

## Descriptions of Various Loa of Voodoo

Compilation from class assignments, Spring, 1990.

Done for Bob Corbett by Jan Chatland

- **Ayida:** The female counterpart Ayida: The female counterpart
- **Adjasou:** Characterized by protruding eyes and a bad humor, lives under the mombin tree near a spring and is very fond of vermouth, rum, and cognac.
- **Agassu:** Dahomean in origin and belonging to the Fon and Yaruba tribes. When a person is possessed by Agassu, his hands become crooked and stiffened, therefore resembling claws. In Dahomey, he is the result of a union between a panther and a woman. He is associated with water deities and sometimes takes the form of a crab.

He is one of the mythical creatures who once gave assistance to the Ancestor. He is considered one of the loa masons.

- **Agau:** Agau is a very violent god. Earth tremors and the frightening sounds associated with storms are because of Agau. The trances induced by his mounting are so violent there have been deaths associated with his brutality. When one is mounted one attempts to imitate the sounds of thunder and tremors, if they are strong enough to utter sounds under the possession. The possessed person keeps repeating, "It is I who am the gunner of god; when I roar the earth trembles."

It is said that when the earth tremors, Agau is angry. Those who are strong enough to keep him in their bodies are puffing with all their strength and sputtering like seals. One has to be very strong to harbor this spirit.

- When **Sogbo and Bade** (the loa of lighting and wind) act together and call upon Agau, a thunder storm is produced.

Agau is the inseparable companion of Sogbo.

Bade and Agau share the same functions, loa of the winds.

- **Agwe: (Agive)** He is invoked under the names "Shell of the Sea," "Eel," and "Tadpole of the Pond." Sovereign of the sea. One of the many lovers of Erzulie. Under his jurisdiction come not only all the flora and fauna of the sea, but all ships which sail on the sea. His symbols are tiny boats, brightly painted oars and shells, and sometimes small metal fishes. He likes military uniforms and gunfire. He is the protector of seafaring men. The service for Agwe is quite different from others since it is on the sea itself.

A conch shell is used to call him during a voodoo ritual.

He must be greeted with wet sponges and towels when leaving the water because of the heat.

A barque is prepared with all sort of Agwe's favorite foods, including champagne. This barque is then floated over where it is believed the sacred underwater world exists. If the barque sinks, then Agwe has accepted the sacrifice and will protect the water interests of those who have prepared the sacrifice. Were the barque to float back into shore, then the service has been refused and a different manner of placating Agwe would have to be devised. The animals that are sacrificed to him are two white sheep.

Depicted as a mulatto with fair skin and green eyes. Services take place near seas, rivers, or lakes. Must be careful that those possessed do not jump into the water.

Any reference to signaling can only come as a pleasure to this god.

Agwe's counterpart is **La Sirine**, the sirin of the seas.

In connection with Christianity, Agwe has borrowed traits from St. Ulrich, who is often pictured with a fish in his hand.

- **Ayezan: (Aizan, Ayizan)** This is the Legba's wife. She protects the markets, public places, doors, and barriers, and has a deep knowledge of the intricacies of the spirit world. Selects and instructs certain novice houngans. When feeding her or her husband, a black or white goat or russet colored ox is offered up. Her favorite tree is the palm tree. Ayezan is symbolized by mounds of earth sprinkled with oil and surrounded by fringes of palm. Ayezan is Dahomean in origin and represented by an old woman in personification. She is one of the oldest gods and is therefore entitled to first offerings at services. She often mounts people only after her husband appears at the scene. Her mounts are never severe; therefore, she can sometimes take quite a while to spot.

She is the mate of Loco (Loko). As a Mambo, Ayezan is reputed to have many children (devotees); she cares for her children greatly; she has a good, loving heart. She punishes those who have made mistakes not because she is a sadistic woman but to correct their behavior in the future. She will punish those adults taking advantage of the young, the rich of the poor, the strong of the weak and the husband of the wife. She is believed to have the ability to purify her surroundings and to exorcise malevolent spirits from her devotees.

