

**HAITI o AYITI**  
***reporting from the land of high mountains***



# RESEARCH TRIP TO HAITI

## January - February 2019

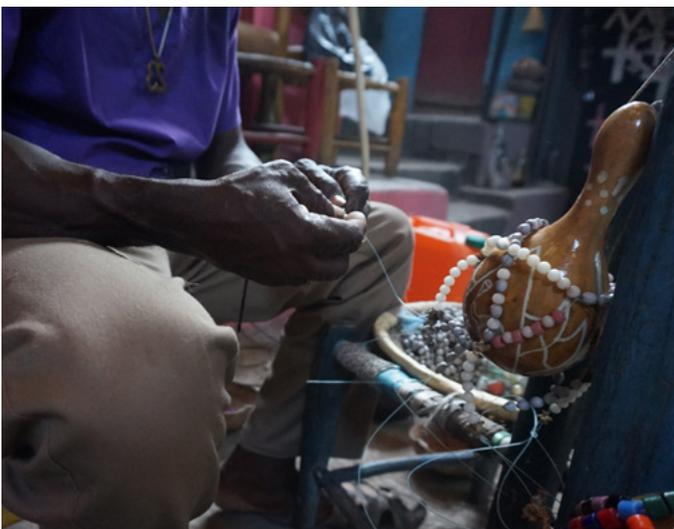
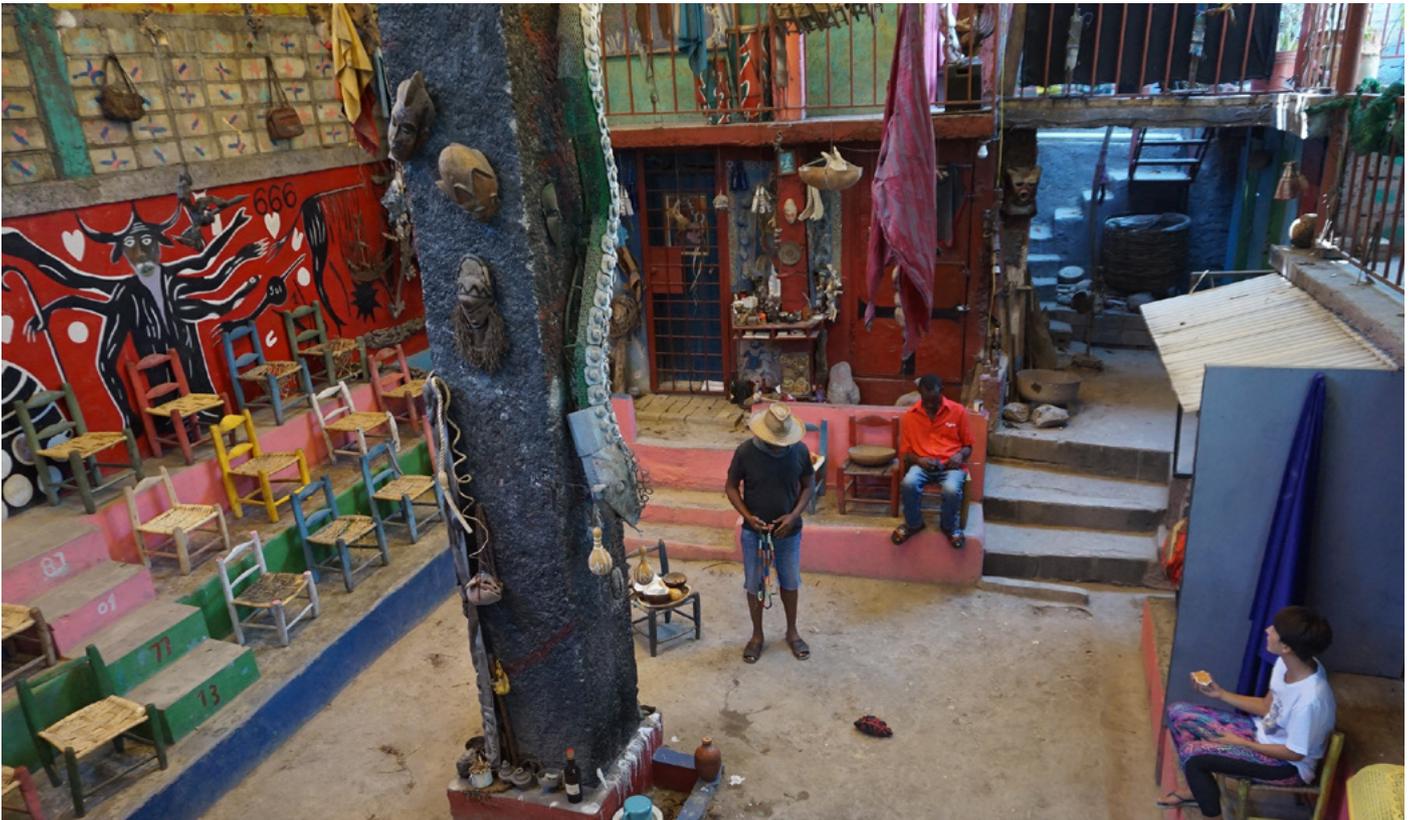
### Cap-Haitien

