



THE FORMATION OF AFRICAN IDENTITIES IN THE AMERICAS: SPIRITUAL “ETHNICITY”

Ivor L. Miller

African Diaspora Studies Program,
DePaul University

ABSTRACT

From the sixteenth century onward, various spiritual traditions were carried by enslaved Africans to the Caribbean and the Americas, where their bearers restructured them by adapting to the economic, political, and social realities of the slave regimes. In Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, and other cultural zones, Africans and their descendants were able to reconstruct fundamental concepts and elements of their homeland material and spiritual cultures while adding new features to these models. Just as we can speak of Anglo-American, Iberian-American, or Franco-American culture—instead of speaking of a monolithic Black or an African American culture, or of an abstract Afro-Cuban culture—we can discuss Kongo-American, Calabarí-American, or Yorùbá-American cultures. Being inclusive, these African-derived cultural systems, perpetuated in most cases through ritual-kinship lineages established by Africans, have for some time been practiced by people of all heritages, and in many cases become unofficial symbols of the particular nation-state in which they reside, even while resisting allegiance to that state and its dominant mythologies.

“No nation now but the imagination.”

Derek Walcott¹

IN A LINEAR PARADIGM, the study of transatlantic history is a study of progress; progress being a condition requiring adaptation to Euro-American norms. The assimilation of Africans enslaved in the Americas entailed a process of several generations, exemplified by this scenario from Argentina: “When the African nations declined beginning in the mid-nineteenth century with the deaths of the last generation of people born in Africa, Afro-Argentineans began to form mutual aid societies. These were the first autonomous Afro-Argentinean organizations since, unlike the brotherhoods and nations whose constitutions had to be ratified by the Church and the provincial government respectively, the mutual aid societies drafted their own constitutions.”² By transitioning over the years from the status of “nation” to mutual-aid “black” societies, then creating “Argentine” societies, George

Andrews indicates that “the community achieved the autonomy it had sought for so long at the price of divesting itself first of its cultural identity and then of its racial identity, as it eventually was assimilated into the white population around it. In the end, does this not constitute the most effective control of all?”³

This is the logical chain of events one might expect: the dying out of those born in Africa, and with them, the traditions they brought. Historian Philip Howard describes the legislated tendency: “The Pan-Afro-Cuban nationalism promoted by leaders of the mutual aid societies also diminished the value of Africa and African cultural expression in Cuba. Their opposition to open expression of Africanisms was determined by the government and members of the dominant society. Both believed that African culture, as promoted within the *cabildos*, stifled the integration of blacks into colonial society.”⁴

But in regions like Salvador, Bahia, Brazil; Matanzas and Havana, Cuba; Gonaïves, Haiti; and other cultural zones, African leaders established community-based ritual traditions that in many cases continue in the present, privileging African-centered world views and identities among participants, as well as reconfiguring the dominant narratives describing the assimilation of Africans into the “creole” societies of the Americas. History has taught them that their inherited ancestral traditions are a guide for correct living and a safety net for hard times.

Based on medieval Iberian models, Africans in Latin American urban centers were organized into “nation-groups” (known as *cabildos*, *congados*, and *reinados*, in different zones), a strategy of keeping them divided ethnically. As slavery ended, the nation-groups were banned; many responded by assuming the name of a Catholic saint in an attempt to exist as mutual-aid societies.⁵ Fernando Ortiz—regarded as the “third discoverer” of Cuba for his voluminous studies of Cuba’s African influences—writes that: “Governmental organisms made . . . war on the *cabildos*; they believed that *these remnants of slavery* should appear to belong to a backwards age; there was a certain hurry to whitewash the society again.”⁶

Two trends that resisted legal destruction of the *cabildos* resulted in the maintenance of African-derived spiritual practices: the use of nation-groups and mutual-aid societies as public sites to camouflage African-centered institutions and the communities of fugitives (called “palenques,” “quilombos,” or “maroon” societies) that maintained reassembled homeland institutions. Their cultural resistance—resulting for example in the use of African-derived drums and dances throughout popular culture in the Americas—are examples of how people have defended their right to construct a particular human identity in dark periods of history.

In one example related to spirituality, anthropologist Luc de Heusch found evidence that in northern Haiti a fugitive founded a major lineage of Vodun practice, where Vodun “mythology seems to be a *bricolage* of old Kongo elements . . .

part of a mythical army. . . . This original restructuring was carried out following a warlike scheme, visibly inspired by the long resistance of escaped slaves (*marrons*) living in hiding. The role of these marrons in the making of voodoo has, no doubt, been underestimated by historians. Oral tradition relates that a fugitive slave named Figaro founded the first sanctuary at Nansoukry.”⁷ Thus African fugitives from the slavery system founded ritual lineages based on their homeland traditions; these have been maintained to the present. The continuity of these lineages is a means of dignifying the memory of the ancestors.

I have worked for many years with leaders of the Cuban Abakuá sodality, gathering oral history materials related to their foundation and propagation. Abakuá is derived from the leopard societies of West Africa, which are ubiquitous throughout southeastern Nigeria and western Cameroon. The term “Abakuá” is likely derived from Àbàkpà, an Èfik term for the Qua settlement in Calabar, originally formed by migrants from the Ejagham-speaking area to the north. These leopard societies—called *Ékpè* among the Èfik, *Ngbè* among the Ejagham, *Obe* among the Efut of Isangele—spread in part as a way of regulating trade throughout the region, particularly in response to European merchants.⁸ Reestablished in Havana by captured leaders of Cross River local governments in the early 1800s, Abakuá is at least six decades older than the Cuban nation. By all accounts, Abakuá was established by members of *Calabari* nation-groups in Havana, then hidden from colonial authorities as long as possible (in Cuba, the term became “Carabalí,” reversing the *l* and *r*).

As in the Argentine scenario, many Carabalí nation-groups were converted to mutual-aid societies; others disappeared as members died out. Abakuá survived as an underground institution because it began to initiate worthy Cubans not born in Africa. Although decreed illegal in Cuba in 1875, its members captured and sent to penal colonies in West and northern Africa, Abakuá persists today as an important—if unofficial—symbol of Cuban-ness that transcends ethnic boundaries. By maintaining a group consciousness through the passing on of oral narratives and performing collective ceremony, Abakuá maintain identities based on historical places and events in the Cross River region.

To understand the ethnic roots of this Cuban society, I began to examine the work of historians who evaluated documents recording the ethnicity of Africans brought as slaves from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Although it is important to assess the documents that quantify and ethnically label those who came to the Americas as slaves, these have proven to be of limited use in trying to understand the persistence of African identities in the Americas. Many historians have argued that the Ìgbo of West Africa were among the largest groups taken, yet Ìgbo cultural material is difficult to discern in present day Cuba, especially as compared with other

ethnolinguistic groups like Yorùbá and Kongo.⁹ Demographics as recorded in shipping and plantation documents do not answer the question of how cultural practices are transmitted and become meaningful to each new generation.

We cannot remain content with the simple tallying of numbers of Africans and their ethnic labels in order to tell the story of African-centered communities in the Americas. We must also conduct ground-up studies based on the oral accounts of leading inheritors of ritual lineages derived from Africa. Percentages of “ethnic” contributions to the colonial societies of the Americas are only one factor. In addition to demographics, specific cultural attitudes—that is, the agency of African arrivants and their descendants—as well as New World contexts are important elements.¹⁰

RITUAL KINSHIP

“Cultural patrimonies are not definable by race.”

Teodoro Díaz¹¹

Many historians have assumed that “Old World” traditions survived in the “New World” if and only if there was a cohesive social unit among migrants to maintain them. By observing that a sense of pervasive ethnic identity is linked to ties with a homeland spiritual tradition, Max Weber helped us grasp how some ethnic markers survive: “Wherever the memory of the origin of a community . . . remains for some reason alive, there undoubtedly exists a very specific and often extremely powerful sense of ethnic identity, which is determined by several factors [including] . . . persistent ties with the old cult.”¹² Few scholars, however, have comprehended the broader social ramifications of ethnically-based initiation societies involving nonmembers of that ethnic group as found in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and other regions. African-derived ritual kinships served a variety of spiritual and moral functions that gave members access to social networks that helped them live better. Because the possibilities offered by their traditions were useful, some groups—even those who seem to have come in smaller numbers—were more successful than others in establishing their homeland institutions in American slave societies. In Cuba, Cross River peoples initiated into Ékpè were among them.

A great diversity of peoples brought to the Americas from the Niger Delta and Cross River Basin were labeled by merchants as *Carabalí*, as Cuban historian Deschamps discovered: “The carabalí. The tribes brought to Cuba under this denomination are innumerable . . . part of those [“carabalí”] who founded cabildos responded to the following denominations: Abalo, Acocuá, Agro, Apapá, Bibí, Bogre, Bogre Isuama, Abate Singlava, Brícamo, Ecnaso, Ibo Induri, Isicuato, Isiegue, Isuama, Isuama Aballa Ocuite, Isuama Ibi, Isuama Isiegue, Isueche, Oquella, Ososo, Ososo

Eche, Osoyo Omuma, Oxó, Ugri, Unigini, Aballa Otopa, Isuama Umofina, Isuama Osulerisna, Orú, Elugo, Orate, Bané, Yudusi.”¹³ Of this partial list of thirty-three ethnic denominations, only five survived into the twentieth century as components of the Abakuá society (Efí, Efó, Orú, Bibí, Suáma); today there are two main ethnic lineages: Efí and Efó, with Orú as an important third lineage. Although there has been a dramatic reduction in ethnic nomenclature, the symbolic importance of Abakuá is not diminished. This may be because the nomenclature documented by slavers was not relevant to the identity of those who later became Abakuá members, who in any case became ritually tied to Efí, Efó, and Orú lineages upon initiation.

That essential historical narratives were not lost was confirmed once more by Nigerian members of the Cross River Ékpè society living in the U.S., who responded to my publication of Abakuá phrases from a commercially recorded album with the news that they had recognized these texts as part of their own history:

“Okobio Enyenisón, Awanabekura Mendo/ Núnkue Itia Ororo Kánde Efík Ebutón/ Oo Ékue.”

