Ifá Tradicional Nigeriano: The Polemics Of “re-Yorubized” Spirituality In Cuban Sound

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Ifá Tradicional Nigeriano: The Polemics Of “re-Yorubized” Spirituality In Cuban Sound

Abstract
In Cuba, emergent circulations between Cuba and contemporary Yoruba land, Nigeria are transforming the landscape of gender, belief, and state religious policy. This project examines this reencounter through the lens of the controversial Yorubization – or re-Yorubization – of the religions of Regla de Ocha, also known as Santeria, and Ifá. Through an ethnography of affective belonging and emancipatory desire in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and the provinces of Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, and Guantánamo, this work examines how “African Traditionalists” mobilize select aspects of the Yoruba Traditional Religion (YTR) and Yoruba language of Nigeria in order to circumvent Cuban prohibitions regarding gender and carve out novel spaces of religious autonomy and authority. Through a critical examination of the intersections of aurality and predications of Africanity in Nigerian-style Ifá, this work interrogates the ways in which women and men craft sound and listening in order to reshape gendered subjectivities and reconstitute the boundaries of Ifá worship in Cuba. In the realm of gender, which constitutes the most polemical break between Nigerian-style Ifá and Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá, women have carved out access to the previously-prohibited tambores de aáa, or consecrated batá drum set. Additionally, women break the gendered boundaries and taboos against female participation in Ifá by “speaking Ifá” as iyin Ifá, or divining priestesses. In the Ifé-rooted Aworeni lineage in Havana, the “Ifé of Cuba” and other babalówos (priests) mobilize the recently-imported dundún “talking drums” of Yoruba land as a means to “re-Yorubize” Cuban Ifá and to promote the spread of Nigerian-rooted institutions in Cuba. In eastern Baracoa and western Havana, all-male Egun Egungun masquerade is additionally gaining prominence as a Yoruba-inspired means of worshiping and "working with" the dead. This project interrogates how various forms of engagement with sound and listening inform – and, often, constitute – central practices of assertion for practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá in Cuba. In a larger sense, this project points to the ongoing ways in which the contemporary African continent continues to influence and transform the landscape of gender and belief in contemporary Cuba.

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IFÁ TRADICIONAL NIGERIANO: THE POLEMICS OF “RE-YORUBIZED” SPIRITUALITY IN CUBAN SOUND

Ruth Meadows

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IFÁ TRADICIONAL NIGERIANO: THE POLEMICS OF “RE-YORUBIZED” SPIRITUALITY IN CUBAN SOUND

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ABSTRACT

_IFÁ TRADICIONAL NIGERIANO: THE POLEMICS OF “RE-YORUBIZED” SPIRITUALITY IN CUBAN SOUND_

Ruth Meadows

Timothy Rommen

In Cuba, emergent circulations between Cuba and contemporary Yorùbáland, Nigeria are transforming the landscape of gender, belief, and state religious policy. This project examines this reencounter through the lens of the controversial Yorubization – or re-Yorubization – of the religions of Regla de Ocha, also known as Santeria, and Ifá. Through an ethnography of affective belonging and emancipatory desire in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and the provinces of Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, and Guantánamo, this work examines how “African Traditionalists” mobilize select aspects of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) and Yorùbá language of Nigeria in order to circumvent Cuban prohibitions regarding gender and carve out novel spaces of religious autonomy and authority. Through a critical examination of the intersections of aurality and predications of Africanity in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, this work interrogates the ways in which women and men craft sound and listening in order to reshape gendered subjectivities and reconstitute the boundaries of Òrìṣà worship in Cuba. In the realm of gender, which constitutes the most polemical break between Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá, women have carved out access to the previously-prohibited _tambores de aña_, or consecrated batá drum set. Additionally, women break the gendered boundaries and taboos against female participation in Ifá by "speaking Ifá" as
Ìyánífá, or divining priestesses. In the Ilé-Ifé-rooted Aworeni lineage in Havana, the “Àràbà of Cuba” and other babaláwos (priests) mobilize the recently-imported dundún "talking drums" of Yorùbáland as a means to “re-Yorubize” Cuban Ifá and to promote the spread of Nigerian-rooted institutions in Cuba. In eastern Baracoa and western Havana, all-male Egúngún masquerade is additionally gaining prominence as a Yorùbá-inspired means of worshiping and "working with" the dead. This project interrogates how various forms of engagement with sound and listening inform – and, often, constitute – central practices of assertion for practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba. In a larger sense, this project points to the ongoing ways in which the contemporary African continent continues to influence and transform the landscape of gender and belief in contemporary Cuba.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