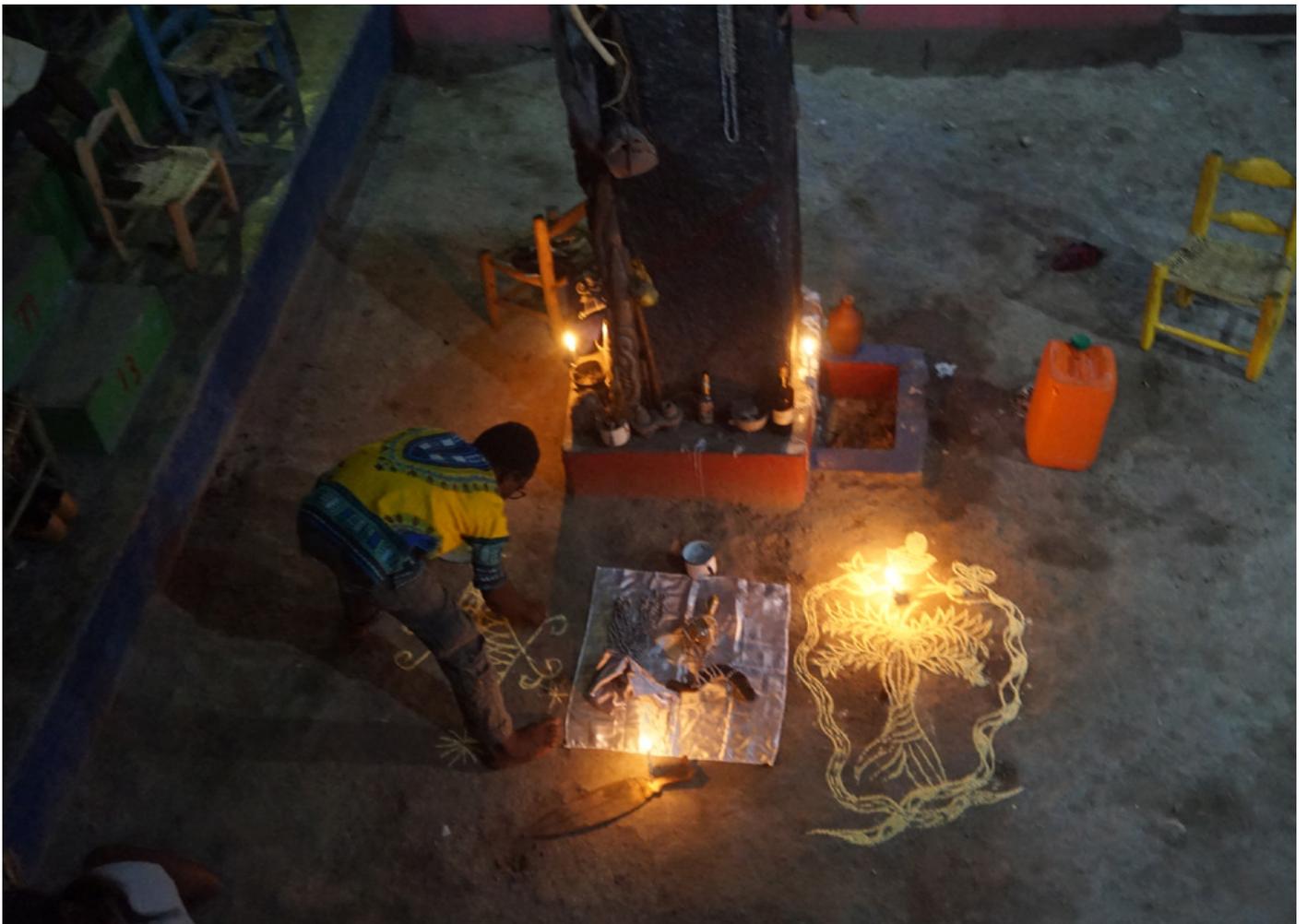
For one month, we stayed at the home/school of the choreographer and teacher of traditional Haitian dance Dieufel Lamisere in Cap-Haitien, north of Haiti. During the colonial period, this region of mountains was filled with plantations of european enslavers with enslaved africans, as well as many Maroon enclaves. By an extraordinary coincidence, the house we stayed was only a twenty-minute walk from the place known as Bois Caiman, from where the Haitian revolution sparked. Cecilia was requested to give ballet classes and pursued her training in the dance of Yanvalou, which is said to be the basis of all traditional Haitian dance. In this context, we also met the hountor (vodou drummer) James Savoy, who introduced us to some of the manyfold rhythms of Yanvalou. While in Cap-Haitien, we could witness the powerful two-week national strike organised against the president Moises and his u.s.a. and canadian friends, who had been trying to boycott the Haiti-Venezuela deal for oil in the framework of Petrocaribe project.