[Our African brothers, from the sacred place/ came to Havana, and in Regla founded Efík Obutóng/ we salute the Ékue drum.]¹⁴

What is surprising is the fact that those who chant this material today in ritual contexts are not necessarily the descendants of Éfik or Efut people, the two main ethnic lineages within the Cuban Abakuá. In fact, by the 1830s, Abakuá leaders had initiated the descendants of Africans born in Cuba; by the 1860s they had initiated the offspring first of Spaniards, and then of Chinese, into their ranks. Abakuá began to reflect the ethnic makeup of the island’s population more accurately than any official institution (except perhaps its prisons, which included women).

For example, the following chant is a standard tribute to the white Abakuá from their black brothers:

“Jeyey bario bakongo Sése Eribo eróko embóko baroko nansáo, abairémo Efí, abairémo Efó, bongó Ita, Sése akanarán biankomo komo iremo Abasí ama Abasí manyobino.”

[Attention to all, the Sése Eribo drum authorizes the initiation of dignitaries, making all of us, the Efí and the Efó, one people. The Sése drum is our mother given to us by God (*Abasí*)].

The chorus repeats, *“Ekóbio Enyegueyé monína son ekóbios”*

[The members of the group Enyegueyé are our brothers].¹⁵

In referring to the ritual kinship of the Efí and Efó people of the Cross River Basin, and then to the white Abakuá group Enyegueyé, these lyrics imply that in Cuba, all Abakuá members are “one people” and that race is not an obstacle to joining this “initiation family.”

Throughout the Americas, ethnic identities are transmitted not only through biological families, but through ritual lineages contained in religious practices, such as Abakuá, Palo Monte, and Santería in Cuba; Candomblé in Brazil; and Vodun in Haiti, to mention only a few.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, when North American Irene Wright witnessed a Santería *Bembe* (drum ceremony), she was astonished to find that “not all their members are negroes.” As is customary, elder initiates are greeted by younger ones through *móforibále*; in standard Yorùbá, *moforíbalẹ̀* literally means “I touch the floor with my head in reverence.” Wright was perturbed at seeing a white woman prostrate before a high-ranking mulatto man, not realizing this act was an expression of respect among two initiates: “One pretty young girl, who might have ‘passed for white’ in her clean lawn dress with blue sash and neck ribbon he [the mulatto] compelled by a glance to do as the rest,—to throw herself prone on the floor before him, and turn from hip to hip.”¹⁶ In fact, the form of prostration described identifies the woman as an initiate of a female divinity from Yorùbá-derived Cuba.

In Miami, anthropologist Stephan Palmié met a “phenotypically white” Cuban of French descent who identified his ancestry as “‘ara takuá,’ i.e., the ‘tapa people,’ a name for the Nupe used by the Oyo-Yoruba.”¹⁷ Likely he was an initiate of *Ọya*, a divinity from the town of Irá in Tápà [Tákpà] territory of northeastern Yorùbá-land.¹⁸ John Mason writes: “*Ọya* was brought to Cuba by a Tápà/Nupe woman in the mid-1800’s.”¹⁹ Palmié’s example demonstrates the impact of African-centered identities in mainland U.S. through Caribbean migration, as well as the tutelage of scholar-priests like Mason and Miguel Ramos.²⁰

What is surprising in this rich history of cultural transfer is the ability to maintain oral traditions closely resembling their African sources. This is possible because those who join Abakuá or Ifá, no matter their background, must learn the language, rhythms, ritual protocols, and customs of these brotherhoods. They must swear loyalty till death to an African spiritual force. Members of the contemporary Abakuá society or the Ifá guild come from all ethnic backgrounds, yet maintain the orthodoxy of the Abakuá rites to such a point that Nigerian members of the *Ékpè* society and Ifá guild can recognize the practice as an extension of their own.²¹

In Cuba today, there are over 120 Abakuá groups with a total of more than 20,000 members, quite significant for a nonproselytizing exclusive society. Each group has its own specific ethnic identity, and when neophytes are initiated, they must learn the ritual texts sacred to that group that tell about its mythic origins in West Africa. For example, a chant from one group evokes its ritual lineage from a specific village in West Africa:

Umóni Apapá Efi Ekueri Tongó Umóni . . .

Title of the territory of Umóni Apapá [considered part of “tierra Efi”].

Bonkó ekueri tongó erendíó ekueri tené . . .

Here in Havana, Ekueri Tongó was founded by a group of Africans called Ekueri Tené.

My research has shown that the ritual name of one Abakuá group, Ekueri Tongó, derives from an Èfik town in Calabar.²² Another example of the transmission of ethnic identities through ritual lineages is found in Recife, Brazil, where the “Shangó Cult” has created vast networks. Here many initiates are said to identify more closely with their ritual parents and siblings than their biological ones. In this case, the Nagó or Yorùbá-derived traditions give Òyó, or Yorùbá-derived identities to initiates, no matter what their biological background.

Researchers Carvalho and Segato have observed that the social structure of the Shangó cult, where “African deities [are] worshipped by the greatest part of the city’s population (the dispossessed), has become an extremely useful chart to organize social and individual behavior.”²³ They describe the context:

The shangos exist, until today, in a human environment to which one finds it very difficult to apply the notion of social structure, especially because the institutions which bind together the majority of traditional societies are here absent. Thus in the slums of Recife family ties and kinship affinities are not very important; rules of descent are nonexistent and those of marriage are almost insignificant; the possibilities opened for sexual partnership are immense and the traditional divisions of gender roles do not apply in most cases . . . and the public services in Recife are among the precarious in Brazil.²⁴

They suggest that in this context, ritual-kinship ties supersede all other allegiances, including the genealogical family among “the greatest part of the city’s population.”

These and many other examples indicate that many African traditions have adapted to and are flourishing in local American contexts. The use of selected elements from the cultures of the dominant classes has enriched them, enabling them to expand and assume new meanings, thereby attracting people of all backgrounds. Their perpetuation of African-derived mythic histories and identities requires their members to assume a transnational identity. That is, initiates of Yorùbá-derived religions in Brazil and Cuba, or any of their extensions now practiced in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America, have religious and spiritual identities connecting them to Ilé-Ifè, sacred city of all Yorùbá-speaking people. Abakuá members, depending on the specific lineage of their group, have identities derived from specific places in the Cross River region. Palo Monte leaders have identities derived from specific zones in the regions of Kongo and Angola.

COMMUNAL TOOLS OF RESISTANCE

“Itá itón pampanó nkanima. One stick does not make a forest.”

Abakuá saying²⁵

The propagation of ritual lineages in the Americas was propelled by three overarching factors:

- 1) Each tradition encompasses rich aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual materials requiring years of study to master. Leaders then demonstrate their expertise through cultural performance, for example, while conducting divination for clients or through sophisticated call and response debates involving music, dance, cuisine, elaborate altars, etc. Individual self-esteem and collective historical consciousness are stimulated through such collective practices. Each tradition enables participation in sophisticated aesthetic activities that offer philosophical insights into the human condition.
- 2) Each tradition gives members access to intimate links with extended communities that help solve problems of daily living. As part of community-based systems, those who specialize in divination, and otherwise conducting ritual activities for Candomblé and Santería communities, have access to informal market systems that enable economic survival. For example, during the prolonged food shortages during the Cuban Revolution—as I witnessed many times in the 1990s—diviners and other participants could eat foods otherwise unavailable by conducting ceremonies in which animal sacrifice was practiced. Similarly, as a political and economic force, the Abakuá brotherhood gave members access to jobs as well as assumed responsibility for their funerals in the case of their death.
- 3) Each tradition is a communal practice directly connected to the historical memory and movement of peoples across time and space; as such, they are tools for resisting policies of the dominant class that encourage their assimilation.

The spiritual practices, although transformed over time, serve to maintain historical self-consciousness among communities that have knowledge of their African and maroon past. Representatives of the dominant class have told the descendants of Africa: “You have no past or history. Western culture has a prestigious past of more than 2000 years, and your history, being oral, is ephemeral and carried away by the wind. Books contain truth; orality is false consciousness.”²⁶ In this context, oral narratives sustained by communities of religious practitioners are powerful devices for affirming histories describing the richness of spiritual origins in Africa.

By and large, the dialectical tension between the dominant and marginal classes has been outlined by rules of the dominant, who have articulated a theory of “universal” human traditions in which theirs are the norm or the most elevated; there-

fore marginal peoples can only participate fully when they have achieved the same cultural standards. The Enlightenment, one of the great banners for the superiority of European norms, is held to be a source for “radical humanism.” Yet as Robin Kelley observes: “the Enlightenment also ushered in a transformation in Western thinking about race. . . . as many, many commentators since the French Revolution have observed, the expansion of slavery and genocidal wars against non-European peoples took place alongside, and by some accounts made possible, bourgeois democratic revolutions that gave birth (in the West) to the concept that liberty and freedom are inalienable rights. This contradiction is fundamental to Enlightenment philosophy, notions of progress, and developments in scientific thinking.”²⁷

Many European thinkers held that Africans would join the human family upon the condition of assimilation to European norms. Visiting Monrovia, Liberia in 1854, Commander Baikie of the Royal Navy wrote: “I have great faith in this young republic, which will some day, when the worn-out dynasties of savage tribes are forgotten, and when advancing civilization and Christianity have smoothed the asperities of barbarous customs and bloody rites, strongly assert the claims of the African to be admitted into the fellowship of his more fortunate brethren, and assist him in substantiating his rights as an integral, a free member of the vast human family.”²⁸

A century later in Cuba, Manuel Cuellar-Vizcaino described how black leaders were bullied into assimilation:

“In other times the discriminators maliciously told the Black progressives: ‘As long as the drum sounds, you cannot progress.’

—“But I don’t play the drum!”—the Black progressive said ingenuously.