IFÁ TRADICIONAL NIGERIANO: THE POLEMICS OF “RE-YORUBIZED” SPIRITUALITY IN CUBAN SOUND

In July, 2016, I sat in the open-air dining room of African traditionalist babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio’s home in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, facing a table covered with laptops, microphones, cables, flash drives, CDs, and notebooks.1 Adjacent to an outdoor courtyard in the back of the house that provided an intermittent breeze, we – and our electronic equipment – were mercifully spared from direct contact with the sun,

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1 A note here on language and spelling. As Palmié notes (2013), orthographic choice in Afro-Cuban religion is “part and parcel of what one might call ‘linguistic ideologies’” and, as such, can be indicative of the split between Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá and African Traditionalism in authorship choice in Cuba (though these orthographic demarcations are often blurred on both sides of the fence). Thus, orthography often conforms to Lucumi spellings in the case of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá (i.e., babalao, Yoruba, oricha/Ocha) or, more recently, and in preference for the contemporary Yorùbá language in African Traditionalism, conforming to Modern Yorùbá orthography as established by the Nigerian Joint Consultative Committee on Education in 1974 (i.e., babaláwo, Yorùbá, ọrìṣà) (See Joint Consultative Committee on Education, 1974). Given the multiple translations that often take place between Yorùbálánd and the Americas (and between Yorùba, English, and Spanish) before texts arrive in Cuba (detailed below), however, in many cases so-called “Yorùbá” texts in Cuba present words not found in Modern Yorùbá. Additionally, the use of diacritics often doesn’t conform to Modern Yorùbá and, in some cases, African Traditionalists present novel diacritics not encountered in contemporary Yorùbá orthography (i.e., ẹgbẹ [African Traditionalist spelling] instead of ẹgbẹ [Modern Yorùbá]). As an ethnographer, this constellation of competing, overlapping, and novel orthographic choices among practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà presented methodological challenges when it came time to write. In this project, I’ve chosen to uphold orthographic preference according to whether the signified falls within the domain of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá (i.e., babalao [Lucumi]) or African traditionalism (babaláwo [Modern Yorùbá]). However, in specific cases, i.e., the names of temples and lyric texts, I re-produce the language and orthography given to me verbatim. These cases are indicated with [sic], and they present the novel or alternate diacritic choices made by African Traditionalists. Additionally, I pluralize several Yorùbá words with an s (i.e., babaláwo, ẹgbẹs), following their common pluralization in Cuba but breaking the rules of Modern Yorùbá. Finally, I refer to “Yorùbá” lyric texts that may not reflect the accuracies of Modern Yorùbá, but are mobilized as “Yorùbá” by practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà in Cuba (See Chapter 4). A babaláwo/babalao is a priest of Ifá (Yorùba/Lucumi spellings, respectively).
though not from the inescapable and pervasive summer heat. Seated and facing his laptop, Orozco Rubio enthusiastically began playing the final cut of a documentary he had co-written and co-edited that summer with one of his *ahijados*, or spiritual “godchildren”, the young Santiago de Cuba filmmaker Noel Rodríguez Portuondo. Entitled *Iyánifá* [sic]: *The Necessary Evolution*, the documentary opens with a striking scene. In it, a young woman, Yadira Flamand Rodriguez, sits on a tan, palm-frond mat, her legs outstretched on the ground and flanking a carved, circular divination tray made of thick mahogany wood and covered with yellow powder. In her hands, she rubs together a set of sacred *ikines*, or palm-tree nuts, while breathing a prayer intimately through her fingers. On the ground across from her sits her client, the film's director Portuondo, who is dressed casually in dark pants and a light-blue T-shirt, patiently awaiting his divination reading (*dafá*). Suddenly, Rodriguez breaks into powerful song, rubbing the sacred *ikines* together in her palms. Expertly, she lifts as many nuts as she can out of her left hand swiftly with her right, instantaneously registering the number that are left behind in her palm before forcefully bringing her hands – and the sacred *ikines* – back together. The *ikines* strike one another loudly, creating a distinctive, repetitive sound in her palms that punctuates the rich cadence of her voice. The camera traces downwards from the silk ceremonial cap that Rodriguez wears on her head, briefly lingering on a tattoo on her upper arm long enough for the viewer to register its image: a silhouette of palm trees emerging from a three-pronged crown, with the words *Ifá*