- **Ayida:** The female counterpart of Dumballah, his mate, is Ayida. She is the mother figure. She is the rainbow. Together they are the unitary forces of human sexuality. Her symbol is also a serpent. She is quite submissive and very delicate. Her co-wife is Erzullie. It is said that whoever "can grasp the diadem of Ayida will be assured wealth" (Metraux, p. 105). Also known as Ayida Wedo: her job is that of holding up the earth.
- **Azacca or Zaka:** This is the loa of agriculture, but is generally seen as the brother of Ghede. For this reason Ghede will often come to the ceremonies for Zaka and come when Zaka has mounted someone. Zaka is a gentle simple peasant, but greatly respected by the peasants since he is a very hard worker. He is addressed as "cousin". He is found wherever there is country. He is usually barefoot, carries a macoute sack, wears a straw hat, and has a pipe in his mouth. By nature he is suspicious, out for profit, fond of quibbling, and has a fear and hatred of town folk. His vocal stylization consists of the almost unintelligible sounds of a goat. He is known for his

gossip he spreads and for his "girl chasing." He is young and like to play when not working.

There are interesting similarities between the sophisticated Ghede and the more bumbling Azacca, as though a younger less sophisticated brother were imitating a more secure older brother. Like Ghede, Zaka loves his food. But, unlike Ghede, he is rude and voracious in his eating habits, often running away to hide with his food and eat it quickly. His favorite dishes to eat are the ones peasants feed on--boiled maize, bread soaked in oil and slices of small intestine with fatty membrane fried, unrefined sugar. His favorite drink is white rum and his tree is the avocado. Zaka controls the fields, and like the farmers themselves, he is very watchful of detail. He notes who is treating whom in what manner, who is flirting with whom, who says what to whom etc. When he mounts someone he often spills out all the local gossip to the embarrassment and amusement of all. He does not forgive easily.

It is rumored that Zaka often appears in concrete forms. In this concrete form, he assumes a limp and dresses in a ragged peasant outfit. Then he begs for rum or cassava melons. Those that refuse to give him anything are punished.

Zaka is a polygamist and considers all his children as investments. He stands for the incest taboo, though, and will not break it no matter how rich he could become.

- **Bade:** The loa of wind. He is the inseparable companion of Sogbo, god of lightning. He also shares his functions with Agau, another storm spirit.
- **Bakulu: (Bakulu-baka)** He drags chains behind him and is such a terrible spirit that no one dares to invoke him. His habitat is in the woods where offerings are taken to him. He himself possesses no one. Since no one wants to call on him, people simply take any offerings that go to him and leave them in the woods.
- **Bosou Koblamin:** Violent petro loa. Bosou is a violent loa capable of defeating his enemies. He is very popular during times of war. He protects his followers when they travel at night. Bosou's appearance is that of a man with three horns; each horn has a meaning--strength, wildness, and violence. Sometimes Bosou comes to the help of his followers but he is not a very reliable loa. When a service is held, Bosou appears by breaking chains that he is restrained. Immediately upon appearing he is given a pig, his favorite food. The ceremony in honor of Bosou always pleases a congregation because it allows them to eat. Usually a good number of people attend such a service.
- **Brise:** Brise is a loa of the hills. He is boss of the woods. Brise is very fierce in appearance. He is very black and has very large proportions. Brise is actually a gentle soul and likes children. Brise lives in the chardette tree and sometimes assumes the form of an owl.

Brise is a protectorate. He is strong and demanding and accepts speckled hens as sacrifices.

- **Congo:** A handsome but apathetic loa. Content with any clothing and eats mixed foods with much pimiento, and is fond of mixed drinks.
- **Congo Savanne:** A fierce petro loa. He is malevolent, fierce, and strong. Savanne eats people.

He grinds them up as we would grind up corn. His color is white. He is a loa not to be messed with.

- **Dincludin & Chalotte:** These two loa are among the French "mysteries." People mounted by these gods talk perfect French and seem to be unable to speak Creole normally or properly. Chalotte often demands upon the most defined forms of ritualistic protocol. Dincludin can be recognized by his habit of pocketing everything given to him.
- **Dumballah (Dumballah Wedo, Damballah):** Known as the serpent god, he is one of the most popular. Dumballah is the father figure. He is benevolent, innocent, a loving father. He doesn't communicate well, as though his wisdom were too aloof for us.

Dumballah is the snake. He plunges into a basin of water which is built for him, or climbs up into a tree. Being both snake and aquatic deity, he haunts rivers, springs, and marshes. Again, as the snake he is rather uncommunicative, but a loving quiet presence. Dumballah does not communicate exact messages, but seems to radiate a comforting presence which sort of sends a general spirit of optimism into all people present. Because of this, he is often sought after during ceremonies. When Dumballah mounts someone the special offering to him is the egg, which he crushes with his teeth.