—“You don’t play it, but those of your race do, and that goes against you.”

The Black progressive placed a great distance between himself and the drummers”²⁹

As the marginal struggle to “rise” by assimilating to the norms of speech, dress, worldview, etc. of the dominant class, the levels are raised. The ultimate effect of marginal groups attempting to assimilate—into a domain controlled by a dominant class that does not share power with them—is the loss of access to their inherited traditions and historical memory.

This dialectic is complicated by the triumph, outside of their own society and in the world’s cultural centers, of artists and musicians who use African-centered elements, thus forcing the local dominant class to accept, and even celebrate, them and their music, for example Bob Marley of Jamaica as well as Wifredo Lam and Chano Pozo of Cuba. Another contemporary example would be the thousands of foreigners entering Cuba for initiation into Santería, to the point that the state,

which once marginalized its practitioners, now depends on the money circulating from these “spiritual transactions” for its own perpetuation.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: EUROPA VS. AFRICA

In his famous treatise, Brathwaite writes: “The single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society was not the imported influence of the Mother Country or the local administrative activity of the white elite, but a cultural action—material, psychological and spiritual—based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and—as white/black, cultural discrete groups—to each other.”³⁰ Brathwaite here defines “this cultural action or social process . . . as creolization,” a metaphor for a creative process: “The friction created by this confrontation was cruel, but it was also creative.”³¹ The cultural and biological mixing termed creolization, what Ortiz calls “trans-culturation,” occurred at all levels of society, despite denial by the elites of the African influences in their lifeways. Although creolization is often used to describe the creation of something new, implying the loss of ties to an original homeland, in fact African-derived ritual traditions have maintained a centeredness in mythical Africa. That is, in spite of enrichment through cultural contact, many African-derived practices have maintained their conceptual rootedness in African spirituality. In the words of one Babalorixá from Bahia, Brazil, who had participated in rituals in the Republic of Benin and Nigeria: “Everywhere I have traveled I have seen cultural mixture; there is no purity; but what I have seen in all places, including Brazil, is spiritual purity, and this is the most important thing.”³²

African-derived identities in the Americas flourish because of—not in spite of—their origins in mythic history. Consciously examined, reinterpreted, and performed, these myths are links to historical civilizations with spiritual insights. When a Cuban does assume a Yorùbá or Èfík-based identity, it is fluid and overlapping, complementary, and integrated into several other identities that Caribbean peoples embody because of their complex historical experience. Not monolithic nor merely oppositional, African-derived identities are used practically to counter European-derived myths of racial purity, white supremacy, and the utopia of classical Athenian democracy (a democracy with a large slave population). If forms of real democracy existed, the pride in collective decisionmaking through councils as used, for example, by the Abakuá, would not be as symbolically important. If the European-derived systems of slavery and genocide were not as persistent, the insistence on Old World identities would not be as pronounced. For example, skin-tone-inclusive traditions like Abakuá, Candomblé, and Santería counter racial hysteria common in the Caribbean, as exemplified in the late eighteenth century by

Moreau de Saint-Méry: “There are in Saint-Domingue persons of mixed blood who have reached their fourth level of miscegenation, always with whites, so that they really have in their veins only one five hundred and twelfth of African blood. . . . One needs extremely exercised eyes to distinguish [some of them] from the pure whites.”³³ It is as if the dominant class system of racial and class hierarchies fostered the need for inclusive systems, like those of Santería, Candomblé, and Abakuá, to counter their impact.

COUNTERING ASSIMILATION AND ERASURE

“The discovery and the conquest of America . . . was the last crusade.”

John Leddy Phelan³⁴

Since the European conquest, all forms of identity and spirituality not derived from Western Christian models have been perceived as threats to the systematic assimilation fostered by European powers, wherein all slaves and citizens must assimilate ideologically or they must disappear (e.g., forced education of “mixed race” aboriginals in Australia).³⁵ In the case of North American Indians, one scholar notes that the effects of the U.S. government’s assimilation campaign through off-reservation facilities was “an enlarged sense of identity as ‘Indians’ . . . the very institution designed to extinguish Indian identity altogether may have in fact contributed to its very persistence in the form of twentieth-century pan-Indian consciousness.”³⁶ Of the same phenomenon, another scholar concludes that: “Rejection and exclusion—confinement in their ‘proper station’ in the social hierarchy—bred self-consciousness, resourcefulness, and aggressive pride.”³⁷

Similar forms of resistance were engendered throughout the Caribbean region. Just as members of the dominant class had “a sense of being ‘European,’ derived from their metropolitan origin or memories; and a sense of being white, ‘civilized’ and superior,”³⁸ the descendants of Africans confidently maintained a sense of their own civilization through initiation into prestige-giving groups like Abakuá, Candomblé, and Ifá. Offering a precedent from West Africa, “Wáñdé Abímbóá interprets Ifá oracle poetry documenting resistance to proselytizing by early Muslims in the region through “veiled criticisms and ridicules of Muslim way[s] of life.”³⁹ One of several such Ifá verses tells how Nana Aisha, “the mother of Muslims” and a wife of the prophet Mohammed, died of hunger because “she was greatly neglected by Muslims.”⁴⁰ As a result, misfortune befell the Muslims, forcing them to consult Ifá divination, whereby they were advised to fast for thirty days in penance for their neglect. The verse wittily points to Ifá as a source for the annual Muslim Ramadan period, implying that Ifá’s wisdom may solve any human problem, to the

point that spiritual leaders from other traditions will benefit from its use. In the Caribbean colonial context, African leaders used such perspectives about the pre-eminence of their homeland spiritual traditions while nurturing and evoking “African spiritual powers” that—being tied to divine kingship and powerful ancestors—uplifted the self-esteem of adherents, a form of defending their communities from European-derived norms. In a recent example, in the 1960s, while leaders of the Cuban Revolution sought an idealized “materialist socialism,” Cuban politician Blas Roca decreed that “religion was the opiate of the masses,” writing: “More and more with their small-talk about non violence, religions and sects morally disarm the oppressed and flatten their revolutionary spirit.”⁴¹ For this reason, those seeking membership in the Communist party were investigated, and if found to be practicing initiates, were rejected.⁴²

In the context of continued pressure to assimilate, the ability of marginal groups to perpetuate themselves and their worldviews is celebrated in oral traditions that recount the connections of their ancestors with the divine and the perpetuation of these relationships in contemporary spiritual practices. Regarding the Abakuá, Lydia Cabrera writes: “The importance of a Potencia [Abakuá group] depends on the number of its initiates and of the “branches” or new groups that have emerged from it.”⁴³ An obvious parallel is found in birthrates among historically enslaved peoples who continue to live in poverty in Europe and the Americas, who seem to resist their erasure and invisibility from official histories by reproducing in large numbers, as if to say: “we will not be eliminated.” Among the so-called Gypsies of Eastern Europe in the 1990s, Isabel Fonseca notes: “In a region with static and negative birthrates the Gypsies, I knew, were reproducing in intimidatingly large numbers. Their population was expected to double within seventeen years.”⁴⁴

DIFFUSION INTO THE WIDER SOCIETY

“El Kongo está cará.”

Cuban Kongo chant

African-derived traditions became legendary during independence struggles in the Caribbean through their effective use by key leaders. In Haiti, a ceremony for Ògún—divinity of war—is widely believed to have commenced the struggle against Napoleon’s forces in 1791. In Cuba, Ortiz writes: “Without the liberation of the slaves and cooperation of the blacks, the Cuban people, of which they form an integral part, would not have been able to achieve independence”; “Well known are the rebellions and resistances that the blacks and mulattos realized in Cuba to break their stocks and chains, and win the liberty of citizenship. It is sufficient to mention as historic heroes the black Aponte and the mulatto Maceo.”⁴⁵

Yorùbá descendant José Antonio Aponte, a retired first corporal of the Black militia and a carpenter, led what historian Levi Marrero calls “the largest and best organized conspiracy which, in colonial Cuba, had as an objective the liberation of slaves,” through the overthrow of the colonial regime.⁴⁶

Not only Oni-Shangó [son of Shangó, divinity of thunder] and leader of the Shangó-Tedun cabildo, Aponte was also believed to be a hereditary member of the Yorùbá-derived Òbgóni “secret” society, re-created in Havana after the arrival of thousands of enslaved Yorùbá-speakers.⁴⁷ Based on archival research as well as the historical memory maintained in Havana, historian Franco writes that, “the elders, who arrived from Nigeria, transmitted to the creole José Antonio Aponte the powers that only a great man could have in Africa.”⁴⁸

Using his skills and status, and inspired by Toussaint-Louverture, George Washington, and others, Aponte built a multi-ethnic movement including “Mandingas, Ararás, Congos, Carabalés, Macuá, Bibis and others . . . as well as groups of blacks and mulatto migrants from Haiti, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, Panama, Cartagena de Indias, and the USA”⁴⁹ Through contact with officers from black militias sailing throughout the Caribbean, Aponte secured information about tactics used in the Haitian Revolution. “Under a secret oath—whose reach and gravity only the Abakuá knew—the brigadier Narciso [of Santo Domingo] agreed with Aponte to lead the rebels once they had weapons in their power.”⁵⁰ Ortiz agreed that “the secret Ogboni society of Nigeria . . . undoubtedly had some early relation with the founders of the ñáñigo [Abakuá] society of Cuba.”⁵¹ Material evidence for Abakuá participation came in the form of “a conventional sign used as a signature by the Abakuá,” discovered later by authorities among papers of Aponte’s colleague, Sr. Chacón, that included proclamations by Aponte, Cristophe of Haiti, and plans for a Havana fortress to be attacked.⁵²

