learning were different from those in West Africa. Convents did not exist in New Orleans but individuals were still trained as voodoo practitioners. To be initiated into a cult meant to study and be trained under an established practitioner for a period of indeterminate time. The length of period depended on the progress of the student; it could have varied from weeks to years. Student stayed at home, but usually after the initiation they started to live with their teacher. Voodoo teacher could refuse any student if they wanted and did not see any potential. Students were referred to as neophytes during the initiation. They had to fulfill duties such as running errands or doing chores, they also assisted to their teachers in ceremonies. After novices were accepted by a hierarchical group of voodoo practitioners, they had to be accepted by the Spirit, or Great One. If they were not approved by the spirit, they would be denied the membership. [55]

However, today it is not necessary to be initiated. Practise of Voodoo is free and anyone can practise it.

## 9 WOMEN IN VOODOO

Voodoo is seen as peripheral cult that expresses African-American culture. In peripheral cults the spirits do not play any direct role in the society's moral code. Women are selected as prized victims because they

occupy dominant or peripheral position in traditional societies. According to Lewis' study, peripheral cults consist of women, marginal men<sup>4</sup> and the poor who use possession to vent their anxieties. Position of women in peripheral cults is predominant because their possession functions are seen as protest movement directed against the dominant sex. Therefore they have a significant role in the sex-war, especially in the cultures where they are not allowed or able to forward their aims. [56] Women had more important role in voodoo in New Orleans because they practiced in its rituals, so voodoo was a matriarchy. Men usually were not able to find any cult. Among famous practitioners were the Marie Laveaus.

### 9.1 Marie Laveau

Marie Laveau is considered the voodoo queen of New Orleans. There is little evidence of her life, so mainly rumors are to be proof of her life and her influence on voodoo as well as people. Still facts about her can be found. She was born 1974 and died in 1881. Although the date of her birth was often misquoted by many authors, the evidence states she was married in 1819 at the age of 25 so the real date of her marriage should be obvious. She was a widow of Jacque Paris and after the death of her husband she her life in a *plaçage*<sup>5</sup> relationship. She is described as a very beautiful woman with natural charms. Her education was non-existent so she could not read or write. Rumors say that she became rich by selling gris-gris, she frightened police, she gave advice to world leaders, she used blackmailing, and she could influence the court cases. She was blamed and credited for every unexplained important event. There was never found a proof of her culpability of any mentioned crime. Main accusations started to show when she was old and could not defend

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<sup>4</sup> people who participate only slightly in the life of two cultural groups without feeling identified with either group

<sup>5</sup> A type of a marriage in which women are not recognized as wives. This type of relationship was common for white French and Spanish or Creole men whose partner was of African, Indian and white Creole descent.



herself, and they were spread by her rivals. She blended voodoo with Catholicism, she called upon saints as well as spirits for their help and protection. She used gris-gris and catholic objects. Because of her voodoo became popular and spread among the United States. In her late years, she taught several people who brought voodoo secrets to New York, to Charleston, to Chicago and to the West Coast. [57, 58] She was like by many but also hated. Her popularity however remains in existence, every practitioner knows her and tells story about her, and her grave is more visited than the grave of Elvis Presley. She is also considered saint among many. Her daughter Marie Laveau II was her successor.

## 10 ZOMBIES

The word zombie origins from the Congolese word nbzambi that refers to the spirit or one's soul. It was integrated to voodoo because of trans-Atlantic trade slave when Africans from different parties were mixed together. In voodoo, four types of zombies can be found there: the Great Spirit, the Spiritual Soul, the Herbal Zombie and the Bargained Zombie. [59]

### 10.1 The Great Spirit

The figure of the Great Spirit is filled by Li Grand Zombi (see 7.4.1). Li Grand Zombi is represented by a snake that is often a part of Voodoo rituals. [59]

### 10.2 Spiritual Zombie

Spiritual Zombie is based on an African belief there are two souls, Great Angle and Little Angle. It is believed that after the death, the Great Angle immediately departs the body because it recognized it is dead. Nonetheless, the Little Angle resides three days in the body until it knows for sure the body is dead. During the period of three days, hoodoo doctor may invoke Ghédé loa that gets to the Little Angle. Afterwards the Little