Dumballah is the serpent god, also lightning. He and his wife, Aida-Wedo, are often shown as two snakes who look as if they were diving into the sink and by a rainbow. He is the bringer of rain; this is a necessity for good crops. People possessed by him dart their tongues in and out, slither along the ground, and climb trees, or roof beams, falling like a boa. He is known to whistle because he has no speech. His special day is Thursday, and his favorite tree is the bougainvillea. White is his color. He is in charge of white metal (silver) and must be fed white food and drink. He grants riches and allows treasures to be discovered. Dumballah sustains the world and prevents it from disintegrating. Dumballah and his wife Ayida, represent human sexuality.

He is sometimes referred to as Da. Dumballah is often spoken of as a serpent. In the voodoo culture, the serpent is a symbol of fertility. He is one of the oldest of the ancestors and is so sacred that he doesn't speak, but expresses himself through hissing sounds, just like that of a serpent. In the voodoo religion Dumballah is closely associated with the Catholic's St. Patrick.

He is Dahomean in origin. His favorite foods are eggs, cornmeal, melons, rice, bananas, and grapes. The usual offering to him is a hen and a cock. It is believed that if respects are paid to him by a married couple, he will keep them happy.

- **Erzulie: (Ezili)** Voodoo does not have a woman as goddess of fertility. Fertility is regarded as a unified principle, equally held by male and female forces. Thus Dumballah is united to his Ayida. Agwe has his counterpart in La Sirene, the Marasa; the twins are contradictory and complementary forces of nature and so on. Erzulie is the female energy of Legba.

She has tremendous power and is feared as much as she is loved. Also, she has several different roles: goddess of the word, love, help, goodwill, health, beauty and fortune, as well as goddess of jealousy, vengeance, and discord. She is usually known as a serpent that coiled upon itself

lives on water and bananas.

There is a casual connection between the lightness of her color and that of wealth, because only the light skinned elite possess wealth in Haiti.

But Voodoo has a most special place for Erzulie, the loa of beauty, the loa who is so uniquely human since she is the differentiating force between human and all other creation. She is the ability to conceptualize, the ability to dream, the artistic ability to create. She is the loa of ideality.

She is the female prototype of voodoo who represents the moon.

She is the most beautiful and sensuous lady in the voodoo pantheon. She is respected and wealthy; wears her hair long; is very jealous and requires her lovers to dedicate a room for her ritual lovemaking.

Erzulie is not a loa of elemental forces, but THE loa of ideal dreams, hopes and aspirations. As such she is the most loved loa of all. She is pale in appearance; almost white, even though she is Dahomean in origin. She is known as the earth mother, the goddess of love. She is depicted as a trembling woman who inhabits the water. She has no specific function, but is approachable in a confidential manner. In every sanctuary there is a room, or corner of a room, dedicated to her.

Erzulie is fabulously rich, and, when she mounts someone the first act is always to accomplish her elaborate toilette. The very best of things which the houngan or mambo have are reserved for Erzulie. She will bathe, using soap still in a fresh wrapper if possible. She will dress in silks with fresh flowers and other signs of her femininity and specialness.

Her sacred days are Tuesday and Thursday. She wears red and blue dresses and jewels. As soon as someone is possessed by her, they are washed and dressed in finery. She is a high class mulatto who walks with a saucy sway to her hips. She is a "woman of the world" and is fond of sugary drinks. She is compared to Aphrodite. She is pleasure-loving, extravagant and likes to give and get presents. She fond of men but mistrusts women as rivals. She is a woman of etiquette, and when she pretends to speak French, she purposely talks in a high pitched voice.

She is a master of coquetry. She may simply visit with her servants, or she may eat or drink with great delicacy. She loves to dance and is the most graceful of all the loa. She is quite special to men and will dance with them, kiss and caress them, even in an often embarrassing manner.

Yet she is closely associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary and her symbol is the heart, usually one broken with an arrow in much the same way as a dominant Catholic portrait of Mary has it.

Erzulie wears three wedding bands since she has been (or is) wedded to Dumballah, Ogoun and Agwe. She has often flirted with Zaka, but she has completely dismissed his more coarse brother Ghede as unworthy (since he is black and she is mulatto). However, Erzulie is always in charge and may take any servitor present as her lover for the day if she chooses.