By using methods of ritual oaths from the Abakuá, Lukumí, and other initiation societies, the conspirators in Havana “advised the white abolitionists and the leaders among men of color, free or slave, from North America, Santo Domingo, Haiti and even Brazil, of the revolution they were organizing.”⁵³ The efficacy of their procedure was such that even after their movement had inspired revolts across the island in “Puerto Príncipe, Bayamo, Juguaní and Holguín,” and then in Guanabo, Havana Province in 1812, neither the Governor General, “nor the Police Assembly created by the Havana city council to detect all propaganda in favor of liberty, had even the slightest suspicion of the revolutionary conspiracy led by Aponte. The blacks and mulattos free or enslaved, under an oath they considered sacred, did not allow the discovery of their plans.”⁵⁴ The movement was destroyed in 1812 through the denunciation of some not under oath, leading to the execution of Aponte and colleagues.⁵⁵

In spite of defeat, Aponte's movement is believed to have had "international resonance," inspiring revolts in New Orleans, Santo Domingo, and Brazil at this time. Franco notes that "the revolutionary work of Aponte . . . left profound marks on the popular masses of Afrocubans."⁵⁶ Aponte is a living symbol among the population; as I have witnessed, the leaders of many Abakuá groups gather annually at a monument on the corner of Aponte and Monte streets in Havana to commemorate Aponte's struggle. A living legacy, Franco remarks that the methods of the oaths used by Aponte "are still kept in secrecy by some Abakuá potencias."⁵⁷

Two Cuban generals during the Wars of Cuban Independence, Quintin Banderas and Antonio Maceo—both of African descent—are remembered as devotees of the Palo Monte tradition. At the commencement of some contemporary Palo Monte ceremonies in Havana, one can hear recited, "*Antonio Maceo Ngo La Habana*" (literally, "leopard of Havana"), the ritual name of General Antonio Maceo, whose portrait is placed upon some Palo altars. Palo Monte invocations list deceased members of the house lineage, and then the names of important Paleros in the history of Cuba.

In 1998, I visited an *ngangulero*, a Palo Monte ritual specialist, who informed me that General Banderas' Kongo *prenda/nkisi* (shrine) was called *Briyumba Zámbe Ndio Ngo La Habana*, interpreted as "a territory with the power of the leopard that came to Havana."⁵⁸ Banderas was the Tata Nkisi, or head custodian of this nkisi, and General Antonio Maceo was the *bakonfula*, or assistant to the Tata.⁵⁹ This nkisi evoked the power of Sarabanda, the Kongo divinity of War.

Legends of this type may be omitted from official history texts, but those familiar with marginal areas of Havana know that they continue to be transmitted orally through ritual lineages; the Kongo title of Banderas is recited each time the nkisi he once used is activated in ceremony.⁶⁰

The practice of Palo Monte by military leaders increased their authority in the eyes of their troops, estimated to have been 70 percent of African descent, many of them Palo Monte practitioners.⁶¹ Spanish colonial leaders attempted to demoralize the independence fighters and shame the white participants away from the struggle by calling them *Mambi*, interpreted as "black," African, therefore "evil," etc. Kongo scholar Dr. Fu-Kiau Bunseki interpreted *mambi* as the Kikongo term *ambi* meaning "bad, evil, rotten, gross corrupt, offensive": *mambu mambi*—bad words/news; *n'kisi miambi*—bad medicines.⁶² Ultimately, this term meant to abuse was inverted as a symbol of power: "The *independentistas*, white and black, adopted with honor something that colonialism meant as an insult. . . . To offend us they call us *mambí*, they call us black; but we reclaim as a mark of glory the honor of considering ourselves descendants of the *mambí*, descendants of the rebel, runaway, *independentista* black—never descendants of the slave holder."⁶³

One potent influence on the Mambi army were “the matiabos . . . a sect of Bantu, Congo, or perhaps more precisely Angolan sorcerers.”⁶⁴ Folklorist Heli Chatelain wrote that in Angola, *ma-diabu* is a common insult derived from the Portuguese *diabo* [devil], used to mean “bad spirit,” “wicked person,” etc. It also has connotations of supernatural powers, as “the Loanda natives call [the flying stars] ma-diabu.”⁶⁵ Ortiz wrote that “Matiabos . . . [were] warlike Africans in fugitive and rural communities, who during the Cuban War of Independence were in close contact with the Mambi forces in Oriente, sometimes participating at their side in the struggle.”⁶⁶ Ortiz reasoned that during the wars against Spain, “Just as in their wars the whites evoked the Apostle Santiago and even the Holy Virgin Mary . . . so too the African blacks evoked Ogún or Nsambi Mpungo [God Almighty]; and they believed in their incantations and rites like the Christians in their supplications and benedictions.”⁶⁷

“In Cuba the term ‘matiabo’ was applied to certain Kongo sorcerers, who today are more appropriately called ‘tata ngangas’ with Kongo terms, or ‘nganguleros’ with the Bantu root ‘nganga’.”⁶⁸ “*Matiabo*,” the Kongo-Christian term and spiritual power brought from Africa, was also used in Cuba for protection by rebels who were phenotypically white. This is not surprising since, as early as 1736 in Kongo, Central West Africa, “Governor Rodrigues de Meneses informed the [Portuguese] crown that . . . “everywhere, not only among the natives of the interior, but even the whites use superstitions and diabolic rites’”; during the same century, Africans participating in the evolving Afro-Lusitanian culture “who were sold as slaves brought elements of this culture with them to the plantations, mines, and urban centers of the Americas.”⁶⁹ In June of 1879, the anthropological society of Cuba documented the preponderance of white rebels in Cuba who practiced African-derived spiritual traditions to protect themselves during the first War of Independence (1868). Because soldiers believing themselves invincible often lost their lives, the white *criollo* general Ignacio Agramonte confronted this issue.⁷⁰ The society’s notes document that:

Dr. Montalvo . . . spoke of the fetishistic cult observed during the insurrection with the matiábulo idol that had large followings and was attributed extraordinary supernatural power. . . . Sr. Varona added that not only blacks but also many whites formed part of the so-called matiábulos who thought themselves free from death, by virtue of their protection able to confront grave dangers, confident that they would always leave unscathed, and all the great energies of general Agramonte were necessary to destroy such fetishism, proving to the adepts in a practical and indubitable manner that they were exposed to death like the rest. . . . Yes! The white race also has its fetishes!⁷¹

Legacies of the Kongo influence in the Wars of Independence are found in contemporary ceremonies in Havana, where one can hear the chant: “*El Kongo está*

cará,” (the Kongo is fierce), that is, full of life, potent and rebellious, charged for action.⁷² The quintessential Kongo spirit in Cuba is anything but passive: fierce, primal, and ready to combat whoever challenges his or her dignity or freedom. The legendary powers of Kongo nkisi are one reason for their diffusion of their ritual lineages into the general society.

DIFFUSION THROUGH POPULAR MUSIC

¡Que viva Changó! / Long live Changó!

Celina González⁷³

Outside the intimate, ceremonial context, popular music played a fundamental role in communicating information from these traditions into the wider population. In one example, *batá* drummer and “son” of Changó, Jesús Pérez, contributed to the diffusion of Santería by traveling to Mexico in 1959 with his show *Obá Kosó Batá* (The *batá* of Changó) to record an album of traditional Lukumí (Yorùbá) and popular music.⁷⁴ *Batá* drums “belong” to Changó—a historical figure transformed into a divinity—known locally as a third Alafin (Emperor) of Old Òyó. *Obá Kosó Batá* could be literally interpreted as “The *bàtá* of Şàngó,” the *Ọba* (ruler) of Kòso, an ancient compound-courtyard complex north of Old Òyó.⁷⁵

In another example, the Cuban Son classic *Yo sí como candela* [Yes, I eat fire] is a direct reference to the divinity Changó, whose lyrics proclaim: “Don’t play with me, because I eat fire.”⁷⁶ This song is nothing but an updated version of a *patakín* (origin myth), in which Changó upset his father Agayú such that Agayú threw him into a fire, but Changó did not burn: *No es candela? ¡Cómo iba a arder!* [“Is he not fire? How could he burn?].⁷⁷

Popular stereotypes of Changó as a virile male with divine power have led to his popularity as a mythic archetype for many Cuban males, just as warrior goddess Oyá is for women.⁷⁸

AFRICAN CULTURAL TRANSMISSION TO ELITES

For centuries throughout the colonial period, especially in the homes of the masters, blacks and whites shared tense intimacies. The role of black women as workers in the homes of Cuba’s elite had a deep effect on the cultural consciousness of the children. Stories and songs recited by black women to white children resulted in a genre of Cuban literature that some call “oralatura,” the documentation and literary rendering of these stories. A primary figure is folklorist Lydia Cabrera, whose first published work, *Cuentos Negros de Cuba* (1936), started her lifelong career of

documenting in her now classic books the reminiscences of elder blacks in Havana and Matanzas, some of whom were employed by her family and those of her colleagues.⁷⁹

In *Yemayá y Ochún*, Cabrera writes: “The presence of affectionate black nannies in the homes [of elite whites] can explain why—although the trunk of the genealogical tree of all our compatriots may not be black—one observes African features in their temperament. The effect of coexistence for centuries with blacks . . . Blacks were much too integrated in Cuban society not to produce . . . this phenomenon of psychic mestizaje.”⁸⁰

Aware of this phenomenon, Fernando Ortiz appealed to elite whites to transcribe stories they learned as children: “African stories are totally ignored in Cuba . . . I would like these lines to be an invitation to the thousands of Cubans able to collaborate in this easy patronage of national culture, to collect the stories with which elderly black women amused black children as mothers, or white children as nurses. . . . document the words or phrases in . . . the African languages or songs that accompany most of these stories, and once written, send to this author.”⁸¹ The message was published during the emergent Afrocubanist movement wherein members of the literate avant-garde sought to reclaim African influences as fundamental to the national identity.

