

# Reframing Vodou's Veves through Guided Imagery Therapy as Diasporic Expressions Among Haitians in Miami-Dade County, Florida



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## Abstract

The Haitian culture is colorful and possesses a tapestry of images, complex symbols, and art archetypes that seem to brush with the cultural, spiritual, and psychological aspects of Haitian life. There are powerful visual narratives such as images, songs and dance, and arts expressing apparatuses for guided imagery, not expressed, but unite Haitians in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

The components of imagery vividness are culturally considered to ascertain whether guided imagery in this culture can be therapeutic. The purpose of this article is to explore guided imagery as a therapeutic expression of mind-body medicine. It proposes an active transformative imagination exercise as guided imagery for three archetypal images as conscious experiences within the culture: The mother, songs and dance, and imagery known as veve (pronounced as vehveh). The tools considered: Gestalt Art, and Dialogue with Art Therapies for songs and dance, and veves, heralded by an Inner Advisor exercise about the mother are expressed to heighten the imagery experiences.

**Keywords:** Imagery; Guided imagery; The mother; Dance and songs; Veve

## Introduction

Various cultural aspects of the Haitian culture in Miami-Dade County, Florida expose distinct themes portrayed as imagery that are highly paramount in the Haitian community of Little Haiti. The fabric of the Haitian culture is paved with archetypes, and tools that enhance its beauty in all facets of society [1-3]. The themes are depicted through visual public art pieces and murals, vibrant images of religious practices such as Vodou and Catholicism that represent components of the daily life of some Haitians, revealed through prayers, songs, music, rituals, stories, mythology, symbolism, and Vodou songs and dances [4-6]. Records of oral tradition: stories, myths, legends, and folktales permeate the Haitian culture [7]. Elements of color in visual symbolism, personal attire (colorful clothing), visual narratives, and artistic impressions are paramount to understand how the experiences of diaspora shape the Afro-Caribbean identities of Haitians in Little Haiti of Miami-Dade County are retained [8]. However, the concept of guided imagery from imagery, visual narratives, and art expositions is new within this community [9,10]. Guided imagery is a mindful alteration of images and their associations in the mind

to rewire the brain in a healthy fashion, burrowing into its neural networks to craft a state of self, and societal transformation. Guided imagery is a very effective instrument for health. Patients or clients can design imagery interventions for their well-being dealing with difficult thoughts, emotions, and lifestyle effects of stress, and other diseases. [11] defined guided imagery in the following terms:

Guided imagery involves the use of images of all kinds that arise from within, including visual, tactile, aural, olfactory, gustatory, mental, spiritual, and impressionistic images. The imagery itself is both diagnostic, an indicator of physical, emotional, or spiritual aspects of our being that are seeking exploration and healing, and a living pool of therapeutic symbols that hold the key to transformation, which can be unlocked through the guided imagery process.

From an anthropological standpoint, Haiti's complex religious system in which Vodou plays a vital part in cultural survival [12], and festivals such as rara, compas, catholic religious pilgrimages-holidays, and carnivals (people in costumes embracing music

with dance movements and parade) are anchors of Haitians' life. Juste-Constant (1994) [13] opined that Haitian culture is not monolithic, and the carnival suits either inside or outside religion. In Figure 1a, the painter Patrice Piard shows a carnival scene with the Vodou flag, drum, and other intriguing items. By considering the material and spiritual aspects of the Haitian culture in Miami-

Dade County, Florida, this article proposes an active imagination exercise as guided imagery for three archetypal images as conscious experiences within the culture: the mother, songs and dance, and a nondirective form of guided imagery known as veve(pronounced as(vehveh).



**Figure 1a:** wlrn.com. Little Haiti street art A painter standing in front of a mural reviewing his art work including welcome to Little Haiti with visual elements such as a man fishing in a boat, a ladder standing on a building in construction, the sea with images of a shark, a woman, the sun, and a mountain in the background. **Figure 1b:** Seth Globepainter. A image of the enclave of Little Haiti with people as characters. **Figure 1c:** Caribbean Market. Courtesy of Little Haiti Cultural Complex Image of the Caribbean Market. Little Haiti Cultural Complex

### Haitians in Miami-Dade County, Florida: A Population Synopsis

The U.S. Census QuickFacts (2021) about Miami-Dade County, estimates the Miami-Dade population as of July 25, 2021, at 2,662,777 individuals. The US Census(2020) reported 2,701,767 individuals. The percentage of foreign-born individuals in 2021 was estimated at 54%. In fact note (b), in terms of race and Hispanic origin, and Hispanic or Latino percentage, during 2017-2021, the percentage was 31.7% (US Census QuickFacts, 2021). The definition of "Hispanics consists of any race, so are individuals in applicable race categories"(Factnote b). Blacks or African Americans alone consist of 17.4 %. As a result, data about Haitians in Miami-Dade County, Florida are underreported. The statistics about the total number of Haitians in Miami-Dade County, throughout Florida, the United States are not exact, and there is difficulty in identifying Haitians as a monolithic group [13-15]. Two attributable causes can be immigration status, and the misrepresentation of Haitians as an ethnic group, instead of classifying them with African-Americans.