Angle is influenced to believe the body is still living so the body is reanimated. [59]

### 10.3 Herbal Zombie

Herbal zombie dominates in Haiti but is also known in New Orleans. Contrary to the Spiritual Zombie, the Herbal Zombie is caused chemically, usually by using powerful drugs, and the body appears dead. Under the influence of drugs, herbs or poisons, the body appeared to be dead and later is dug out. The body is given the antidote by the bokor who is said to be priest, houngan, or sorcerers in Haiti Vodou and root workers in New Orleans Voodoo. After the administering the antidote, the bokor captures part of body soul, Ti Bon Ange, that is referred to as zombie astral that is kept in a clay jar, and the body is reanimated. It is said that zombie astrals makes bokor more powerful. After the process, the body is called zombie. The zombie loses its free will and must abide to orders of the bokor. It is considered as a mind control and the zombie becomes a slave. The possibility of creating the zombie was proofed scientifically by discovering the poison and the antidote. The poison originates from the Tetraodontidae order that includes species as pufferfish and blowfish, the poison contains neurotoxin called tetrodotoxin TTX that causes muscle paralysis. The poison was commonly planted in one's shoes and absorbed by the sweet gland in the feet. The antidote originates from the flower angle's trumpet and the created drug is called datura. The antidote contains two types of active substances, atropine and a hallucinogenic. Atropine counteracts the effects of poisoning and the hallucinogenic is responsible for amnesia as well as disorientation. [60]

### 10.4 Bargained Zombie

The act of becoming Bargained Zombie is voluntary when a volunteer have a part of his or her soul exorcised and kept by a Voodoo queen in

exchange for protection and some advantages. However, after the death of Voodoo queen, the rest of the soul is surrendered. [59]

In New Orleans, there is a tradition of zombie bottles that was brought by Africans. The bottle is created by skilful Voodoo conjures. It is believed that the bottle may contain more than one spirits who will obey only the owner of the bottle. The spirits inside the bottle are said to be protectors of the house so they are usually placed on a shelf or a mantle. [61]

Zombies including four types originate in West-African religion and they were brought to New World by African slaves. The most frequent occurrence takes place in Haiti Vodou, however, Li Grand Zombi and Bargained Zombie form part of New Orleans Voodoo. The Spiritual Zombie and the Herbal Zombie are often portrayed in Hollywood movies where corpses are able to move physically however is not mentally coherent. In New Orleans, there is another connection with zombies, the zombie bottles that may contain more than one spirits whose role is to protect the household of the owner.

## 11 GRIS-GRIS

Gris-gris is considered as a magical system whose origin is traced to African Muslims and to Senegambians. The word gris-gris, pronounced gree-gree, refers to both a noun and a verb. As a noun gris-gris means magic and as a verb it indicates the act of creating the spells. [62] Gris-gris became an integral part of New Orleans Voodoo hoodoo.

Gris-gris can be both physical objects and spells. Typical objects are gris-gris bags, voodoo dolls, love potions. The intimate objects can be possessed by spirits. The spells, verbally invoked effect voodoo magic. There are two types of gris-gris magic – sympathetic and homeopathic magic. The object of sympathetic magic looks like the target person and the object of homeopathic magic is linked to something of the target person. Gris-gris are used to help people with love, their finance, luck

and legal matters. There are other terms related to gris-gris that represent objects intended for making magic, such as goofer, hudu, ju-ju, mojo, ouanga, toby and zinzin. [63]

## 12 VOODOO DOLLS

Voodoo dolls are form of gris-gris that invokes spirits or fate, and acts in a specific way towards the target person. Dolls can be used for both good and evil purposes, however ninety percent of usage is dedicated to the good, mainly healing. They can bring love, luck, power but they can also cause harm. Voodoo dolls do not manipulate or control another person, but they represent the person so voodoo spirits find it appealing. There are two ways how to make a doll using straight pins or thorns. The first way is to attach a picture or a name of the target person to the doll. The second way is to link something that was in intimate contact with the target person to the doll. Voodoo dolls are referred to as black magic, but this concept is wrong. If the doll is used in a malevolent manner, the color is red. In movies, voodoo dolls are easily detected and shown, however, in purpose to work properly the doll must be kept a secret and hidden, it is recommended to be as close as possible to the target person. [64]

Voodoo dolls originate in Africa but they were used by Native Americans and in European folk magic and witchcraft. In New Orleans, they are bought as souvenirs.

