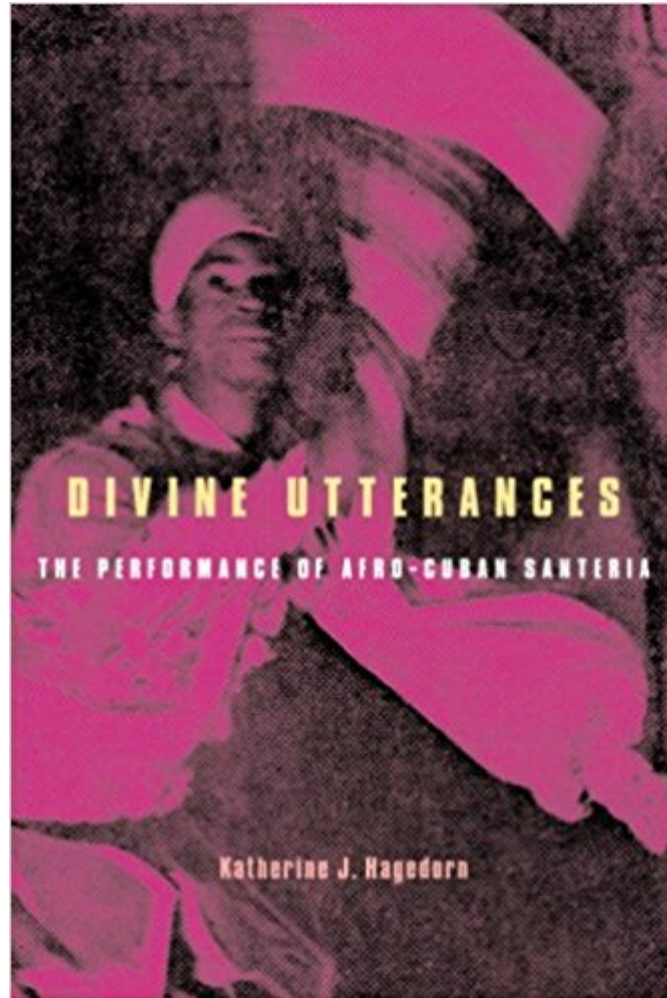


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Divine Utterances: The Performance Of Afro-Cuban Santeria



Synopsis

In *Divine Utterances*, Katherine J. Hagedorn explores the enduring cultural and spiritual power of the music of Afro-Cuban Santería and the process by which it has been transformed for a secular audience. She focuses on the integral connections between sacred music performances and the dramatizations of theatrical troupes, especially the state-sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, and examines the complex relationships involving race, politics, and religion in Cuba. The music that Hagedorn describes is rooted in Afro-Cuban religious tradition and today pervades a secular performances that can produce a trance in audience members in the same way as a traditional religious ceremony. Hagedorn's analysis is deeply informed by her experiences in Cuba as a woman, scholar, and apprentice batá drummer. She argues that constructions of race and gender, the politics of pre- and post-Revolutionary Cuba, the economics of tourism, and contemporary practices within Santería have contributed to a blurring of boundaries between the sacred and the folkloric. As both modes now vie for primacy in Cuba's burgeoning tourist trade, what had once been the music of a marginalized group is now a cultural expression of national pride. The compact disc that accompanies the book includes examples of twenty songs to the orichas, or Afro-Cuban deities, performed by prominent musicians, including Lázaro Ros, Francisco Aguabella, Alberto Villarreal, and Zenaida Armenteros.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Review of "Divine Utterances: The Transformation of Memory in Afro-Cuban Performance" This is an

exceptionally well-researched and well-argued monograph. The author examines the complex relationship between the ritual ceremonies, rhythms, and possession performances of the Afro-Cuban Santería—a religion and the theatrical performance of Santería—a ceremonies, music, and possession by way of the state sponsored Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and other theatrical troupes. The book is a highly original work in which the authors visit a "busy intersection" where the webs that both unite and separate "authentic" sacred performance and theatrical representations of Santería—a are dissected against the background of two other dualities: the centuries long dialectic between race relations and Afro-Cuban religious practice in the island, and the seemingly antithetical policy of an officially religion-unfriendly socialist government that relies on the Santería—a religion as a means to attract capitalist tourist dollars to the island. Hagedorn's book constitutes an in-depth study of the Santería religion. At the same times it presents an analysis of how two types of performances, one grounded on everyday religious practice, the other a theatrical representation of those religious practices, are connected, disconnected, and mutually inform each other. As the author describes, this situation gives rise to a wide variety of paradoxical occurrences.

I'm sorry to say that I bought this book after reading that it was supposed to be "superb." Instead, I was disappointed in the lack of depth in discussing the political situation between the religious contexts and their staged touristic performances. The issue of race is very gently treated—as if blackness, authentic Afro-Cuban practice and performance is not a serious issue in religious presentations. I felt that there was a mediocre of discussion of the all-important US dollar as a motivating source for the often incomplete and inaccurate renditions of Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies to which tourists have access. Tourism is a widely studied topic right now, for example, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has done amazing work on the topic of museums and tourism, and this book doesn't convince me that the author has read or understands the deeply intersecting areas of economy/tourism/voyeurism/performance studies/cultural theory and race. Instead, I can recommend Robin Moore's book on the history of blackness and the political struggles involved in race relations and feel that Moore's book, although it sidesteps religion and the production of religion in Cuba, also gives a badly-needed history of the racism and production of black culture in Cuba from the US occupation until the present day embargo. This book by Hagedorn, while being personally reflective, doesn't problematize race or the economics of these musicians in a way that highlights the history of race relations/blackness or the present political situation. The book Afro-Cuban Voices also I would recommend as "superb," as it is a compilation of actual interviews with Cubans who struggle to define their race inside the present socialist society and in light of the

revolution and US cultural imperialism.

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