According to the U.S. Census (2020) estimates, there were more than 300,000 people with Haitian ancestry in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, Florida, but the number consists of a considerable dent. It also reported 1.2 million Haitians in the United States. The difficulty in providing a current count from the U.S. Census(2020), also stemmed from the Trump administration policy of non-citizens exclusion, although the Census Bureau allowed respondents more options to designate

their country of origin. The span of segregation of Haitians in Florida covers different cities, towns, and villages (St.Hilaire, 2021). To date, it is not plausible to offer an exact number of Haitians living in the United States.

### Little Haiti: A Powerful Imagery Portal

According to the official travel and tourism site of Greater Miami and Miami Beach (n.d), Little Haiti represents the crucial point of Greater Miami and Miami Beach's Haitian community, and "shops and other buildings are painted pastel pink, blue, and yellow"(p.1). Little Haiti is a 3.5-square-mile enclave encompassing miles north of the downtown city of Miami, 50 by 10 city quarters. There are the 9,000 square foot Caribbean Market, Libreri Mapou bookstore, and Little Haiti Complex which preserves the Afro-Caribbean culture, art gallery, dance studios, Haitian restaurants, and contemporary modern art galleries (miamiandbeaches.com; Stepick & Stepick, 2006b). The diverse Haitian culture, a mix of Africa, French and Spanish inspirations is vibrant and striving (Zafenou, n.d). According to Farrell (2022) [16], Little Haiti faces the dire problems of gentrification since 2009, and there are 30,000 exiles and artists of Haitian descent who can soon be displaced due to higher property values, investors, and developers seeking to move into Little Haiti, considered "the hottest neighborhood in Miami", according to Zillow(p.2). The New Tropic (n.d) highlighted the concerning issue of 'whitewashing.' Other issues such as Little Haiti's cultural identity survival, and the expansion of creative zones of Wynwood and the Miami Design District which borders the 54<sup>th</sup> street, and 79<sup>th</sup> Street areas of Little Haiti, are looming

[17].

The artistic representation in this cultural space of Miami-Dade County, Florida, reflects sophisticated designs portraying certain Haitians' struggles to come to America from Haiti, using improvised boats for perilous journeys in the Atlantic and Caribbean seas to America. The symbolism of the sea, boat, the Haitian plea for protection from the spirits guiding the sea and their journey, and the image of the Lady of Perpetual Help, is depicted in murals, and dreams reflecting their experience are painted. Figures 1a, 1b, and 1c below exemplify an aspect of

the urban and cultural life in Little Haiti in Miami-Dade County, Florida ([www.wlrn.org](http://www.wlrn.org)).

### Elements of Imagery Vividness in The Little Haiti Portal

Consistent with imagery vividness, the cognitive imagination depicted by imageries in Little Haiti suggests that the Haitian visualization noted through artworks is a quintessential element of Haitians 'imaginative lives in Miami-Dade County, Florida, I posit. The following Figure 2a and Figure 2b. portrays the symbolism of the sea, and the Lady of Perpetual Help guiding Haitians during their Journey at the sea to reach the United States by boat [18].



Figure 2a, 2b: Èzili, Èzili Dantò

### Image representing Our lady of Perpetual Help in the sky while a boat of people is sailing

The Mother. The image of our Lady of Perpetual Help represents the matron of the Notre Dame D'Haiti Catholic Church in Little Haiti, Miami, whom some Haitians worship and see as their spiritual mother). Haiti was consecrated to the Lady of Perpetual Help on December 8, 1942 [19], and she is accepted as a caring mother, the equivalent of Mary the mother of Christ.

The symbolism of the mother is also found in Haitian Vodou, a religion in which the Lady of Perpetual Help is venerated as Ezili Dantò, a spirit or lwa, the mother of freedom during the Haitian revolution. Hebblethwaite (2012) explained that the Vodou religion is deeply rooted within the Haitian culture, history, identity, and there is a religious syncretism between Vodou and Catholicism. The term Vodou originated from the Fon culture in Dahomey (now Benin), and signifies a spirit, and in Yoruba culture, a mystery (Hoffman, 1990) [20]. The spirit or deity, called lwa or myste(mystery) in Haitian culture partakes in human life and relates to natural powers [21]. The Images of Ezili and Ezili Dantò are shown below in Figures 2a and 2b ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) Alt text: Two pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Help representing two deities in Haitian Culture; Ezili (White woman) and Ezili Dantò(Black woman).

Additionally, the concept of the sea is also understood through the lenses of the spirits or lwas offering protection at sea, such as Agwe Tawoyo, Lasirenn (the Mermaid), a rescuer of victims of shipwrecks. Lasirenn (the Mermaid) has a body of a beautiful attractive mulatto woman (sometimes depicted as such) with a codfish tail [5]. Images of the mermaid and the symbolism of water are captured in the paintings of Patrice Piard (Figure 3) & Frantz Zephyring([www.artshaitian.com](http://www.artshaitian.com)), Figure 4, and Figures 5a,5b, 6a, 6b ([www.patricepiard.com](http://www.patricepiard.com))

The painters J. Lundy, Prefete Duffaut, and Patrice Piard presented the symbolism of water as a life element. Their paintings below (Figure 7-9) expressed the vital importance of water, a metaphor for spirituality, renewal, the spirit of the ancestors, the lwas (spirits), such as the spirit Simbi living underwater, and Vodou practitioners can spend time under water to acquire healing power. Water in the Vodou religion is understood as a communicative channel to the ancestral spirit or lwa and is a form of purification, and reminiscence of pain during the Black people's enslavement from Africa to the new world opined that the lwas or spirits inhabit three domains: the sky, the earth, and the sea. The following song, translated by Hebblethwaite (2012), typifies that assertion:



**Figure 3:** The mermaid represent a deity in the sea.



**Figure 4:** Frantz Zephirin. The Brooks. images of a boat with six individuals standing on the upper deck showing three of them with animal faces, and 12 slaves standing in the lower deck of a boat during the crossing of the Atlantic trade. A mermaid deity is guiding them sounding the core, and holding a musical instrument in her left hand.



