

# 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

Noticeable figure that exemplifies the religious syncretism in the Caribbean

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



## 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.



## 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.



Scene from *Fresa y chocolate*

Piedra Imán



## 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 de Cobre, and has affiliation with Santería and popular spiritual practices

“ánima triste y sola, métete en el corazón de David Álvarez; que no haya ni negra ni blanca, ni chiva ni mulata que con él pueda estar. Con dos lomido, 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*

“María Piedra Imán” (Santos-Febres 19)

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.

The syncretic deities and practices are used as symbols to prove the characters’ binary identities, which in turn reflects the Caribbean’s own syncretic and diverse 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.

↑ And more Symbolically  
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 identity.