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Ìranlówo inked beneath. The camera finally rests on a close-up of Rodriguez’ hands, juxtaposing her hot-pink-painted fingernails with the expert maneuvering of the black, clattering, sacred ikines in her palms. With the middle finger of her right hand, Rodriguez methodically "cuts" the powder of the divining tray in front of her with a series of single and double lines (See Bascom, 1968: 7, 8), gradually forming the distinctive ideogramatic figure of an odu, or divinatory "sign," that forms the basis of her client's reading and the foundation of the divinatory practice of Ifá.

The exquisite details of this enrapturing, opening filmic scene break forcefully with a foundational taboo in the Cuban religions of Regla de Ocha-Ifá: the strict and passionately-enforced prohibition against female initiation into the Ifá priesthood. Through on-screen text, Rodriguez is revealed to be an Ìyánífá, or priestess of the divining practice of Ifá, an extremely controversial and recently-introduced designation in Cuban òrìṣa worship modeled upon the gender norms of female participation in contemporary Yorùbáland, Nigeria. Onscreen, Rodriguez’ commanding use of Ifá’s implements of divination, her forceful and Yorùbá-centric voice, and the striking sound of the sacred ikines crashing between her palms offer powerful aural and visual demonstrations of female presence and authority. For many Cuban viewers, including

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3 Ifá Ìranlówo, founded by Cuban babalao Victor Betancourt Estrada in Havana in 1991 (Martínez Betancourt, 2014), is widely considered to be the first African Traditionalist casa-templo (“house- temple”) ever established in Cuba (Larduet Luaces, 2014). The clip of Yadira Flamean Rodríguez in the documentary Ìyánífá: La necesaria evolución was filmed in the the casa-templo of Ìyánífá Dulce María Rodriguez in Holguín (Égbé Ifá Fermina Gómez atì Èṣù Dina), a temple that constitutes one of the subsidiary temples of Betancourt’s Ifá Ìranlówo lineage located outside of Havana. Significantly, Ìyánífá Dulce María Rodriguez is the only known female rector of any African Traditionalist ìgbé in Cuba, the rest of which are headed by male babaláwos (Martinez Betancourt, pers. comm.).
those who first witnessed the film’s premier at the *Almacén de Imagen* film festival in Camagüey in 2016, these shocking images provide their first glimpse into the controversial gendered practices of the burgeoning "African Traditionalist" religious movement in Cuba. This movement, also known as Nigerian-style Ifá-Ọrìṣa or *Ifá nigeriano*, has grown out of – and broken with – the well-known Cuban religions of Regla de Ocha, also known as Santería, and Ifá, an interlocking and yet divergent branch of divination, since the 1990s.

In this dissertation, I examine the Yorubizing, “African Traditionalist” turn in *Regla de Ocha* (Santería) and *Ifá* and its relationship to gender, emancipatory desire, cultural policy, and belief in contemporary Cuba. During the thirty-two months of ethnographic research that I spent in Cuba between 2014-2016, my primary research questions were as follows: how have emergent ties with the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) and Yorùbá language of contemporary Nigeria enabled new spaces of potentiality for Cuban women and men to transform the landscape of gender and belief in Cuban *Regla de Ocha-Ifá*? In what ways have African traditionalists mobilized select aspects of

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4 Regla de Ocha (“Rule of the Oricha”) is also commonly known as Santería. Ifá forms an interlocking, and yet diverging, branch of oricha worship and divination in Cuba (See Brown, 2003; Holbraad, 2012; Larduet Luaces, 2014; and, for Ifá in contemporary Yorùbáland, Adegbinding, 2014). Due to their ritual and religious overlap, the two are often referred to in Cuba as *El complejo religioso Regla de Ocha-Ifá* (“The Religious Complex Regla de Ocha-Ifá”) (Martinez Betancourt, 2013).