**Figure 5a:** Patrice Piard. Irene. Black woman sitting with one foot in the water. **Figure 5b:** Patrice Piard. Fisherman. A sea with boats, a fisherman in the background & people standing in the proximity representing business activities.



**Figure 6a:** Village River Scene. J. Lundy.8"x6" **Figure 6b:** Prefète Duffaut. The Bay Collection12"x16" A river scene showing a man getting off a boat, A man-made community built on a lake,visual and a woman carrying a water jug on her head.elements : two boats and 9 coconut trees.



**Figure 7:** A black woman sitting on a rock with both feet deep in the water.



**Figure 8:** The lesson. Patrice Piard



Figure 9: Patrice Piard. Rara 48x67



Figure 10: miamianbeaches.com. Dance A rara music with men blowing the bamboo Black women in red and blue colors dancing.



Figure 11: yahoo.com. Haiti: Galleries, food, Indie, music, and more in Little Haiti A painting depicting Haiti: Galleries, food, Indie, music, and more in Little Haiti.

vodou te a, ey Savalou e! (Spirits of the earth, hey Savalou, yeah!) vodou dlo a, ey Savalou e!(Spirits of the water, hey Savalou, yeah !) vodou le a, ey Savalou e ! (Spirits of the air, hey Savalou, yeah!) (p.13).

Songs and Dance. Miami-Dade County is an energetic cultural space, trendy nightlife, historical heritage, leisure, romance, and natural outdoor wonders that display its uniqueness(visitflorida.com). The enclave of Little Haiti offers various musical platforms exposing the power and excitement of music and dance. Haitian music such as compas,rara ou rasin (roots music) rhythm, Vodou music, and songs are status quo in this space. Vodou songs and dance, and music are usually heard in the Vodou temples called hounfò. The hounfò is the sacred place of the spirit or lwa where Vodou rituals, worship, spiritual inquiry, and celebration in the forms of prayer, dance, liturgy, music, and possessions occur [21]. The images below express the power of a voodoo manbo (priestess) getting ready for a tarot reading(lecture) sitting in an hounfò, and dancing during a Vodou ceremony [22].

### Elements of Vodou's songs translate imagery and conversation of death to the spirit of the ancestors

In Haitian Vodou, songs are perceived as a hereditary dimension of its tradition and are associated sometimes with joy, pain, mental transcendence, and fortitude. Celebration of life is key under the influence of drumming on songs and dance and worship, and spiritual protection against sickness. The power of the priest (ougan) as a spiritual healer and singer, is considered a rudiment of beauty with messages. One core assumption of Vodou music is the amalgamation of Vodou songs and dance creating daze and triggering spirit or lwa possession, Hebblethwaite (2012) advanced. Spirit possession is defined by [23] as:

the standard anthropological classification for ritual events in which a nonhuman entity to displace the human person in a given body, with every invocation renewing, at least implicitly, the perennial problems of how to define the "person" in relation to the body" (p.4).

A type of symbolic property exists in the musical instruments played during a Vodou ceremony. As a result, the sound of certain Vodou musical instruments: drums, ogan[cowbells], and asotò drums provides spiritual cooperation, and singing a Vodou song specific to a particular spirit/deity or lwa, creates an invitation to that spirit or lwa to manifest itself. Laguerre(1982, as cited in Hebblethwaite, 2012) explained:

The songs express emotions that pertain to the tradition of the lwa; they address love, fear, awe, violence, energy, jubilation, admiration, and respect. Vodou songs provide a unique insight into the mythology of the lwa or its functions (p.37).

Hebblethwaite (2012) stated songs describe familial, friendship, and lovers' relationships with the lwa or spirit. Examples are Papa Legba (Father Legba), Manman Brigit (Granny Brigit), Grann Ezili(Granny Ezili), and Kouzen Zaka [Cousin Zaka]

(p.37). Images of rara and folk dances obtained in Little Haiti are exhibited below in Figures 10, 11, and 12(miamiandbeaches.com; www.patricepiard.com; yahoo.com).

Beauvoir (2008b) [23] sees in vodou songs, a version in Haitian culture expressing vodou thinking, as part of a broader dogmatic, and anthropological framework. He posited that scholars should be invited to ascertain the cross-sectional spiritual and exegetic methods to appreciate and understand the meaning of Vodou songs. Spirit(lwa) possession is usually accompanied by songs and dance, and serving the lwa or spirit can inspire protection, wisdom, social status, and wealth, Hebblethwaite (2012) asserted.