However, the visit of Erzulie is never fully satisfying. In the end she always begins to weep. The world is just too much for her. At first people try to comfort her with more delicate food or drink or other gifts, but her tears continue to flow. It is this tearful and sad side of her that allows the women to accept her in her haughty ways. She is, in the end, one who suffers the burden of the world's sorrows.

Despite her flirtations and loving ways, Erzulie is a virgin. She is the complete converse of the crude sexuality of Papa Ghede. She may not be a virgin in the physical sense, but in the sense that her love transcends the earth, it is a love of higher forces. She belongs to the family of sea spirits, but has become completely divorced from her origins as to be now almost exclusively a personification of feminine grace and beauty.

- **Erzulie Jan Petro:** Violent spirit loa belonging to the Petro tradition. Jan Petro is called upon to take responsibility for the temple where spells are on display; although she is a neutral entity, when not called upon it is the duty of the devotees to make them behave peacefully or violently, depending on their motivation for dealing with the spirits. Jan Petro as a protector of temples is very powerful; when people come to the temple they soon find out. Jan Petro likes fresh air and water; she is a sea spirit. She likes perfume and lotion--any temple dedicated to her usually smells like lotion, for it is thrown on those things she possesses.
- **Ghede: (Papa Ghede)** Ghede is the eternal figure in black, controlling the eternal crossroads at which everyone must someday cross over. His symbol is the cross upon a tomb. Known as the spirit of death, other spirits fear him and try to avoid him.

He operates under the direction of Baron Samedi.

Baron Samedi represents the death side of Ghede (Guede). He talks through his nose, is cynical, jovial, and tells broad jokes. His language is full of the unexpected. His tools are the pick, the hoe, and the spade. He is the power behind the magic that kills. He controls the souls of those who have met death as a result of magic.

When he appears (mounting someone at an invoking ceremony), he wears a pair of dark glasses, from which he knocks out the right lens: for with his right eye he watches those present, lest anyone steal his food.

Of especial interest is the testimony of Ghede; for when this god mounts his carriers, they are bereft of any sense of self, behave and speak compulsively, and recover knowing nothing of what they did or said.

Loa of death, sexuality, and keeper of the cemeteries. He is enamored of women, makes constant use of obscene words and songs, and performs obscene dances. When someone is mounted by Guede they put on a black undertaker's coat, a black top hat and stuff cotton in their ears and noses, this to symbolize a dead person. After they are dressed up they must then perform the banda dance, an erotic dance in which one imitates the movements of copulation.

The Guedes live in cemeteries and visit Catholic churches at night. On November 2 the faithful visit cemeteries and light candles in honor of Baron Samedi.

Papa Guede is a much loved loa because his appearance always brings laughter and joy, singing and dancing; he is usually the last to appear at a ceremony.

He is the loa of death and resurrection; is known as a total clown; loves cigarettes; is often seen smoking two at a time.

He is neither good nor evil, but he is amused by humans and that's why he jokes around so much.

Ghede is sort of to the underworld or afterlife what Legba is to life--he who controls access. Ghede controls access to everything in the afterlife.

We are reminded by him that our understanding of death and life is limited and that both are beyond our comprehension.

Ghede is also god of eroticism. Eroticism is beyond good and evil since it is inevitable. Ghede is neither delighted by eroticism, and certainly not shamed by it. If anything, Ghede is amused by the universal presence of eroticism and humans' constant need to pretend that it is other than what it is.

It is believed that his obscenity in sexual matters is an affirmation of life in the midst of death.

Saturday is his day and his color is black. His favorite foods are salt herring, hot peppers, roasted corn, and roasted bananas, and he is known for stealing food and hiding it, and then demanding more. Black goats and chickens are the animal sacrifices made to him during the rituals.

When Ghede mounts someone he often singles out people who pretend to be aloof from eroticism. He ridicules them, embarrasses them, exposes them (in more ways than one). He is especially hard on whites since they often have the puritanical sexual attitudes of western culture.

Ghede is also often called **BARON SAMEDI**. In this aspect he is *DEATH*. He is the keeper of the cemetery and the primary contact with the dead. Anyone who would seek contact with the dead must first contact and solicit Ghede/Baron Samedi in the same way that Legba is contacted to cross over to the spirit world.

Ghede has a ravenous appetite for food and drink and doesn't mind manifesting them when he mounts someone.

He has a dread of fire and shares the characteristic of a nasal voice with zombis.

Ghede is a clown, an interrupter, a coarse fellow. He wears formal black attire and a high silk hat with dark glasses and a cane. He smokes cigarettes and drinks rum. Likes to mount young girls. When he is pleased, he's quite a clown, but hard to handle when angered.