Perhaps this early cultural orientation is why so many among the elite became initiated. When traveling in 1999 to Orozco, Cuba, a sugar mill village whose population is largely mill workers and their families, I learned that the mills’ former owner, José Manuel Casanova, was a devotee of Changó who gave offerings to the ceiba tree behind his mansion.⁸² Not only a private initiate, Casanova participated in ceremonies in which each year a young bull was sacrificed to the mill machinery on the harvest to protect the workers from death by Ògún, lord of metal. Furthermore, Casanova was a Senator of the Republic in 1940 who regularly visited the White House in Washington.⁸³

Fernando Ortiz described Casanova as: “Our friend, the late Sr. J. Casanova, who at his death in 1949, was President of the National Association of Hacendados, that is, of sugar producers of Cuba and Senator of the Republic, as well as devotee and supporter of the religion or *regla de ocha*, of the black yoruba or lucumí, in which he was considered ‘son of Santa Barbara,’ or *babalocha* Oni-Chango, according to what was published in the magazine Bohemia during his lifetime.”⁸⁴

During his lifetime, wrote Cuellar-Vizcaino: “The senator José Manuel Casanova spoke to me of his faith in Changó.” Because of many such examples, he observed that Santería “has ceased to be a cult of blacks to become a Cuban cult . . . In Havana there are various Spanish babalawos, perfectly equipped with their Ecuélé and

Ifá [divination instruments]. Senators, representatives, and businessmen, black and white, have ‘santo asentado’ [consecrations] and practice Santería to support their business.”⁸⁵

In an interview, Arcadio, a renowned santero of Guanabacoa, claimed Casanova as one of his more than two thousand godsons. He reported: “To tell you frankly: before [the Revolution] none of these rich people did anything without consulting the Saints. All of them are my godchildren. Casanova was the king of Cuba. A fierce santero. He was white and owned a sugar factory. The drum [ceremonies] of Casanova were expensive! He gave feasts every month. He spent twelve to thirteen thousand pesos in a feast of Changó.”⁸⁶

AFRICAN ETHNICITY AS AMERICAN SPIRITUALLY-BASED IDENTITIES

African-derived ritual texts are important because they offer information about African philosophies and historical narratives. They are even more provocative for their insights into the formation of contemporary ethnic identities in the Americas.

In Haiti we find examples of African-derived ethnic identities perpetuated through ritual lineages, including one Kongo lineage established by a legendary fugitive:

The place where Figaro chose to install a purely Kongo but thoroughly original cult is located a few kilometers from the important temple of Souvenance, which is dedicated to the purest Dahomean cult on the island! Not far from there, in Nanbadjo, another temple has been built for the *nago* divinities alone. Side by side but at a distinct site in this area are the three fundamental components of voodoo. The triangle delimited by these three temples in the Gonaïves countryside covers three cultural zones, each of which, in spite of syncretism, has kept its identity.⁸⁷

In other words, ethnic distinctions evident in Haitian Vodun are maintained through ritual lineages connected to mythic or historical figures and places in specific regions of West and Central West Africa. These Kongo, Dahomean, and Yorùbá identities are foundational to the formation of contemporary Haitian identities.

Instead of dealing with African “residuals” or “survivals”—to use these belittling terms—we are witnessing the sociological effect of spiritual “powers” believed to transmit energies to those who “serve” them through contemporary ritual practices. For example, in Abakuá practice, Erúme is a founding spirit whose presence is evoked through cultural activities of the brotherhood. Erúme is said to be present

when a spiritual feeling of solidarity is summoned through collective expressions of music and dance. So, too, in Yorùbá-derived practice, Orishá are evoked in order to communicate with communities of devotees by temporarily inhabiting the bodies of selected members. These communal practices, sustained by ritualized ties to mythic Africa, lead us to perceive that concepts of “nation,” history, and identity that differ vastly from those developed in the West are being upheld in communities across the Americas.

HYBRID AFRICA IN THE AMERICAS

“Saint Anthony is the restorer of the Kingdom of Kongo.”

Dona Beatrice, 1704

The common paradigm for the creation of Caribbean “syncretic” cultures is that Africans, American aboriginals, and Europeans met and mixed in the Americas. In some cases, what were commonly described as syncretic American traditions appear to have been created in Africa and transferred to the Americas.⁸⁸ For example, anthropologist Luc de Heusch found strains of Kongo inheritance “in the supposedly Creole petro pantheon” of Haitian Vodun.⁸⁹ He writes: “How can we explain the co-existence of so many spirits with Haitian names alongside the Kongo spirits in the *petro* pantheon? . . . Let us begin by looking at Don Pedro himself. Far from being a Spaniard as has been believed, his eponym brings to mind the name of the four kings (Pedro I, II, III, and IV) who reigned over the Kongo Kingdom from the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries. Don and Dona were honorary titles used by the Kongo in imitation of the Portuguese. Furthermore, several apparently Creole *petro loa* can be likened to major symbolic figures among the Kongo.”⁹⁰

In Cuba, each *cabildo* elected a king and queen to act as intermediary between the colony’s Governor General and the *cabildo* member. On King’s Day, writes Ortiz, “the Congo king wore a dress coat and pants, a two-pointed hat, an adorned staff, etc. All these attributes of European origin and a royal mantle and scepter as well, were used by the King of Kongo in Africa.”⁹¹ By the 1880s, as in this example, the selective use of European regal dress was a nearly four century tradition in Kongo, not an example of a new “creole” practice. Although the crowning of Kongo kings and queens in the Americas had been perceived by some observers as “proof that the middle passage caused a “real death,” that Africans quickly became Christians and forgot their pasts, Elizabeth Kiddy has convincingly demonstrated that in Brazil, “The title King of Congo came to be used because of the legendary political and ritual power of the King of Kongo . . . the King of Congo represents the triumph of a continuing strategy to preserve a link to Africa.”⁹²

Significant examples of cultural transfer to Brazil and Cuba are found in Kongo-derived cabildos titled San Antonio, likely references to Portugal's patron saint and Catholic influence in the Kingdom of the Kongo from the late fifteenth century. The aforementioned King Pedro IV (1671–1718) of Kongo reigned during the 1702 emergence of the “Antonian movement,” a consequence of the rise of several mediums “possessed” by San Antonio, most famously Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita, who sought to reunite the kingdom torn apart by wars. Dona Beatrice—trained in Kongo spiritual arts—was widely believed to be possessed by Saint Anthony, and a movement grew around her that “drew support from all sections of Kongo society.”⁹³ Anne Hilton suggests that the “choice of St Antony as the possessing spirit reflected the influence of the mid-seventeenth century confraternity of St Antony in Mbanza Kongo.”⁹⁴ After Beatrice was sentenced “as a heretic to death by burning” by Pedro IV's council in 1706, thousands of her enslaved followers were sent throughout the Americas.⁹⁵

Kongo cabildos named after San Antonio were formed throughout Cuba, including the provinces of Havana, Cienfuegos, and Sancti Spiritus.⁹⁶ From an “old Kongo” in Cuba, Ortiz learned that: “the election of the king was made every four years in a meeting held after three days of vigil and ceremonies for San Antonio, *to whom was given offerings of food.*”⁹⁷ In other words, this was not the result of an encounter between the patron saint of Portugal and West Central Africans in Cuba, but an Africanized saint brought from the Kongo-Angola region as an integral part of a living tradition.⁹⁸

The cabildo of San Antonio Tata Makuende in Quiebra Hacha, Havana Province, continues to be maintained within an extended family; before 1959 the annual celebrations were regional: each June 13, San Antonio's day, devotees came from throughout the region to the community-built “church” where the Angolan-derived Kinfuiti friction drum was played through the night with dance and chants.⁹⁹

At 80 years of age, Cesáreo Cuesta remembered his grandmother, who was responsible for the kinfuiti tradition:

My grandmother Ma Gertrudis was from Kongo-Angola; she came from Africa like my grandfather. She had her “inheritance,” she was prepared in Africa as a Tata Nkisi [ritual specialist]. Out back is a cave where it is said the maroons hid. My grandmother told me of them; sometimes their abuse [on plantations] was too great and they left for the woods. When abolition arrived, they came back and brought what they found in the cave: San Antonio. According to my grandmother, San Antonio came from Africa; he appeared in a cave in the woods near the Asunción sugar mill. In Kongo he is called “Tata makuénde yaya.” He is owner of the crossroads; without this saint nothing gets done.¹⁰⁰

A younger member of the extended family described San Antonio to me as “a black saint; the kinfuiti drums are played because this is what pleases him most.”¹⁰¹

MULTIPLE HOMELANDS

Ritual oaths uttered by American peoples tie them to places and mythic origins in Africa. These ties often complement identification with a contemporary nation-state of residence. The phenomenon of complementary identities means that we can be Cuban [or Brazilian, Haitian, North American, Trinidadian] and African, and can have ties to Calabar, Kongo, Òyó and Seville, London, and Paris; our lives are enriched by enjoying our diverse sources.

Whereas state nationalism demands that we choose a single identity, political loyalty, and race—for example on ID cards—African-derived traditions allow us to be inclusive, affirming our cultural and genetic diversity. Ubiquitous practices of multiple identities are not unique to the Americas; they also may have been transmitted from African sources. Olabiyi Yai suggests American continuities regarding African concepts of nationhood, that in fact predate modern European nationalism: “What matters in the definition of nation in Africa and in the African Diaspora is not so much the place where one was born (Latin: *natus*, the root of nation). It is rather the set of values this place stands for, or the set of values invested in it by conscious agents. This is why Africans may claim or desire several nations without any sense of contradiction.”¹⁰² That is, there is no idea of a single identity that Africans cling to; instead, there are multiple loyalties resulting from the place of birth, a local political power, and ritual practices with their attendant mythologies.

Yai argues that “the Orisha and Vodun communities have, as a rule, consistently functioned as, in today’s parlance, *forces of transnational civil society*, countering the hegemonic state policies that tended to promote unconditional allegiance to one state.” Since many West African towns “would have no fewer than ten Orishas or Vodun, half of which may not have originally belonged to the area . . . it is little surprise that many citizens were ‘plurinational,’ which softened their unconditional allegiance to particular states. . . . [This] defining trait of the concept and practice of nation in West Africa [was] retained, sometimes reinforced, in the Americas.”