Veve(Pronouncedasvehveh).Vivid images in the Haitian culture espoused by the Vodou religion are called veve. Hebblethwaite (2012) describes the veve as a mystical geometrical diagram or portal traced on the ground with corn flour, ashes, coffee ground, hot-pepper powder, sand, and other granulated ingredients by a priest(ougan) or manbo (priestess) to invite a spirit or lwa during a ceremony (p.298). The crossroad or kalfou(corner) sign symbolizes the intersection of the living and the ancestors, lwa or spirit. Each veve represents a singular spirit or lwa. The Haitian veve is found in the Fon term weke meaning supplication and is linked to Benin, formerly known as the kingdom of Dahomey. In Benin, as well as in Haiti, huge rectangular veves provide healing, as spiritual portals to a deity/spirit or lwa. The same concept of veve is found in Nigeria, Ghana, and other neighboring African cultures(Hebblethwaite, 2012.p.298). In Miami- Dade County, Florida, and Little Haiti, these diagrams are found in various temples or hounfòs, and botanicas (Figure 13), which can be part of Vodou societies, such as the Halouba community, la Société de Saint Jacques Majeur(St. James the Major Society), etc.. New Argument. The nomenclature of veves as a healing, therapeutic, or protection portal from a Vodouist or non-Vodou practitioner's standpoint has never been considered. I argue that it is plausible that guided imagery, using the veve symbolism, not considering its protective or spiritual portal during spirit or lwa possession of a person as a horse (chwal) can be therapeutic, and open further inquiries into mind-body-medicine. There can also be tremendous psychological avenues for further research to expand sample images of the veves as portals for inviting a spirit or lwa. Symbols are presented in Figures 14, and 15 below.

It is with this understanding that this article proposes the adoption of a guided imagery active imagination exercise without accessing the spiritual portals in Vodou ceremonies, but using an individual perspective, moving away from the top-down spirit or lwa possessing the person- horse(chwal) as understood in the Vodou culture. The concept of chwal is grasped as being ridden or possessed by a lwa or spirit (Hebblethwaite, 2012).) During the spirit possession, there is a loss of consciousness, personality departing from the body, and other spirits intending to channel through an individual are chased away with the sound of the ason musical instrument [sacred rattle] (p.17).

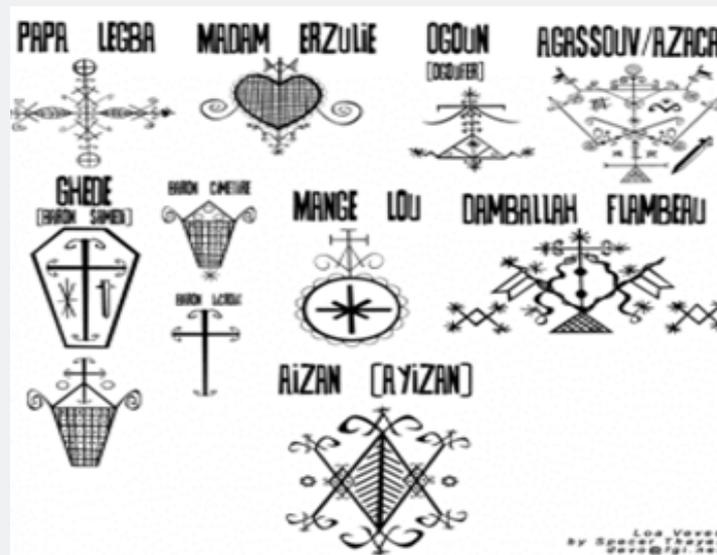


Figure 12: Images of various portals for deities

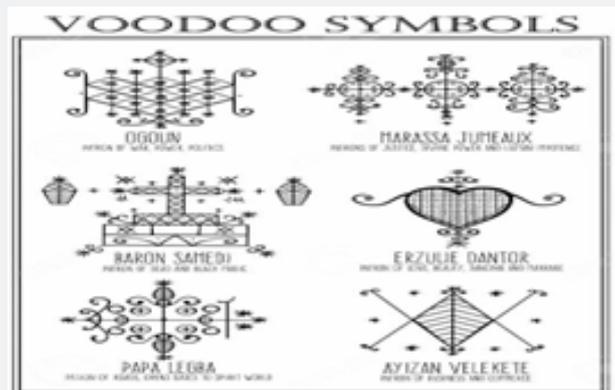


Figure 13: Representation of a goat mask. Mural showing a woman deep in the sea with a boat of her head surrounded by an octopus.

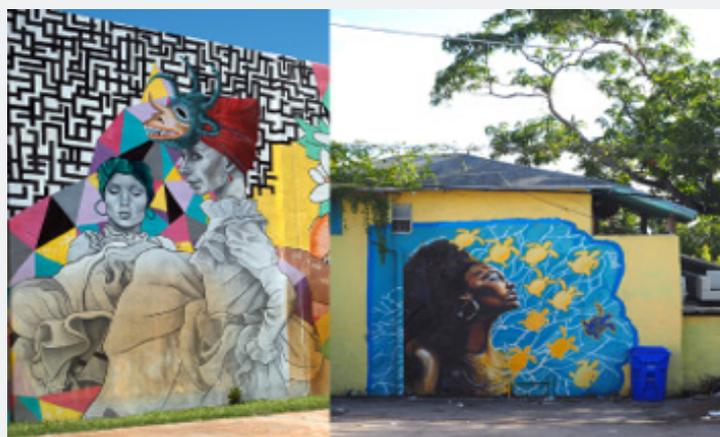


Figure 14a: Little Haiti Murals, Wynwood walls

Figure 14b: Street Art in Little Haiti, a taste of my life, Mural showing 2 women, 1 carrying an animal. A woman deeply thinking about the sea in her journey, seeing mask on her head turtle.

Gestalt Art Therapy, Dialogue with Art Therapy, and Inner Advisor exercises are considered to help expand the imagery experiences with Focusing-Oriented Expressing Arts [FOAT] (Rappaport, 2016).

