

## Glossary

The Creole spelling, *vodou*, has become increasingly common over the past few years, compared to the traditional English spelling, *voodoo*. Many people consider it more appropriate because it is closer to *vodun*, a term of West African origin that refers to the invisible powers whose favour human beings try to win.

**Agwe:** a *lwa*, master of the seas. An important means of honouring Agwe is to fill a raft (Agwe's boat) with food and drink and put it out to sea. If the raft sinks quickly, it means that Agwe has accepted the offering.

**Ason:** a sacred rattle that *oungan* or *manbo* use to summon the *lwa* during Rada rite ceremonies. It also symbolizes the *oungan's* and *manbo's* ability to interact with the world of spirits.

**Badji:** a sacred chamber containing the altar of the *lwa*. It is where the *oungan* or the *manbo* interact with the *lwa*, particularly to administer treatments to help people who consult them.

**Bizango:** a Vodou secret society. Secret societies emerged in the years of slavery. They grew out of the clandestine practice of Vodou, which was banned by the European colonizers.

**Bosou (Bossou):** a family of "bull" *lwa* that are depicted with horns. Bosou can be violent, but they protect their followers well.

**Danbala:** Danbala, one of the oldest and most honoured *lwa*, came from the Kingdom of Dahomey (present-day Benin). Calm and generous, he can grant prestige, wealth and happiness. His symbol, or attribute, is the snake — the snake from which the world originated, the snake of fertility, of the life force that supports the world and prevents it from disintegrating.

**Èzili Dantò (Erzulie Dantor):** This *lwa* is a proud and independent woman, a protective mother who watches over those who are oppressed and abused. If this *lwa* possesses someone when it is angry, the results can be dramatic and violent. The person possessed may cough up blood or swallow fire.

**Èzili Freda (Erzulie Freda):** a *lwa* that personifies love, beauty, sensuality, and a taste for luxury and worldly pleasures. This mulatto *lwa* is flirtatious and likes beautiful dresses, jewellery, perfumes, grooming accessories and fine foods.

**Gede:** a family of *lwa* that embody the continuous cycle of dissolution and regeneration, of life that culminates in death and death that is the source of life. Rulers of the

cemeteries, the Gede know the paths that connect the world of the dead and that of the living and through which those worlds intersect.

**Govi:** a jug that contains spirits and into which *Iwa* are drawn.

**Granbwa (Grand Bois):** *Iwa* of trees, leaves and forests. An expert on medicinal plants, he plays a key role in the initiation of future *oungan* and *manbo*. Forests are important places in Vodou. There, African slaves who escaped from plantations found refuge and met indigenous people who shared their knowledge of the land and nature.

**Gran Mèt (Great Master):** also called the good Lord. In Vodou, there is one, supreme God, viewed as an entity so absolute that one can neither imagine it nor communicate directly with it.

**Kouzen Zaka (Cousin Zaka):** *Iwa* of agriculture and farm work. He is especially revered in rural areas. Thrifty and hardworking, he scolds those who are lazy, and when offered food, he proves to be generous. An expert on medicinal plants, he fights diseases that are not easily cured.

**Lasirèn (the Mermaid):** *Iwa* often portrayed as a mermaid. When it possesses someone, this *Iwa* often expresses itself as a flirtatious, elegant young woman who is particular about her appearance.

**Legba:** Legba is the first *Iwa* invoked by *oungan* and *manbo* because he is the one who can clear the path that connects humans to the Divine and the other *Iwa*.

**Loko:** *Iwa* that presides over the initiations of the *manbo* and *oungan*. He also guards the *ounfò*. Vodouists say that he is like a wind — the eternal wind of Vodou.

**Lwa:** the most important category of spirits in Vodou. There are hundreds of *Iwa*, and their energies, temperaments and preferred fields of activity vary greatly. They represent both the many manifestations of the Gran Mèt and the intermediaries of the Gran Mèt, with which humans can communicate. Some people also consider them to be the multiple aspects of the presence of the Gran Mèt in each individual.

**Manbo:** Vodou priestess.

**Marasa (Marassa):** *Iwa* that express the world of children and that of twins (or triplets). Their phenomenal power is often considered greater than that of any other *Iwa*.

**Mèt Kafou (Master of the Crossroads):** *Iwa* that controls crossroads and the first *Iwa* invoked in the practise of *maji*. In Vodou, crossroads are sacred places where the worlds of the living and the dead intersect. Spirits, forces and energies circulate intensely there. That is why they are favourite places for *maji* and why *maji* practitioners sometimes administer their therapies there, calling upon the *Iwa* to heal, defend or

punish. The proprietor of these sacred places, Mèt Kafou is the one who, like a judge or doctor, can authorize the practice of *maji*.

**Ogou:** a family of *lwa*. These *lwa* are soldiers and warriors. Their emblem is a sabre with a Haitian flag on either side. These energetic *lwa* chomp on cigars, drink rum and take a keen interest in women.

**Ounfò:** Vodou temple.

**Oungan:** Vodou priest.

**Ounsi:** a man or woman who has undergone initiation rites and assists the *oungan* or *manbo*.

**Pake:** When someone is initiated, *pake* are made during a secret ceremony called *bat gè* (fight the war). Placed on the initiate's altar, they represent his or her protective *lwa*, bear their colours and release their power. They can contain soil from specific places, leaves, spices and other materials.

**Pe:** Vodou altar.

**Peristyle:** an annex of the *ounfò* that looks like a big hangar with open sides. It is where ritual dances and many Vodou ceremonies are held.

**Potomitan (centre pole):** Whether it is a living tree, or a wooden or cement post, the *potomitan* is found at the centre of the ceremonial spaces where Vodou celebrations are held. It is the axis around which everything takes place because it is the vehicle used by the *lwa* to descend among participants during ceremonies.

**Pwen (point):** a "supernatural" power or protective magic force symbolized by an object that is made by an *oungan* or a *manbo*, and can be either plain or elaborate.

**Sèvitè (servants):** This is how Vodouists refer to themselves, to highlight the fact that they serve the *lwa*.

**Simbi:** a large family of *lwa*. Many of them guard springs and other sources of water.

**Tchatcha:** a sacred rattle that serves the same purpose as the *ason*, but it has a different shape and is used in the Kongo, Petro and other rites.

**Vèvè:** a sacred symbolic drawing that represents the attributes of a *lwa*. The image is drawn on the ground using corn flour, ashes, coffee grounds, or powdered brick or bark. Each *vèvè* encourages the corresponding *lwa* to appear.