But he is history too. As keeper of the cemetery he has intimate contact with the dead. He knows what their plans were, what's going on in families, what the connections of things are.

And he is quite generous with his information. Even when he is clowning or performing his erotic antics, if you can pull him aside and ask him a serious question you will get a serious and reliable answer.

Another of Ghede's great powers is as the protector of children. Ghede generally does not like to see children die. They need a full life. Thus he is the loa to go to when seeking help for a sick child.

Ghede has the power over zombies and decides whether or not people can be changed into animals. Any such black magic voodoo must seek the help of Baron Samedi/Ghede with these tasks.

Lastly, since Ghede is the lord of death, he is also the last resort for healing since he must decide whether to accept the sick person into the dead or allow them to recover.

- **Gran Boa:** Lives in the deep forest where the vegetation is wild. He is the protector of wildlife, and doesn't like to be seen. He eats fruits and vegetables all day in the woods and when called in a ceremony, he is usually not hungry but the people always have food for him anyway. He is the loa that must be called upon before one is ordained into voodoo priesthood.
- **Grande Ezili:** An old woman, crippled with rheumatism and she is only able to walk by dragging herself along on the ground with a stick.
- **Ibo Lele:** He is independent and hateful; proud of himself and ambitious. He likes to be exclusively served and doesn't like to associate with the other loa. He relies heavily on the people for his food, but the people are never certain what kind of food he is likely to eat.
- **Jean Petro:** Jean Petro is a deformation of Don Pedro, the name of the Spanish slave. Jean Petro is the spirit-leader of a group of strong and violent spirits called petro. The difference between the good loa (rada) and the evil loa (petro) is still far and wide. Voodoo services are rarely held for petro loa; however, they still do occur but most services are for family and rada loa. Some say that Jean Petro was brought about by Don Pedro who was a Negro slave of Spanish origin. He acquired much influence by being denounced as the instigator of some alarming plots to overthrow the government. Because of this he symbolizes resistance, force, uprisings, and a sort of black power ideology.
- **Kalfu (Carrefour, Kalfou):** Legba is twined with his Petro opposite. Kalfu too controls the crossroads. Actually, were it not for him the world would be more rational, a better place. But, not unlike Pandora in Greek religion and myth, Kalfu controls the evil forces of the spirit world. He allows the crossing of bad luck, deliberate destruction, misfortune, injustice.

Kalfu controls the in-between points of the crossroads, the off- center points.

Legba controls the positive spirits of the day. Kalfu controls the malevolent spirits of the night.

Yet Kalfu can control these evil spirits too. He is strong and tall, muscular. People do not speak in his presence. When he mounts a person everyone at the service stops speaking because he

allows evil loa to come to the ceremony. He claims that most of the important loa know him and he collaborates with them. Kalfu says that some people claim he is a demon but he denies this. He is a respected loa and he is not liked much.

He is the grand master of charms and sorceries and is closely associated with black magic. Ceremonies are often held at the crossroads.

The origin of darkness. The moon is his symbol. He can be placated, but is a very violent and dangerous loa.

Kalfu is similar to Pandora in that he controls the gate comings and goings of bad spirits. He controls the off center points of the crossroads.

He has knowledge of the human condition and develops ways to help individuals cope with their problems. He has experience dealing with all kinds of people. Kalfu is a magician and likes to use tree leaves in his magic. He has the ability to change people into animals and then control their minds.

- **Krabinay:** Krabinay loa are petro loa. They dress all in red and do high impressive jumps. People are warned away from Krabinay. However, they are very tough and can offer a great deal of assistance to a houngan.

These loa behave in a truly devilish way. Possessions induced by them are so violent that spectators are advised to keep their distance. They take pleasure in cynicism. However, they undertake treatment of desperate cases.

Despite their admission of creation by God they avoid mentioning his name.

- **Legba:** Old man who guards the crossroads. He is the origin of life, so he must be saluted each time a service or any other activity with the loa will begin. Legba controls the crossing over from one world to the other. He is the contact between the worlds of spirit and of flesh.

He can deliver messages of gods in human language and interpret their will. He is the god of destiny and is also the intermediary between human beings and divine gods.

Legba is one of the most important loa in Haitian voodoo. He is the first loa to be called in a service, so that he can open the gates to the spirit world and let them communicate with other loa. No loa dares show itself without Legba's permission. Whoever has offended him finds himself unable to address his loa and is deprived of their protection. He is the origin and the male prototype of voodoo.