Hebblethwaite (2012, pp.205-303) asserted certain veves' meanings with the following:

[16]. Papa Legba's veve is identified as the lwa of the crossroads giving access to the invisible. His veve is represented in the image below in Figure 15, Figure 16, and other veves are found in Figures 17,18. Erzulie is a lwa or spirit that typifies love, devotion, affection, grace, and beauty. Her veve shows a heart. The Ogun veve is identified as the patron of war and politics (Figure 19). His emblems are iron, fire, machete, sword, and saber. Another veve: the Ogou Balendjo expresses similar concepts. Additionally, the Gede spirit, or lwa gede is believed to be the protector of the living and dead.

The Mermaid (la Sirene) spirit or lwa's veve symbolizes she is a rescuer of victims of shipwrecks. Haitian legend contends that this spirit or lwa attracts women to the shore and entices them into the sea to grant them healing powers (Hebblethwaite, 2012, p.253). In the same vein, the Simbi spirit, or lwa is associated with fountains, springs, ponds, and lakes, and is believed to be the guardian of coasts that captures children going alone to procure water (p.291). Her veve traduces the concept of river crossing and healing (Figure 15).

15 16 19

Azaka, as the spirit or lwa of agriculture and farming, and protecting travelers is represented in Spencer Thayer's image as Agassou/Azaka. The Damballah Flambeau (Thayer, n.d) or Danbala spirit(snake) or lwa typifies conception, birth, life, family, love, sexuality, fecundity, wealth, movement, permanency, harmony, wisdom, and fate(Hebblethwaite, 2012, p.226). The artist Myrlande Constant (Figure 19) presented in one of her Vodou flags, the Danbala spirit or lwa during a spiritual exorcism healing by a snake(myrlandeconstant.com). Vodou flags represent authority (Polk, 1997). The Marassa Jumeaux (Figure 16) (the Twins) are patrons of justice and represent divine power and human impotence (pinterest.com). Baron Samedi (Lord Saturday) (Figure 16) is the patron or guardian of the dead(pinterest.com). In Figure 14a, Thayer (n.d) presents Baron Cimetiere (Lord of the Cemetery), and Barron Lakou(Lord Backyard). Erzulie Dantor is the matron of love, beauty, dancing, and marriage, and Ayizan Velekete is known as the patron of business and commerce (pinterest.com).

### Images of various portals for deities

Spirits as animals, animal spirits, and animal sacrifices. There seems to be in the Vodou religion reliance on animal sacrifices to the deities or lwas/spirits, a form of archetypal symbols enunciated by Jung's concept of power animals or spirit helpers as living images directing to the meaning of the inner world (Davenport, 2016,p.187), an unknown inner sphere. Beauvoir-Dominique

(1995, as cited in Conner, 2001) alluded to aesthetic signs and symbols in Vodou as excerpts of the meaning of the inner being relying on the activation of the collective unconscious. Beyond the animal sacrifice as an object/item to honor and seek the support of the lwa, the animal blood and meat are offered to the lwa, then cooked, and served to the possessed individual and members of the community (Hebblethwaite, 2012, p.287). However, ingesting raw animal blood by a possessed individual implies a devil spirit, according to Marcenat (n.d., as cited in Hebblethwaite, 2012). [26] refers to the practice of imagery in the pits of consciousness through the sense of taste.

One can argue that only a Vodou practitioner [Vodouist] (Vodouisant) is aware of the invisible. Anthropologist Rene Devish (1973, as cited in Benoit & Delpuech, 2018) [ sees in elements, objects, and sculptures in Vodou, a profane and sacred reality. The sacred dimension, I argue, could be multidimensional and subjectively expressed. There is a deep spiritual dichotomous element in animal sacrifices, meaning, and animal transformation, I further contend. In significant terms, seeing spirits as animals is deeply entrenched in the Vodou culture. Furthermore, animals such as snakes, birds, cows, goats, and insects oftentimes serve as spiritual dwellings (Hebblethwaite,2012, p.15). There are secret societies called the bizangos, sanpwel, or champwel or chanpwels (Hairless), segments of the Bizango society, with members having the power to metamorphose into animals, and Zobops (Hebblethwaite, 2012,p.288; Hoffmann,1990). The sanpwel or chanpwel and the bizangos are feared. The Sanpwel bands seek victims to sacrifice and are considered executioners for atrocious infringements, while the bizangos are thought to be protectors or gatekeepers of the community and its cultural heritage(Benoit & Delpuech, 2018; Hebblethwaite, 2012). Vodou art is also deeply influenced by bizango statues, and museums in France, Haiti, and Europe see them as expensive, and sacred religious art [27]. Hebblethwaite (2012) stated the bizangos of Haiti originated from "Zangbetò in Porto-Novo, Benin, the archipelago near the coast of Kakonda, between Sierra Leone and Cape Verde, and possess magical powers"(pp.219-220). Other Bizangos communities are from Guinea-Bissau's Bijagos or Bissagos islands located 48km (30 mi) from the Guinea-Bissau coast consisting of 88 and other sacred islands that have never been annexed by colonial rulers, due to their distance and resistance to slavery, spiritual beliefs, traditions, and the spirits that govern them [28].