¹⁰³

In Cuba it is common to practice several traditions at once. Each offers special access to the divine; each implicitly requires initiates to maintain ritual links with historical and mythological African places. An initiate need not have direct African heritage, nor is their specific genetic ancestry important: “re-birth” through initiation into ritual lineages from these regions provides members with access to African-centered spirituality. Olabiyi Yai articulates a precedent for this in an ear-

lier African phenomenon of double or multiple religious and cultural loyalties spanning across geopolitical entities.

As is well known, an Orisha or a Vodun, the spiritual beings of the Yorubá and Fon people, has a mythical or an historical home. For example, Ire is Ogun's home, Oya hails from Ira, and Kétu is Eshu's home. It was, and still is, mandatory for the devotees of an Orisha or Vodun to learn the language, the history, the cuisine, and other mores of the birthplace of their respective spiritual beings and, indeed, to regard themselves as citizens of that city-nation. This sacred rule applies to devotees irrespective of their place of birth or residence. For example, a Shango devotee from Kétu will learn and speak the Eyò language of Òyó because Shango hails from Òyó, and the devotee regards him- or herself as an Òyó citizen.¹⁰⁴

In Africa, deeply held identity markers and loyalties do not merely cross local geopolitical regions, but also cross the Atlantic ocean to the Americas.

THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN THE PRESERVATION OF IDENTITY

*“Botón grinerón awana luma moropó. My body is from here, Cuba.
My head, my spirit is from there, Guinea.”*

Abakuá saying¹⁰⁵

The contemporary implications of the transfer of African cultures to the Americas are vast. They suggest the need for a far greater understanding of African history, as well as African-derived oral history, for scholars of American societies.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, which theoretically ignore the ethnic background of those who join, Abakuá, Yorùbá-derived, and Kongo ritual traditions instill a religious identity tied to a specific African-based ethnic homeland.¹⁰⁶ Participating in these lineages as a member requires effort and learning; this is how these traditions are maintained. The goal is not eventual migration “back to Africa.” Instead, it is to create and strengthen local ties and allegiances which provide alternate identifications to those offered by the dominant forces of nation states. Ironically, because of its historical role in Cuba and unique costumes, the Abakuá brotherhood has become—in the abstract—a symbol of the nation, even while Abakuá groups reject total allegiance to the state. Abakuá groups consider themselves sovereign lands (*tierras*) whose primary allegiance is to Èkue, the ritual epicenter of the brotherhood. Lydia Cabrera documented an Abakuá elder as saying: “An Abakuá potencia is this, the government of the republic, a small state, which should be a model. This is why we impose order in our ceremonies. And to have order, we admit only serious and dignified men.”¹⁰⁷ Abakuá are iconic for extolling the idea and practice of

brotherhood, a ritual union that surpasses patriotism to a state, one that no regime has been able to break. At the neighborhood level, Abakuá command respect; as Cuellar-Vizcaino writes: “Nobody plays with the family of the monina [initiate], with the manhood of the monina, with the health of the monina, with the liberty of the monina.”¹⁰⁸ Because of their history and convictions, Abakuá evokes the idea of an indomitable spirit among the Cuban population.

In another example, the Egúngún tradition of ancestor veneration was reestablished in Itaparica, Brazil between 1820 and 1835, where it continues in the present with annual ceremonies including performances by masqueraders representing the ancestors. Scholars Dos Santos and Dos Santos identify the function of this society as “making immortality, a basic concept of Yorùbá philosophy, incontestable and unchallengeable.”¹⁰⁹

In a context in which African histories and philosophies rarely form part of educational curricula, participating in African-derived religions is a method of maintaining historical counternarratives in which the present generation has direct links to an African past. These links were in part inspired by named ancestors who resisted assimilation and contributed to their ritual lineages. By creating community and an idealized sense of unity, contemporary initiates resist the dehumanizing effects of continuing social inequalities. Since epics of the descendants of Africans have not been included in official histories, many historical narratives are maintained within families and ritual lineages. Conserving cultural inheritance is a form of historical survival. Because these inheritances have spiritual insights useful to the human experience, people of all heritages participate in them. Philosophical traditions of classical African civilizations were foundational to emerging societies in the Americas. Their continuing expansion indicates that their relevance and their perpetuation will only increase within the prevailing conditions.

NOTES

Acknowledgments: Kólá Abimbólá, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, William Leslie Balan-Gaubert, Jeremy Brecher, Jill Cutler, C. Daniel Dawson, Ogduardo “Román” Díaz, Henry J. Drewal, Michael Gomez, Joseph Inikori, Felix “Pupi” Insua, Victor Manfredi, Helen H. Tanner, Robert F. Thompson, John Thornton, as well as several Abakuá leaders who wish to remain anonymous. This essay is dedicated to Rogelio Martínez-Furé.

1. Derek Walcott, “The Schooner *Flight*,” *Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986).

2. Lucía Dominga Molina and Mario Luis López, “Afro-Argentines: ‘Forgotten’ and ‘Disappeared’—Yet Still Present,” in Sheila Walker, ed., *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 332–47. Citation from p. 338. See also George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), pp. 151–54.

3. Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines*, p. 155.

4. Philip A. Howard, "Creolization and Integration: The Development of a Political Culture among the Pan-Afro-Cuban Benevolent Societies, 1878–1985," in Darlene C. Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 134–58. Citation from p. 135.

5. See Fannie Theresa Rushing, "Afro-Cuban Social Organization and Identity in a Colonial Slave Society, 1800–1888," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review*, 11, 2 (Spring 2002): 177–201.

6. Fernando Ortiz, "Los cabildos afro-cubanos," *Ensayos etnográficos* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1984), pp. 11–40. Citation from p. 28. Originally published in *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, 16, 1 (Jan-Feb 1921). Emphasis in original.

7. Luc de Heusch, "Kongo in Haiti: A New Approach to Religious Syncretism," *Man*. Royal Anthropological Institute, 24, 2 (June 1989): 290–303. Citation from p. 301.

8. Keith Nicklin, "Un emblème Ejagham de la société Ekpe/An Ejagham Emblem of the Ekpe Society," *Art Tribal* (Bulletin annuel publié par l'Association des Amis du Musée Barbier-Muller, 1991): 3–18. References from pp. 10, 14.

9. Historian Paul Lovejoy and others have argued that "The overwhelming majority of slaves from the Bight of Biafra were Igbo"; see Paul Lovejoy, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of African History* 30, 3 (1989): 365–94. Citation from p. 375. See also David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 60–65.

Contrary to the findings of Cuban scholars Ortiz and Cabrera, Myers asserts that "in Cuba, these enslaved people reconstructed aspects of their language (Ibo) and religious rituals in Abakuás" and that "Abakuás preserve . . . narratives in the Ibo language." Aaron Myers, "Abakuás, all-male secret societies created by African slaves living in Cuba during the mid-nineteenth century," in K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates, Jr., eds., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), p. 2.

Evidence for the Èfik and Efut basis of the Abakuá is widely documented, however, in Abakuá oral traditions, as well as by comparisons of Abakuá and Èfik Èkpè language and cultural styles. See Ivor Miller, "Cuban Abakuá Chants: Examining New Evidence for the African Diaspora," *African Studies Review*, 47, 2 (September 2004).

10. See Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition*, 18, 1 (April 1997), pp. 122–45.

11. Teodoro Díaz Fabelo, *Olorun* (La Habana: Departamento de folklore del teatro nacional de Cuba, 1960).

12. Max Weber, "Ethnic Groups," in Werner Sollors, ed., *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 52–66. Citation from p. 57. Original essay from 1922.

13. Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, "Marcas Tribales de los Esclavos en Cuba," *Etnología y folklore*, 8 (Julio-diciembre 1969): 65–78. Citation from pp. 71–72.

14. Ivor Miller, "A Secret Society Goes Public: The Relationship Between Abakuá and Cuban Popular Culture," *African Studies Review*, 43, 1 (April 2000): pp. 161–88.

15. This chant, as well as other rhythms and phrases performed during public segments of Abakuá ceremonies, is part of the 1920s composition "Criolla Carabali." Written by Guillermo Castillo, recorded May 29, 1928, New York, *Sexteto Habanero 1926–1931* (Harlequin HQ CD 53, England, 1995).

16. Irene Wright, *Cuba* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1910), pp. 149–50.

17. Stephan Palmié, "Ethnogenetic Processes and Cultural Transfer in Afro-American Slave Populations," in W. Binder, ed., *Slavery in the Americas*. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), pp. 337–63. Citation from p. 356.

18. See Wáńdè Abimbólá and Ivor Miller, *Ifá Will Mend Our Broken World: Thoughts on Yorùbá Culture in West Africa and the Diaspora* (Roxbury, Mass: AIM Books, 1997), p. 147.