Voodooists believe that if Legba grants their wishes, they can contact the forces of the universe.

He is the guardian of voodoo temples, courtyards, plantations,, and crossroads. He protects the home. If you are going on a trip, it is believed that you pray to Legba for protection from harm and a safe return home.

As "Master of Crossroads" he is the god of every parting of the way--a favorite haunt of evil

spirits and propitious to magic devices; and it is at crossroads that he receives the homage of sorcerers and presides over their incantations and spells.

He is also the guardian of the *poto mitan*--the center post--a post in the center of a peristyle regarded as a thoroughfare of the spirits. The *poto-mitan* is an extremely sacred object. Legba walks in his bare feet because he is in constant contact with the earth.

He is a small crooked lovable old man. Small pipe with little tobacco, a little food in his *macoute* sack. Sores on his body. His pitiful appearance has earned him the nickname of Legba of the Broken Foot but conceals the terrific strength which becomes apparent in the violence of possession induced by him.

Because of his politeness and caring nature he is greeted as Papa Legba. He is a much loved loa.

His favorite foods are vegetables, meat and tubules grilled on a fire. These foods will be offered to him so that he will open the gates. His symbol is the sun and all that is good. His sacred day is Tuesday. His favorite tree is the *medicinier-bebi*.

When he mounts someone the person's limbs are twisted and horrible to see. The crutch is the symbol of Legba. The outward appearance of Legba hides a very powerful interior.

Legba is the symbol of the sun, of daylight, of things positive. Legba controls the cardinal points of the crossroads.

The interpreter to the gods can deliver the messages of the gods in human language and interpret their will. He is the god of destiny, honored first at every ceremony, receiving first offerings. He is represented by a wooden or iron phallus mounted in a little mound of earth in front of every house.

Legba is also known to hold the "key of the spiritual world", and for this reason is identified with the Christian St. Peter.

Legba's colors are green, rose, and red.

- **Lemba:** is symbolized by an iron bar.
- **Linglessu:** This is one of the loa free masons. When feeding this loa, all meat prepared for him must be liberally salted. He prefers the ends of the tongue, ears, front teeth, and the end of a tail of a goat. When this loa mounts somebody, it is violent and his voice is highly distorted.
- **Linto:** The child spirit of the Guede family. He induces childish behavior in those he rides. They walk clumsily, much like a baby who hardly knows how to use his legs. They babble and cry for food. The company Linto is in teases him but only in good humor.
- **Loco: (Loko)** is the spirit of vegetation and guardian of sanctuaries. Mainly associated with trees. He gives healing properties to leaves; the god of healing and patron of the herbs doctors who always invoke him before undertaking a treatment. Offerings are placed in straw bags

which are then hung in its branches.

He is only recognizable by the pipe smoked by his servant and the stick which he carries in his hand. His favorite colors are red and white. Animals that are most likely to be offered to this god are black or white goats or russet colored oxen.

Portrayed in the form of a butterfly, Loco has an extensive knowledge of pharmaceutical uses of herbs. It is said that Houngans and Mambos receive their knowledge from Loco.

He is known for his good judgment; often during conflicts he is called in to be judge. He is known for his intolerance of injustice. It has been said that he transforms into the wind and listens to people without them knowing he is there.

Loco has many wives and girlfriends who are young and good-looking all over the country wherever there is vegetation.

He is the personification of the trees he is so closely associated with.

Loco is compared to an invisible houngan with authority over all the sanctuaries in Haiti. The worship of Loco is much like the worship of trees--mainly the Ceiba. The Ceiba tree is the Antillean silk-cotton tree and the tallest species in Haiti. Offerings to it are put in straw bags and hung from the branches.

It is hard to distinguish Loco when he has mounted someone since he is the personification of plants.

Loco is also a messenger loa and communication loa, but his main duties are the vegetation in the woods and forests. He also watches over the agricultural tools peasants use in their every day activities.

The voodoo physician priests worship him, getting their knowledge from him.

- **Marasa:** Twins who died in their early childhood and are innocent and capricious. They are thought to be orphans with no discipline in terms of good eating habits. They eat from twin plates and they eat all of what they are offered at once, always coming very hungry to the ceremonies. They must be fed until they are content and then they will listen to the people. They have a reputation for doing harm to those who have forgotten to provide food or who have not kept their promises, but also refuse to take responsibility for any wrong doing or illnesses.
- **Marinette-Bwa-Chech:** Literally "Marinette of the dry arms." This is a petro loa or an evil spirit. Worship of her is not spread all over Haiti but is growing rapidly in southern parts. Her ceremonies are held under a tent and lit with a huge fire in which salt and petrol are thrown.