## Port-au-Prince

For the period of ten days, we were invited to stay in the temple Na-Ri-Veh. The temple is run by the extraordinary Jean-Daniel Lafontant, who is a houngan (vodou priest), an art collector and enthusiast, and a cultural consultant for the Haitian foreigner ministry. Jean-Daniel was extremely generous and opened his library dedicated to vodou, introduced us to some great artists whose production is also related to vodou, took us to visit other temples and cultural institutions. Through Jean-Daniel, we met and started a collaboration with the visual artists Jean Ricardo and Lherisson Dubreus. Works of both artists are now part of our own environment (milieu) for the performance HAITI o AYITI. We also met Mambo Aida, a vodou high priestess in the hierarchy of vodou in Haiti. With their guidance, we were able to glimpse a lot of information (historical, present and future) of Haiti that we would otherwise have never had access to. As a contribution to the international alliances initiated by Cecilia and Leandro with this project, Jean-Daniel prepared an very unique Asson (knowledge rattle) as a gift for Dona Cici, and a snake fetish for Luciana de Ewa, both collaborators of the project.





## RESEARCH WORK WITH DONA CICI

Senior Ressearcher of Fundação Pierre Verger, Salvador de Bahia

August 2018 - Ongoing

During our weekly visits to Dona Cici while in Salvador, we learn about the history of Oxumare (snake, rainbow deity) in Brazilian candomble, and the approximations of snake-water deities in Brazil, West Africa, and Haiti. Based on her vast archival work developed in complicity with the ethnographer Pierre Verger, Dona Cici talks us through the visible and invisible meanings of songs, dances, languages, codes and stories that maintain an unbreakable cultural bond among originary peoples of Africa and the so-called Americas. It is an invaluable honour to work with Dona Cici, a living library of afro-diasporic, quantum, biology and cosmic knowledges.