19. John Mason, *Orin Òrìṣà: Songs for Selected Heads* (Brooklyn, NY: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1992), p. 336.
20. See Gary Edwards and John Mason, *Black Gods—Orisa Studies in the New World* (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1985); Miguel Ramos, “The Empire Beats On: Oyo, Batá Drums, and Hegemony in Nineteenth Century Cuba” (Masters thesis, Florida International University, 2000).
21. See Miller “Cuban Abakuá Chants”; Abímbólá and Miller, *Ifá Will Mend*.
22. See Miller, “Cuban Abakuá Chants.” Africanist sources document “Ekuritonko” as one of the indigenous names for Creek Town, Calabar; Umon [Umóni] is a village on the Cross River north of Calabar. G. I. Jones, “The Political Organization of Old Calabar,” in Daryll Forde, ed., *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: International African Institute, 1956), pp. 116–57. Citation from p. 119; Donald C. Simmons, “Notes on the Diary [of Antera Duke],” *ibid.*, pp. 66–78. Citation from p. 72, note 45.
23. José Jorge de Carvalho and Rita Segato, *Shango Cult in Recife, Brazil* (Caracas, Venezuela: Fundef, Conac, Oas, 1992), p. 11.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
25. Lydia Cabrera, “Refranes Abakuá,” *La Enciclopedia de Cuba*, Tomo 6. (San Juan-Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1974), pp. 375–78. Citation from p. 376.
26. Rogelio Martínez-Furé, Public lecture at UNEAC. Havana, Cuba. January 2002.
27. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Looking Extremely Backwards: Why the Enlightenment Will Only Lead Us into Darkness,” in *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp. 103–24. Citation from pp. 106–08.
28. William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an exploring voyage up the Rivers Kwo’ra and Bi’nie (commonly known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854* (London, 1856 [1966 reprint]), p. 369. Commander William B. Baikie (1825–1864), who achieved the rank of British Consul, is described as an “explorer and philologist whose travels into Nigeria helped open up the country to British trade”; see *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* 2003. Baikie is regarded as the founder of Lokoja, Nigeria at the junction of the Niger and Benue rivers, where “he acted not merely as ruler, but also as physician, teacher and priest”; see *1911 Encyclopedia Online* 2003.
29. Manuel Cuellar-Vizcaino, *Unas Cuantas Verdades* (La Habana: Club Atenas, 1948), p. 52.
30. E. Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 296.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
32. José Antonio Almeida “Lokanfú,” Conversation with the author in Chicago, September 5, 2003. Almeida is the *babalorixá* (leader) of Ilé Axé Injino Ilú Orossi of Bahia, Brazil.
33. Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique, et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 3 vols. (Paris: Société de l’histoire des colonies françaises, 1958. 1797–98, reprint ed.), p. 93. Cited in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Motion in the System: Coffee, Color, and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue,” *Review* 3 (Winter 1982): pp. 331–88. Citation from p. 355.
34. John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*. 2nd ed., revised (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970 [original 1956]), p. 22. This quote refers to the spirituality of Christopher (“Christ-bearer”) Columbus and that of his age—based upon eschatological prophecies—as inspirations for his voyages. Pauline Moffitt Watts demonstrated “Columbus’s preoccupation with the final conversion of all races on the eve of the end of the world.” Pauline Moffitt Watts, “Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus’s ‘Enterprise of the Indies,’” *The American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 73–102. Citation from p. 93.
- Christian conversions are implicit in the use of Columbia as Columbus inspired place names in the U.S. Furthermore, Professor Kauffman writes: “From the late nineteenth century on, the Knights

of Columbus have extolled the significance of their patron's name, 'Christbearing Dove,' in terms of the Providential role assigned to him in the Christianization of 'the Indies.'" Christopher J. Kauffman, *Faith and Fraternalism: the History of the Knights of Columbus*, Revised Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992 [original 1982]), p. xvii.

35. Cf. *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Phillip Noyce, director. Australian Film Finance Corporation Limited, 2002.

36. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 336.

37. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [reprint of 1984 original]), p. 244. For the perspectives of those who lived the process of the assimilation campaigns, see K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: the Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Brenda Childs, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

38. E. Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1985/1974), p. 32.

39. "Wándé Abimbólá, "Ifá Divination Poetry and the Coming of Islam to Yorubaland: A Preliminary Investigation," *Pan-African Journal*, 4, 4 (Fall 1971): 440–54. Citation from p. 445.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

41. Blas Roca, "La lucha ideológica contra las sectas religiosas," *Cuba socialista* (junio 1963): 28–41. Citation from p. 31.

42. Luis Salinas-Martínez, Ekueñón of Efi Abarako Nankabia. Interviews with Ivor Miller and Michel Díaz, October 21 and December 26, in the home of Mr. Salinas (1919–1995), La Habana Vieja, 1994.

43. "La importancia de una Potencia depende del número de sus iniciados y de la "ramas" o nuevas agrupaciones que hayan surgido de ella." Lydia Cabrera, "Ritual y símbolos de la iniciación en la Sociedad Secreta Abakuá," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 58 (Paris, 1969): 139–71. Citation from p. 140.

44. Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York: A. Knopf, 1995), p. 14.

45. Sería ocioso que señaláramos, por ser bien sabidas, las rebeliones y resistencias que los negros y mulatos realizaron en Cuba para romper sus cadenas y cepos, y ganar las libertades ciudadanas. Bastara citar como héroes históricos al Moreno Aponte y al pardo Maceo. Sin la liberación de los esclavos y sin la cooperación de los negros, el pueblo cubano, del cual aquellos formaban parte integrante, no habría podido alcanzar su independencia" Fernando Ortiz, "Los negros "Matiabos" de Cuba," *Bohemia* 47, 37 (September 11, 1955): 8–9, 120–121, 130. Citation from p. 8.

46. Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad*, Vol IX (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1983), p. 34.

47. The pre-colonial Ògbóni initiation society was a powerful religious brotherhood/sisterhood with political dimensions that brought together powerful men and women in each Yorùbá town, under the protection of secrecy, to venerate the earth in its aspect of the universal mother (Cf. R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yorùbá* (London: University of London Press, 1958), p. 484; "Wándé Abimbólá, *Ifá Divination Poetry* (New York: NOK, 1977), p. 39; H. J. Drewal, J. Pemberton, and R. Abiodun, *Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, ed. Allen Wardwell (New York: Center for African Art, 1989), p. 136, f.n. 242; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology, and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969 [Reprint from the 1926 original]), p. 762; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1984), p. 74.

48. José Luciano Franco, "La conspiración de Aponte, 1812," in J. L. Franco, ed., *Ensayos históricos*. (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), pp. 125–90. Citation from pp.148–49.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
51. Fernando Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*, vol. 5. (La Habana: Cárdenas y Cía, 1955), p. 310.
52. Franco, "La conspiración de Aponte," p. 179.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
55. Jorge Castellanos and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura afrocubana, 1 (El negro en Cuba, 1492–1844)* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1988), pp. 215–17.
56. Franco, "La conspiración de Aponte," p. 184.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
58. Briyumba = territory or a *prenda* from the region of Kongo Luango; [N]zámbe = God; Ngó = leopard. This *nkisi/prenda* originated in Oriente, but from 1895–98, during the invasion from Oriente to the Occident of the island, was brought to Matanzas in a saddle bag. This portable *nkisi*, used to protect the warriors, was later brought to Regla, Havana.
- This legend of General Banderas is retold in contemporary Little Havana, Miami, where, in 1994, a Cuban *santero* and *ngangulero* told me that Banderas's Palo Monte *prenda* was maintained by a Cuban-Kongo lineage in Miami. This legend is contested by *nganguleros* living on the island, who insist the *prenda* is still in Cuba.
59. *Bakonfula*, interpreted as "the one who lights the gunpowder," derives from Portuguese *polvora*, transformed to *fula*. Thanks to C. Daniel Dawson.
60. One of the chants that speaks of Banderas's *nkisi* is "*Briyumba Zámbe Ndio, Briyumba Ngo La Habana*." Information regarding Banderas and Maceo and the Kongo *nkisi* came from many leading practitioners, particularly Sr. Ricardo Montabán Vega, a Palo Monte initiate since age seven. When I spoke with him, he had been a *Tata Nkisi* (ritual leader) for twenty-seven years. An image of Antonio Maceo was placed upon his Palo altar in San Miguel de Padrón, Havana. Ricardo Montabán Vega, Conversation with the author in San Miguel de Padrón, Cuba, 1998.
61. See Fernando Ortiz, "La secta conga de los 'Matiabos' de Cuba," *Libro Jubilar de Alfonso Reyes* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, dirección general de difusión cultural, 1956), pp. 309–25.
62. Dr. Fu-Kiau Bunseki, Letter to the author, June 27, 2000. "mám̀b̀i; evil (things)"; see also Harold W. Fehderau, *Dictionnaire Kituba (kikongo ya leta)–Anglais–français et Vocabulaire Français–Kituba* (Kinshasa: Editions Cedi, 1992), p. 127.
63. Roberto Fernández-Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, Trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 16.
64. "los matiabos eran unos brujos o secta de brujos bantús, congos o acaso más precisamente de Angola." Ortiz, "Los negros 'Matiabos,'" p. 130.
65. Heli Chatelain, *Folk-tales of Angola. Fifty Tales, with Ki-Mbundu Text, Literal English Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, vol. 1 (Boston: Moughton, Mifflin & Co., 1894), p. 258, n. 69.
66. "Por matiabos o matiaberos se entendían ciertos cimarrones apalencados y belicosos, que durante la Guerra de independencia cubana estuvieron muy en contacto con las fuerzas mambisas, en Oriente, participando a veces a su lado en la contienda." Ortiz, "Los negros 'Matiabos,'" p. 9.
67. "Así como los blancos en sus guerras evocaban al Apóstol Santiago y hasta a la Santísima Virgen María . . . así los negros africanos invocaban a Ogún o a Nsambi Mpungo; y se valían de sus conjuros y ritos como los cristianos de sus rogativas y bendiciones." Ortiz, "Los negros 'Matiabos,'" p. 9.
68. "En Cuba se aplicó así-mismo la voz 'matiabo' a ciertos brujos o 'brujeros' congos, que hoy más propiamente decimos 'tata ngangas' con vocablos congos, o 'nganguleros' con la raíz bantú 'nganga.'" Ortiz, "Los negros 'Matiabos,'" p. 121.

69. Linda Heywood, "Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth-Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Cultures," in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 91–113. Citation from pp. 99, 111.

70. General Ignacio Agramonte, born 1841 in Camagüey, was the leader of the independence struggles in that region, famous for his military strategies. He died in battle in 1873. *Cuba en la mano: enciclopedia popular ilustrada*, Esteban Roldán-Oliarte, ed. (La Habana: Imprenta Ucar, García y Cía, 1940), p. 791.

71. "El Dr. Montalvo . . . habló del culto fetichico [sic, fetichero], que se observó durante la insurrección con el ídolo matiábulo que tuvo grandes sectarios y se le atribuyó un extraordinario poder sobrenatural. Consistió éste, en una grande figura humana toscamente esculpida, con ojos de color rojo, cuyo dibujo publicó en Madrid la "Ilustración española y americana. . ."