The animal spirit concept seems not to correlate with certain aspects of Vodou rituals consciously or unconsciously, and the imagery portals such as veve. Nonetheless, there is an element of real fear in the culture related to various and powerful spirits [29-32]. One aspect of this fear is created by the sanpwel or bizangos'powerful spirits metamorphosizing into animals, I contend. While there is a deeper connection to human life and spirit, and a quest to understand their synchronicity [33], the Haitian Vodou mythology and philosophical realms appear to be intriguing. Certain areas with stones, mountains, waterfalls, caves, and impressive natural sites are perceived to be sacred

with spirits or lwas residing there suggesting fear or veneration. Images captured in Little Haiti through murals, and paintings from various painters suggest further inquiry is warranted to explore

their sensory characteristics. Figures 16-18 below show forms of subliminal messages of dove, octopus, turtle, goat, parrot, heron, and butterfly (www.wlrn.org)[34].



Figure 15: Street Art & Graffiti in NYC 720 x 540.



Figure 16: Sabrina. Patrice Piard Depicts a Black woman with three doves. On her hat.

Artistic animal representations and spirits. An associative stance with the animal representations through symbols expressed in the arts by Haitian artists suggests that imagery practices are profoundly rooted in consciousness, and visual, hearing, and touch senses within this culture. This stance is represented: by a Catholic saint holding her child, images of feet in the water, a woman carrying water on her head, a priestess leaning on the drums with eyes closed in her *ounfò*, a man on a boat fishing, people sailing on a boat, mermaid, dove, a snake in a Vodou flag, an octopus in the sea, turtles, parrot, goat, heron, butterfly, and animal mask. The *veves* representations are specific images that can be used for Gestalt Art Therapy, a valuable modality of FOAT (Focusing-Oriented Expressive Arts) (Rappaport, 2016). Rappaport (2016)

explained: Focusing-oriented expressive arts provide a multi-sensory experience by incorporating focusing as a mindful, inner-directed approach for accessing imagery, in conjunction with the sensory-based arts process (p.248).

Baron-Reid (2018) enunciated that the dove, snake, turtle, parrot, goat, and butterfly spirits help reclaim higher power, intrinsic pure gift, and instinctive awareness. The butterfly spirit entails “transformation is beautiful” (p.35), the dove spirit signifies “be peace” (p.64), the parrot spirit means “watch your words” (p.136), the snake spirit is defined as “time to heal” (p.162), and the turtle spirit means “slow and steady wins the race” (p.182). A connection between the highlighted imagery practices seen in

the Haitian culture, and the spirit animal requires further inquiry. One exception is the snake spirit found in Vodou mythology and veve that considers the snake image and spirit/lwa as healing, life,

movement, harmony, and the religious syncretism that considers St.Patrick, accepted in Vodou as the spirit of snakes and ancestral knowledge.

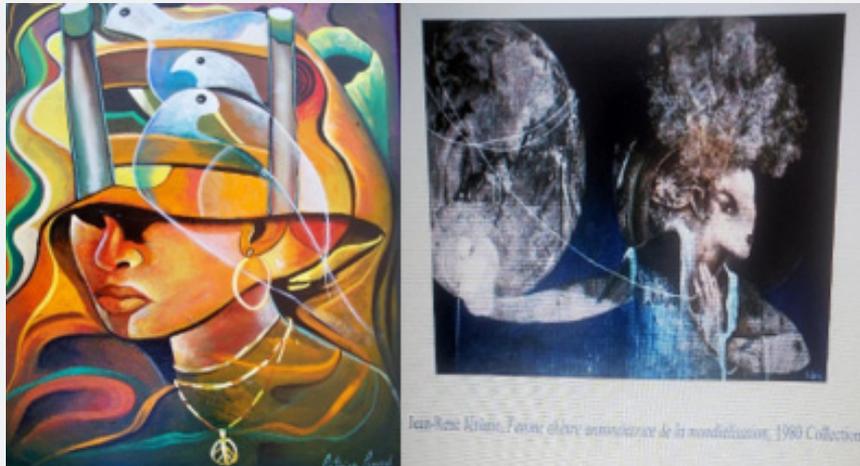


Figure 17: Femme Chèvre(Goat woman)



Figure 18a: Wall Art in Miami, FL Little Haiti expressions.

Figure 18b: St. Gerard Botanica. Botanica with 4 images of Black woman depicting a butterfly with open ears. Catholic Saints with prayer, incantation and victorious ostensibly open towards a wall.

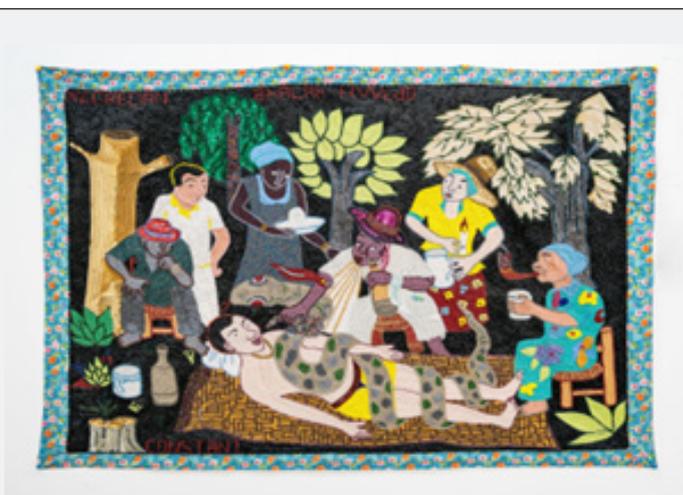
### Guided Imagery Relevance to Haitian Health and Mental Health Needs