## EXCHANGE TRIP HAITI – SALVADOR, BAHIA

April 2019

In the spirit of reciprocity and dialogue amongst peoples, we invited the choreographer Dieufel Lamisere and the drummer James Savoy to spend twenty days in Salvador de Bahia with us. The main desire was to exchange and unveil the existing links between the cultures of Salvador and Haiti, especially dance cultures and spiritual cultures. For that, we organised a series of public events in partnership with the following institutions:

**Rede Africanidade and Grupo GIRA (UFBA)** - those research groups are connected to the philosophy and the dance departments of the Federal University of Bahia. Their focus are the afro-diasporic cultures in Bahia. Organised with prof. Marilza Oliveira, the format was a four-hour master-class with Dieufel Lamisere and James Savoy, with a focus on the Yanvalou, Ibo, Maskaeron dances and rhythms as well as a hisotrical context of Haiti.

**Curso Profissional de Dança (FUNCEB)** - we organised a master-class for the professional dance students of FUNCEB, the most popular public dance school in Salvador, with more than two thousand pupils every year.



UFBA



FUNCEB

**Irmãos no Coro and Diálogos Ancestrais (Tumba Junsara)** - with the help of our friend and partner Paulo França, who is a candomble initiate in the Tumba Junsara temple, we were able to organise two different encounters between our Haitian guests and study groups of Salvador. **Irmãos no Coro** is a group of drummers from different nations and traditions of candomble who meet every week in Tumba Junsara to exchange techniques and information related to the sacred rhythms. We organised a special participation of James Savoy in two encounters. And for the **Diálogos Ancestrais** (ancestral dialogues), we gathered a study group UFBA (federal university) focused on Human Rights and members of Tumba Junsara to engage in a discussion around religious intolerance and racism.



TUMBA



## STUDIO WORK AND PERFORMANCES IN SALVADOR

April – May 2019

For the period of one month, we worked on the rehearsal studio of Teatro Vila Velha (an artist-run theatre in Salvador), where a structure and choreography began to take shape. We invited the following collaborators, who were also present in the first four performances we presented in Salvador:

Clarins da Bahia - a clarin (wind-instrument) duo that mark the presence of important guests or the arrival of specific entities in candomble festivities. Together with Clarins, we set a score composed of four different refrains.

Estelle Foli – a dancer and choreographer who has been trained by Haitian-diasporic choreographers in her hometown Lomé, in Togo. Estelle came to Salvador for a two-week period of movement research and also to take part in the first presentations of the work.

Luciana Barauna – a dancer and candomble initiate who serves the snake/water entity Ewa. Luciana joined the work initially to give classes of Ewa and Oxumare related dances, according to candomble traditions. She moved on to become part of the performances in Salvador as one of the three snakes.

Tonceles – an Ogã (drummer) and creator of Irmãos no Coro, a group of candomble drummers who gather in Tumba Junsara to exchange rhythms of different nations. The role of the Ogã, amongst others, is to call and take care of the entities. In this capacity we asked Ton to play the atabaque and agogo for a specific part of “snake attack” in the choreography.

As part of the 2019 program of Sala do Coro Teatro, Castro Alves, we had four presentations in two weeks (8, 9 and 15, 16 May). Teatro Castro Alves is the most important public theatre in Salvador and one of the most important in Brazil. For us, it was precious to be able to show there because a lot of our research for this project was/is actually done in Salvador de Bahia. In those four performances, we were able to experiment with a composition for seven people, and an environment that changed slightly for each day.

The 15 May performance was extended into a session of **Diálogos Ancestrais** (Ancestral Dialogues), co-produced with Tumba Junsara. We invited the elders Dona Cici and Tata Xuxuca (Tumba) to talk us through some of the simbologies of the snake dance, as present in Brazilian Candomble, and served Haitian hot chocolate with tapioca for the audience.