## 13 CONCLUSION

It is a little more than two centuries that Voodoo first arrived to North America. Voodoo is mainly associated with the state Louisiana and the city New Orleans. This highly complex religion and magical system with deep roots in Africa had to overcome a lot of obstacles. Due to suffering of slaves and their hard working condition, Voodoo was almost forgotten and beliefs and rituals were orally passed on by few. Still this religion managed to survive. However, Voodoo in Louisiana differed from Voodoo in Africa. Since the beginning of slave trade, different African cultures and believes mixed together so they were integrated to Voodoo. For example we can find zombies in there, even though their origin is in Congo. We can find several variation and derivation of Voodoo. In Africa we can find many convents that worship a big range of deities, but in Louisiana there is one major cult that worships their snake deity, Li Grand Zombi. During the time, Voodoo spirits were fused with catholic saints, catholic objects were used in Voodoo and Voodoo objects were found on altars in churches. Voodoo caused fear among citizens, it was seen as black magic that used human sacrifices. It was a joyous religion, people gathered to dance and sing, but with time Voodoo became a source of money and a good business. Those who stayed loyal to Voodoo receded into privacy and ceded their position to greedy practitioners and root doctors. Today it is practiced in secret and if you ask for information about it around people will lie to you. In New Orleans, there is also a form of Voodoo that is called New Orleans Voodoo hoodoo that is a combination of religion and magic. Now, Voodoo is seen as a good material for Hollywood movies and book novels or as a tourist attraction. People are forgetting the spirits but stories and legends are told.

## 14. ENDNOTES

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[Retrieved 5 March 2012].

## 16 ABSTRACT

The theme of bachelor thesis is Voodoo in Louisiana. The text of thesis is divided into thirteen chapters included the introduction and the conclusion. The second chapter describes a history of Louisiana, the third chapter is a brief introduction of Voodoo and the fourth chapter explains the origin of the word Voodoo. The fifth chapter describes how was Voodoo brought to Louisiana and what phases it underwent and briefly introduces hoodoo. The sixth chapter describes the influences on Voodoo, especially Catholic and Indian influence. The seventh chapter introduces the most important spirits. The eighth chapter is about initiations in Africa as well as in New Orleans and differences between them. The ninth chapter is about influence of women on Voodoo and what was their role in it. Eleventh and twelfth chapter explain other concepts included in New Orleans Voodoo, gris-gris and Voodoo dolls.

## 17 RESUME

Tématem této bakalářské práce je Voodoo v Louisianě. Text je rozdělen do třinácti kapitol včetně úvodu a závěru. Druhá kapitola je zaměřená na historii a vývoj Louisiany. Třetí kapitola je stručným představením Voodoo. Čtvrtá kapitola vysvětluje původ slova Voodoo. Pátá kapitola popisuje, jak se Voodoo dostalo do Louisiany a jakými fázemi podstoupilo. Šestá kapitola zkoumá vlivy, především katolický vliv a vliv původních obyvatel, na Voodoo. Sedmá kapitola představuje nejdůležitější uctívané duchy ve Voodoo. V osmé kapitole jsou zmíněna zasvěcení v Africe a v New Orleans, dále jsou zmíněny rozdíly mezi nimi. Devátá kapitola je o vlivu žen na Voodoo a jakou roli v něm hrají. Desátá kapitola vysvětluje Zombie. Jedenáctá a dvanáctá kapitola vysvětluje koncepty vztahující se k Voodoo, gris gris a panenky Voodoo.