She is most dreaded; a she-devil; the sworn servant of evil. She is respected by werewolves, who hold services in her honor. She is an agent of the underhand dealings of Kita who is, herself, an outstanding loa sorceress.

The screeching owl is the emblem of Marinette. When she mounts someone they behave as an

owl, hooking their fingers, lowering their heads and scratching.

After mounting people, she talks of eating people and confesses hideous crimes. At the end the houngan and the possessed alike jump in the fire and stamp it out. For sacrifice she is offered chickens that have been plucked alive, goats and sows. However, no one can touch these animals while preparing them; they must also be buried. Marinette is the mistress of Petro-rouge and wife to Ti-Jean-pied-sec.

She wanders the woods and goes to her secret place where the offerings she shares with no one are left.

- **Obatala:** Obatala is a sky loa. He is the loa responsible for forming children in the womb. Thus, Obatala is responsible for birth defects. He is also called king of the white cloth, and all his followers wear white. Obatala's favorite food is edible snails.
- **Ogoun: (Ogorin, Ogu-badagri)** Ogoun is the traditional warrior figure in Dahomean religion. He is quite similar to the spirit Zeus in Greek religion/mythology. As such Ogoun is mighty, powerful, triumphal. In more recent time Ogoun has taken on a new face which is not quite related to his African roots. This is the crafty and powerful political leader. However, this political warrior is much more of an image of where struggle is in modern Haiti.

Originally, he was the god of blacksmithing; however, now that blacksmithing has become obsolete, he has become the warrior loa.

He can give strength through prophecy and magic. It is Ogoun (Ogu) who is said to have planted the idea and led and given power to the slaves to the 1804 revolt and freedom. He is called now to help people obtain a government more responsible to their needs.

He is of the Nago loa family. This loa loves the noise of battle itself and this is most likely why he is the voodoo religion's master of lightning and storm. By Nado tradition Shango has these loa duties. Ogu-badagri by voodoo hymn, "throws" lightning and thunder.

His symbol in humfo is a sabre stuck in the earth in front of the altar. His past follows him in that "Ogu's forge" is the name given to an iron rod stuck in a brazier which represents him.

Ogoun comes to mount people in various aspects of his character, but the people are quite familiar with each of them. Some of these aspects are:

Ogoun the wounded warrior. Here he even assumes a Christ-figure pose which the people know well from their Christian associations.

As Ogoun Feraille he gives strength to the servitors by slapping them on the thighs or back.

As Ogoun Badagris he may lift a person up and carry him or her around to indicate his special attention and patronage.

But in all the aspects of Ogoun there is the dominant theme of power and militancy. He represents a veteran of the "time of bayonets."

His possessions can sometimes be violent. Those mounted by him are known to wash their hands in flaming rum without suffering from it later. They are never given water; they are more like "teased" with water. They dress up in red dolman and French kepi and wave a saber or machete, chew a cigar and demand rum in an old phrase "Gren mwe fret" (my testicles are cold).

At times, the loa Ogu interprets Dumballah's messages.

If he is properly persuaded, he will protect his petitioners from bullets and weapon wounds.

He is covered with iron and immune to fire and bullets. To make him more comfortable the congregation serves him white rum. Ogou's symbol is a piece of iron, which he uses to fight his enemies. He is a respected loa.

Ogoun is the deity of fire and "metallurgical elements" and red is his color. Therefore, he likes animals that are red to be offered to him; for example, red or russet pigs or roosters. He likes to be saluted with rum, not with the more traditional water. Often this rum is poured on the ground then lit and the flames pervade the peristyle.

The sword, or much more commonly, the machete is his weapon and he often does strange feats of poking himself with it, or even sticking the handle in the ground, then mounting the blade without piercing his skin.

The members of this family are great drinkers, but alcohol has no effect on them.

Ogoun is identified with St. Jacques, the warrior general, and is often in the guise of a revolutionary war general.

He likes cigars and rum. He has a passion for fire and likes the women. He's the spirit of fire and water.

His favorite tree is the mango tree. His favorite day is Wednesday.