El Sr. Varona agregó que no solamente negros sino que muchos blancos formaron parte de los llamados matiábulos que se creían libres de la muerte, pudiendo su virtud de la protección de sus días afrontar los mayores peligros, seguros de que saldrían siempre ilesos, y que fue necesaria toda la gran energía del general Agramonte para destruir semejante fetichismo, probando á los adeptos de un modo práctico y fuera de duda que estaban expuestos á la muerte como los demás.

El Dr. Montané cree que se deben dar las gracias al Sr. Varona por haber suscitado el debate sobre una cuestión tan interesante. Es tiempo todavía de recoger esas costumbres locales que la tradición parece referir á la raza negra y que están expuestas á desaparecer con ella. Pero, por desgracia, no sucederá eso pues esas costumbres se han extendido á las razas que pueblan esta Isla.

¡Si! la raza blanca tiene también sus fetiches!" *Actas: sociedad antropológica de la isla de Cuba*, Comisión nacional cubana de la UNESCO. Compilación, prólogo e índices por Manuel Rivero de la Calle (La Habana: ECAG, 1966), pp. 91–92.

72. As recorded on video cassette during my field research in Los Sitios, Havana (2/27/1996), in the home of "Domingo."

73. *Celina González, ¡Que Vivi Changó!* (New York: Qbadisc QB 9004).

74. See Ivor Miller, "Jesús Pérez and the transculturation of the Cuban batá drum," *Dialogo*, 7 (Center for Latino Research, DePaul University, Spring 2003): 70–74.

75. Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, "Oyo Ruins of NW Yorùbáland, Nigeria," *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 17 (1990): 367–73; Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, "Samuel Johnson, Yorùbá Origins and Archaeology," in Toyin Falola, ed., *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch: Samuel Johnson and the Yorùbá People* (African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993), pp. 105–14. Citation from p. 107.

After Old Òyó was "sacked by the Fulani and abandoned for the last time, before the 1840s," Kòso, "the compound where the political head of the Şàngó cult lives" was rebuilt in the modern city of Òyó; see Agbaje, "Oyo Ruins," p. 367; Wándé Abimbólá, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, Nigeria, 1976), p. 247; Abimbólá, *Ifa Divination Poetry*, p. 159.

76. Félix Chapottín, "Yo sí como candela," Composed by F. Chapottín, *Chapottín su conjunto* (LP Puchito SP 107; reissued as Antilla CD 107, recorded in the 1950s).

Like the great majority of Cuban popular musicians, famed trumpeter Félix Chapottín (1907–1983) was an initiate of African-derived traditions, being a member of the Abakuá group Ikanfioró Nankúko (founded 1873 in Havana); "Ikan" meaning "fire," whose mythic homeland was a volcano in the Cross River/Cameroon region. His brother Miguel, a founder of rumba group Yorùbá Andabo, is an initiate of Changó.

77. Samuel Feijóo, "Changó y su padre," *El negro en la literatura folklórica cubana*, 2nd ed. (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1987), pp. 240–41.

78. See the English-language documentary by Gloria Rolando, *The Eyes of the Rainbow: Assata Shakur and Oya* (Havana: Imágenes del Caribe, 1997).

79. Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte* (Miami: Colección del Chicherekú, 1954 [1992 reprint]), p. 27; Lydia

Cabrera, *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín*, Fotografías de Josefina Tarafa, 2da edición (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1993), pp. 7, 9–11.

80. “La presencia de las tiernas tatas negras en los hogares puede explicar que aunque no sea negro el tronco del árbol genealógico de todos nuestros compatriotas, se advierta en su temperamento rasgos que son africanos. Efecto de una convivencia de siglos con los negros . . . Los negros estuvieron demasiado integrados en la sociedad cubana para que no se produjese . . . ese fenómeno de mestizaje psíquico.” Lidia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, Iyalorichas y Olorichas* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1996. [original Madrid 1974]), p. 239.

81. “Los cuentos africanos se ignoran totalmente en Cuba . . . Quisiéramos que estas líneas fueran una invitación a los miles de cubanos capaces de colaborar en este fácil empeño de cultura nacional, cual es el de recoger los cuentos con que las morenas viejecitas entretuvieron como madres a los negritos, o como crianderas o manejadoras a los blanquitos. . . . recoger las palabras o frases en . . . *lenguas o cánticos* africanos que acompañan a casi todos esos cuentos; y una vez redactado, remítalo a quien suscribe.” Fernando Ortiz, “Cuentos Afrocubanos,” *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, IV, 2 (April–June 1929): 97–112. Citation from pp. 97–99.

82. Luis Dorin. Conversation with this local cultural historian and leader of a Lukumí dance troupe in Orozco, Havana Province, Cuba. December 1999.

83. *Cuba en la mano*, p. 1201.

84. Ortiz, *Los instrumentos*, p. 151.

85. Cuellar-Vizcaino, *Unas Cuantas Verdades*, p. 55.

86. “yo tengo como dos mil y pico de ahijado . . . Te voy a hablar franqueza; antes, ninguna gente de ésta, de ricos de dinero, hacía nada si no lo hacía al pie del santo. Todo son ahijados míos. Tó esa gente. Casanova era el rey de Cuba. Santero bravo. Era blanco y era dueño de ingenio. El tambor de Casanova ¡costaba! Daba fiestas todos los meses. Él se gastaba de 12,000 a 13,000 pesos en la fiesta de Changó.” William Luis and Julia Cuervo Hewitt, “Santos y Santería: Conversación con Arcadio, santero de Guanabacoa,” *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 6 (January 1987): 9–17. Citation from pp. 10–11.

87. Heusch, “Kongo in Haiti,” p. 302.

88. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8.

89. Heusch, “Kongo in Haiti,” p. 293.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 293–94.

91. “El rey congo vestía casaca y pantalones, sombrero de dos puntas, bastón borlado, etc. Todos esos atributos de origen europeo y, además, un manto real y un cetro, eran propios del rey congo africano.” Ortiz, “Los cabildos afro-cubanos,” p. 12.

92. Elizabeth W. Kiddy, “Who is the King of Congo? A New Look at African and Afro-Brazilian Kings in Brazil,” in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 153–82. Citation from pp. 173, 182.

93. Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1985), p. 208.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

95. John Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 106–13; John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 203–14.

96. See *Cantos de congos y paleros*, Grabaciones in situ pertenecientes a la colección del Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Música Cubana (La Habana: Artex, 1994).

97. “La elección del rey (*salí*) se hacía por cuatro años en un ajunta celebrada después de tres días de vela y ceremonias a san Antonio, al cual *le daban comida*.” Ortiz, “Los cabildos afro-cubanos,” p. 13. Italics original.

98. Antony of Padua (1195–1231) was born in Lisboa, Portugal. His feast day is June 13. *Dictionary of Saints* (London: Brockhampton Press, 1996), p. 22.

99. Friction is produced in the Cuban Kinfuiti with a bamboo shoot and rope manipulated on the underside of the drum head, inside the drum. This technique is similar to that used in the Kwika (also Cuica or Puita) friction drum used in Brazilian carnival, also of Kongo/Angolan origin. See Edgard Rocca, *Ritmos brasileiros e seus instrumentos de percussão* (Rio de Janeiro: Escola Brasileira de Musica, 1986), p. 26; Gerhard Kubik, “Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brasil,” *Estudios de Antropologia Cultural*, 10 (Lisboa, 1979): 22–24.

100. “Mi abuela Ma Gertrudis era Kongo-Angola; vino de África al igual que mi abuelo. Ella tenía su prenda, era Tata Nkisi y allí la prepararon. Allí atrás hay una cueva donde dicen que los cimarrones se metían. Mi abuela me hablaba de ellos; algunas veces eran demasiado los golpes que le daban y cogían el monte. Cuando vino la libertad de los esclavos ellos vinieron y trajeron lo que se encontraron en la cueva, a San Antonio. Según dice mi abuela San Antonio vino de África, pareció en una cueva en el monte por el ingenio Asunción. él se llama en congo: Tata makuende yaya. Es Eleguá porque es el dueño de los caminos sin ese santo no hay nada.” Cesáreo Cuesta, Interview with the author, Guanajay, Cuba, August 26, 2000. Sr. Cuesta was born in 1920 into a Kongo-derived lineage.

101. Lázara Ester Robaina-López, Interview with the author. Quebra Hacha, Provincia de la Habana, June 12, 2000. Ms. Robaina is a member of the family responsible for the kinfuiti tradition of San Antonio.

102. Olabiyi Yai, “African Diaspora Concepts and Practice of the Nation and Their Implications in the Modern World,” in Sheila Walker, ed., *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 244–55. Citation from p. 252.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 248. Emphasis in original.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

105. Lydia Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada de los Ñañigos* (Miami: Colección del Chicherekú en el exilio, 1988), p. 128.

106. Christianity and Islam have theoretically had the effect of deracinating their adherents, or of severing their roots as they join a “universal family.” In rare cases, non-Semitic converts to these religions start behaving as if they had ancestors in the Middle East, for example the so-called “Inca Israeli-Jews,” who migrated from Peru to Israel after “submitting to the rule of Orthodox Judaism.” See David Landy, “90 Inca Israeli-Jews: Recruiting for Israel’s Demographic War,” *Race & Class*, 44, 4 (April, 2003): 1–18.

In the Americas, Christianity has historically marginalized African and American Indian adherents, leading to the formation of African American and Native American churches, for example.

107. “una potencia ñañiga es eso, el gobierno de la República, un estado en chiquito, que debe ser un modelo. Por esto se impone el orden en nuestro baroco. Y para que puede haber orden, solo admitimos hombres serios y dignos.” Cabrera, *El Monte*, p. 201.

108. Manuel Cuellar-Vizcaino, “Mensaje secreto,” Aire Libre column, *Tiempo* periodico (La Habana: Dec. 21, 1956), 1 page.

109. Juana Elbein Dos Santos and Deoscoredes M. Dos Santos, “Ancestor Worship in Bahia: The Égun-Cult,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 58 (1969): 79–108. Citation from p. 102.