Religious Syncretism, Caribbean Identity and Contemporary Cinema & Literature
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“todo mezclado” (Guillén 130)

Contributing to the Caribbean’s Multidimensional Identity
To understand the character analysis of Nancy and Sirena, we must first familiarize ourselves with religious practices of the Caribbean, in particular of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Religious Syncretism: results from the mixture of different ethnicities that came to the Caribbean voluntarily, or by force.

Most Prominent: Mixture of Christianity with Indigenous and African religions:
- Santería
- Yoruba
- Palo Monte

La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (The Virgin of Charity of El Cobre)

Noticeable figure that exemplifies the religious syncretism in the Caribbean

Methodology
Comparison between two contemporary works of literature and cinema from the Caribbean. Analysis of the religious syncretism of Puerto Rico and Cuba in order to understand the religious practices of Nancy and Sirena and its contribution to their binary identity.

Their Functions within the Texts
Nancy as a ex-prostitute, David’s savior, and rescuer of the text’s critical message about Cuban post-revolutionary society.

And more Symbolically
Her binary identity compared to La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre’s syncretic identity.

Sirena as a woman trapped in a man’s body, as a divine being in a human’s body, and as men’s object of veneration.

Conclusion
The Caribbean’s mixed composition is not only ethnic and cultural, but religious as well. It is through this religious syncretism that the figures of Nancy and Sirena are analyzed, providing a clear illustration of their binary and complex identity, which in turn reflects and portrays the Caribbean’s own syncretic and diverse identity.

Thesis
The Caribbean’s syncretic identity is portrayed in the works Fresa y chocolate and Sirena Selena vestida de pena through the characters of Nancy and Sirena, who present this complex identity by the means of their individual characteristics and, more specifically, through their religious practices and beliefs. It is through this aspect that we interpret their binary identities as symbolic representations of the Caribbean’s own syncretic identity.

Key Arguments
Religious Practices of Nancy & Sirena
Nancy from Fresa y chocolate
Venerates two entities from the Yoruba religion and Christianity: Santa Bárbara and la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, and has affiliation with Santería and popular spiritual practices

“ánima triste y sola, méltete en el corazón de David Álvarez; que no haya ni negra ni blanca, ni chiva ni mulata que con él pueda estar. Con dos lomído, con tres lováto, la sangre de su corazón me bebo y su corazón me arrebato. A que llegue a mis pies rendidos como llegó nuestro Señor Jesús Cristo a los pies de Poncio Pilatos” (Fresa y chocolate).

Sirena from Sirena Selena vestida de pena
Venerates the Virgen Mary (Christian entity) and la Piedra Imán or Lodestone (Yoruba symbol) in a combined manner. Practices syncretic rituals from popular beliefs for self protection.

“María Piedra Imán” (Santos-Febres 19)

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