A considerable number of researchers have indirectly addressed the concepts of health and mental health needs within the Haitian culture [35-37] sees Vodou's healing as paramount in mental health balance among Haitian immigrant communities. Stress, depression, emotional distress, pain, and anxiety are

not limited to a particular culture but are part of the biological and biochemistry process that begins in every individual from the amygdala and throughout the nervous system, hormones (endocrine system), and reactions of the immune system [38]. The key concern is how communication from these three systems flows to maintain internal balance or homeostasis, and what are Haitians' cultural perceptions of health, healing, and mental health? The concepts of pain, depression as an illness, and emotional

distress in Haitian culture need to be understood from their emic perspective. Hebblethwaite (2012) presents many vodou songs addressing pain as a concept entangled in Vodou's therapeutic worldview and anthropological discourses. The emic perspective considers a native's cultural worldview [39,40]. For example, the word depression, as a typical human affect can be caused by loss, conflict or crisis, trauma, or any disruption in life's normal balance. In Haitian culture, being depressed means feeling overwhelmed, or "akable" [pronounced as akablay] in Haitian Creole [41]. It can also be tied to health perceptions such as a physical malaise, a sense of weakness, or low energy (Auguste & Rasmussen, 2019) due to strong, obscure expressions, or events, such as internal or external offenses, I posit. Within the Haitian culture, mental health diseases have negative psychiatric implications tied with

cultural and religious biases, Catholic and Vodou faiths that seem to prevent people to seek help for their psychological problems) [41,42]. Richardson (2014) asserted that depression is associated with excessive worrying, and shame, and can be due to a Vodou curse, which can dichotomously perceive Vodou as a treatment for a mental illness. Additionally, explained, one needs to distinguish between depression and depression mentale (mental depression) in Haiti. Depression mentale (mental depression) refers to a gamut of symptoms, including fatigue, and feelings of desolation, whereas depression, is more clinically associated with major depressive disorders. The above considerations suggest that a viable platform for guided imagery, built on visual imagination, art archetypes, songs and dance, religious music, and using the veves can help express an inner sense of self towards self-healing.



**Figure 19:** Exorcism. Vodou Flag by Myrlande Constant. A priest using a snake crawling on a sick man lying to heal him, surrounded by 5 servants. Courtesy <https://www.myrlandeconstant.com/>

### Guided Imagery and Health

Guided imagery, as a conscious variant of images and their linkages with our minds, has proven to be effective in neuroscience confirming that relaxing images and moods of belonging cause higher levels of dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin secretion from the brain, which lead to reduced anxiety, and cortisol inhibition. Similar images with negative emotions propel releases of chemicals detrimental to bodily tissues, and cultivating new images and ideas leads to relaxed states and positive emotions in individuals/clients or patients' mind and behavior (p.57). Kapogiannis et al. (2018) [43], in a systematic review of randomized controlled trials of cancer patients, reported based on independent trials that progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) and guided imagery (GI) showed improvement in patient mental states such as moods and anxiety.

### Guided Imagery Therapy

In this article, I consider visuals as essential to guided imagery, and visualization requires sound methods for the mind's eyes to

create images. They do not imply a complete sensory awareness encounter with other physical sensations, as explained. An imagery procedure needs to be freely guided, perceived, and explored to lead to an inner dimension and healing. As a result, guided exercises with a Vodou, a non-Vodou practitioner can be powerful avenues to healing. It relies on the principles of mind- body medicine (MBM) that an imagery experience can be transformative, free, not spirit-possessed, and provide tremendous benefits such as self-healing. The shared images and values uniting Haitians can lead to therapeutic domains of the physical and mental states, from a modern neuroscience standpoint. Higher levels of serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin diminish anxiety, block cortisol, and improve neuroplasticity [44].

Theme-Directed FOAT(Focusing Oriented Expressive Art): Mother Haitians in Miami-Dade County of Florida live with visual and mental memories of displacement from their families and motherland due to economic and political instabilities, after seeking refuge in the U.S during the perilous Winward passage(ocean between Haiti and the U.S.). A type of up

rootedness lingers. Philogene (2004) cleverly stated that two Haitian American contemporary artists constructed a visual diaspora and suggested a cultural memory finding that “various forms of visual culture blur artistic and national boundaries and specificities.”(p.85). Nonetheless, the process through which the visual culture impacts national boundaries and specificities is ground for discussion. A Vodou practitioner or an outsider may see a Vodou priest or ougan as a therapist enabling psychological qualities linked with spiritual beings, executing rituals to maintain harmony, and leading to a psychic or transpersonal level of consciousness. I present in this article the following guided imagery therapy model to create relaxation, a logic of self-efficacy for a Vodou, non-Vodou practitioner, and a person without religious affiliation feeling disconnected from his/her family, the motherland, and suffering from emotional distress or anxiety while adjusting to a foreign country, or from a perilous journey to America. Self-efficacy entails an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to accomplish tasks or achieve goals.