- **Petite Pierre:** is a gluttonous and quarrelsome spirit who tries to pick fights with the audience.
- **Petro:** Comes from a new nation of spirits forged directly in the steel and blood of the colonial era. They reflect all the rage, violence and delirium that threw off shackles of slavery. The drums, dancing, and rhythm are offbeat sharp, and unforgiving, like the crack of a rawhide whip. The Bizango is an extreme form of the Petro and it is sometimes described as the wild Petro. Bizango occurs by night, in darkness that is the province of the djab, the devil.
- **Rada:** The loa that represents the emotional stability and warmth of Africa, the hearth of the nation. Rada derived almost directly from the Dahomean deity is highly religious in nature; rite is never celebrated without the performance of Mahi dances and without honoring and invocation of Nago gods. The Rada drumming and dancing is on beat whereas the Petro is offbeat. Rada stands for light and the normal affairs of humanity.
- **Simbi: (Simba, Simbe, Simbi Andezo)** is guardian of the fountains and marshes and cannot do

without the freshness of water. Voodoo rituals are held near springs. Several of their songs mention these sorts of places. He is a very knowledgeable loa because he spends a lot of time learning about the nature of illnesses of supernatural origin and how to treat them. He is either with you or against you by protecting those who have good relations with him and turning his back on those who do not. As part of Ogou's army he is the chief of the coast guard and goes wherever he pleases.

He is the petro loa of the coast; one of the respected members of the petro family. He belongs to rada because of his nature. Sometimes neglected by their devotees and gnawed by hunger, he tends to be cruel.

He lives in springs and rivers. He cannot stand being away from water; children who go to fetch water at springs run the risk-- particularly if they are fair-skinned--of being kidnapped to work for him under the water for a few years, gifting them with second sight for their trouble.

- **Siren and Whale:** These two loa are marine divinities, so closely linked that they are always worshipped together and celebrated in the same songs. Some people say the Whale is the mother of the Siren, others that he is her husband; others say they are used for one and the same deity. Popular opinion says the Siren is married to Agwe. When Siren turns up in a sanctuary, the person possessed by her appears simply in the role of a young coquette most careful of her looks, and speaking in French, often offending the peasant serviteurs. Both the Siren and the Whale are often viewed as "upper class."
- **Sobo (Sobo Kessou):** Loa of strength. Sobo is a very powerful loa and well known for his bravery as a warrior. When he possesses someone, that person must dress up like a general in the army. When he addresses the congregation during a mounting it is like a general addressing his troops. Sobo is considered an important figure in voodoo mythology. He is the symbol of strength, the ideal of voodoo priests who want to be respected figures in their communities. Because of the strength he procures for his followers, Sobo's presence is continually requested to bring security and protection to the congregation. He who is with Sobo is protected against wild spirits.

Sobo is said to have healing power and is often called upon to cure illness of the supernatural origin to his devotees.

He dines upon goat meat and mutton, and often lives under trees. His servitors wear kerchiefs of white and lemon, his favorite colors.

- **Sogbo (Soybo):** He is the god of lightning and the protector of flags. Sogbo is the brother of the three-horned Bosu. Sogbo is always accompanied by his companion Bade, who is the loa of the winds. These loa share functions with Agau, who is also a storm loa.

When possessed by Sogbo, one hurls down polished stones which are piously collected and used as symbols of the loa. Despite their divine origins, thunderstones are not uncommon in Haiti. The spirit hurls a lightning bolt to the earth, striking a rock outcropping and casting the stone to the valley floor. There it must lie for a year and a day before the houngan may touch it.

- **Taureau-trois-graines:** His name means bull with three testicles. This loa is a product of the fanciful imagination of the people in Haiti and is considered a Creole loa. He is the great loa of the Jacmel region. His appearances are terrible; people possessed by him are seized with destructive rage and create havoc all round unless appeased by the offer of a handful of grass. This they munch at once. During trance, they bellow ceaselessly.
- **Ti-Jean-Petro:** This is a black magic or "petro" loa that is depicted as a dwarf with one foot. Even though Ti-Jean-Petro has a French name, his roots can be traced back to Africa. He is easily comparable to a spirit that roamed through the bush. This spirit, too, was depicted as having only one leg. This loa often protects and assists black magic sorcerers. Ti-Jean-Petro also is recognized under the names of Petro-e-rouge, Ti-Jean-pied-fin, Prince Zandor, and Ti-Jean-Zandor. He has a violent and passionate nature that becomes apparent when he mounts people.

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