### Emotional Distress Guided Imagery Therapy. Theme Directed FOAT

The Mother I invite you to relax and close your eyes. Allow your mind to find a special place, a place that deems itself to be your unique and comfortable space. Whether you are sitting or lying down to enter the inner space of your body, I invite you to take a couple of full and deep breaths. Breathe in, breathe out, and let your breath move deeper and freely into the various parts of your body. I invite you to relax and unwind any tension you may feel in your shoulder, arms, fingers, your abdomen and lungs, the lower part of your body, your right foot, your leg foot, and your thighs. Relax, breathe in, and breathe out. While you exhale, let go of any thoughts or tensions; let go of the emotions that cause you anguish. Do not worry if you feel it is difficult to face them. How do you feel now about these emotions? Do you feel powerless or uncomfortable? Do you feel this is a painful experience? See what happens when you translate this feeling into peace, calmness, and kindness!

Now, take these emotions and put them aside! How does it now feel since they are outside your body?

Imagine yourself in a beautiful natural site, a beautiful island, far away from the rock cliffs. You hear beautiful birds singing, you see the sea so calm, surrounded by deep springs. You think of rivers and gigantic trees, and you feel spirited. and so peaceful. You are unafraid of the sea; you feel the sea breeze is healing but seems a little lost in this beautiful natural site. You feel this place is so beautiful to explore. The only idea that comes to your mind is your mother. It feels so authentic, you are not alone, and you experience a felt sense of that imagery. How do receive this image? What does it mean to you? Use the art material to naturally draw, in any way

you feel, and express your felt-sense image of your mother. When your drawing is complete, take time to reflect on how you have depicted your problem.

### Gestalt Art Therapy, Dialogue with Art Therapy Using Veves, Songs, and Dance

Using Gestalt Art Therapy is a noble endeavor that may lead to theorizing receptive imagery that facilitates changes, and awareness of unconscious patterns and needs (Rossman, 2000). Using it with veve opens a new world for active imagery to settle in, and communicate with our conscious intents. It is a reframing of the role of veve since a Vodou practitioner during a Vodou ceremony is exposed to a purposeful event: a spirit or lwa will come through the veve portal to possess an individual(chwal). The purposeful event can be to satisfy the need of the spirit/lwa or to approve a vodouist’s quests for healing, fortune, to gain protection, power, social status, and wisdom. For Rossman (2010), the goal-oriented achievement is equivalent to a passive state of mind. Thus, using the symbolism of veve without its spiritual accessories can be therapeutic in many facets, I argue, contrary to Largey’s(2006) claim that Vodou’s practices focus on its adherents’ emotional well-being. In Gestalt Art Therapy, a person visualizes specific images within an art and brings voice to it by saying, “I am....” what I perceive the art describes to me). While the idea of visual perception has been criticized for not being exploratory in essence [45], both Gestalt Art and Dialogue with Art Therapies are very important tools that mind-body medicine uses to tap into deeper layers of healing, self-healing that may lead to the creation of new spiritual and cultural paradigms, I contend. It could be that a deconstruction of the religious, cultural, and spiritual boundaries of Vodou is necessary, I further argue. For a veve exercise with a Vodou priest (ougan), a vodouist (Vodou practitioner or Vodouisant), not spiritually possessed, a non-Vodou practitioner, and a person without religious affiliation looking at a verve sign can freely and subjectively generate powerful themes from the visual perception. I look at the Baron Samedi (Lord Saturday) veve, which symbolizes the spirit or lwa Baron Samedi (Lord Saturday), the patron of the dead, I may say if am a non-spirit-possessed organ(priest) that “I do not have the power not to die, but beyond the grave, I will know or exist”. One question lingers: will I continue to serve Baron Samedi (Lord Saturday) when I die? I can speak the voice of the heart and express myself as the voice of the symbol [47-50]. As a non-Vodou practitioner, I may say “I fear death, express my visual perceptions of pain, sickness, etc.”. Additionally, if I am a Christian, my visual perceptions may reflect resurrection, seeing death as a sleep, standing on the hope in Jesus Christ since he died and was resurrected. As a person without religious affiliation, I may devoid the veve experience as my own subjective voice. There is an array of subjective voices to hear and cogitate [51-56].

In Dialogue with Art Therapy, a person looks at the art and formulates a question about an image of attraction [57-59]. The answer is provided through his or her felt sense, then verbalizes the dialogue through a chosen way of expression: verbally or in writing [60-65]. Looking at dance imagery, hearing folk music, Vodou songs, and dance through the veves may yield noteworthy expressions among Vodou, non-Vodou practitioners, and a person without religious affiliation [66-69].

## Conclusion

This article explored guided imagery within a subsection of the Haitian community of Miami-Dade County, named Little Haiti. Guided imagery is one of the mind-body medicine (MBM) therapies that emphasizes mental, spiritual, and physical transformation through authentic impulses to amplify the benefits of imagery experiences. Rich symbols, songs, and dance, music, thoughts, or image-abundant expressions also constitute the gamut of guided imagery, and are plentiful in Haitian culture. Particular symbols such as the veves, known as portals for spirits or l was to possess individual Vodou practitioners, suggest that a spirit-possessed person is not cognizant of the veve's tentacles in the conscious realm. Deflating these veves from their spirit-possessed components, and making use of them as imagery to Vodou, non-Vodou practitioners, and a person without religious affiliation as therapeutic elements can open many doors to healing, self-healing, anxiety or fear, and stress reduction. Individuals will have a conscious voice in the process, and such intervention will help reframe the role of individuals devoid of spirit possession or laws can play in their holism, striving to restore the veracity that mind-body, and spirit are interconnected. A Gestalt Art Therapy, Dialogue with Art Therapy using veves, songs and dance, music, and an active imagination exercise are proposed. Further research is needed.

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