5 Peel usefully problematizes the use of the term “Yorùbá traditional religion” (YTR) to refer to ọrìṣà practices in Yorùbáland, objecting to the “portrayal” of ọrìṣà practices as “a unified and bounded entity, unvarying across space and time” (Peel, 2016: 217). As he notes, “what existed on the ground [in 19th-century “Yorùbáland” (itself an anachronism, See Peel, 2000)], was less a single Yoruba religion than a spectrum of local-cult complexes that varied from town to town and from West to East” (ibid). Furthermore, “the notion of a specifically *Yoruba* religion implies a content that is both common to all Yoruba and distinctive of them,” a position that obfuscates the wide presence of “important Yoruba oriṣa (e.g., Ifa, Ogun, Esu-Elegba)... among neighboring, non-Yoruba
the contemporary Yorùbá Traditional Religion in order to reformulate gender and carve out novel spaces of religious autonomy and authority? And, more specifically, how have various forms of engagement with sound and listening informed – and, at times, constituted – central practices of assertion for practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà?

Through an ethnography of affective belonging and emancipatory desire in urban Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and the provinces of Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, and Guantánamo, I explore the ways in which practitioners of Ifá nigeriano creatively translate and adapt select aspects of the contemporary Yoruba Traditional Religions (YTR) of Nigeria in the service of heterogeneous, and yet overlapping, projects. Through a critical examination of the intersections of aurality (Moreno, 2016; Ochoa Gautier, 2014) and predications of Africanity (Palmié, 2008) in Nigerian-style Ifá-Òrìṣa, I interrogate the ways in which women and men craft sound and language in order to reshape gendered subjectivities, carve out novel spaces for religious autonomy and authority, and reconstitute the boundaries of òrìṣà worship. Additionally, I explore the

peoples” (ibid). This 19th-century plurality, heterogeneity, and porosity among Yorùbá cults and practices additionally speaks to the wide variation among òrìṣà practices and lineages in contemporary, 21st-century Yorùbáland. In this project, I use Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) not to refer to a “unified” or “bounded” entity but as a means to refer to the heterogeneous and plural òrìṣà practices and lineages with which Cuban practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà have begun to engage since the 1980’s and 1990’s. In this work, then, Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) refers specifically to the collective of globalizing and transatlantic Yorùbá lineages – headed by such globally-minded babaláwa-“entrepreneur[s]” (Probst, 2011: 89) as Ifáyémi ElegbubuBon and Ọ̀ṣàlọgbọdé Pópóṣolá (See below) – that have initiated contact with Cuban practitioners in recent decades and spread a varied and heterogeneous array of ritual practices and gendered approaches to òrìṣà and Ifá worship on the island and throughout the Americas. In so doing, my use of the term “Yorùbá Traditional Religion” (YTR) recognizes that a wide array of localized òrìṣà practices and lineages in Yorùbaland do not engage in this transatlantic dialogue, and that the specificity of their practices remain unknown to òrìṣà and Ifá worshippers in Cuba.
ways in which the aural and institutional interventions of African traditionalists challenge
the juridical's boundaries of oricha/oriṣa worship in Cuba’s (post-)Revolutionary,
socialist nation-state, particularly in relation to the legal and religious monopoly of the
state-linked Yorùbá Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC).

In a broader sense, this project points to the ongoing ways in which pan-African
sensibilities continue to shape gender, belief, and cultural and religious policy in Cuba
and the larger Caribbean. The African continent's contemporary – as opposed to historical
– impact on Cuba remains underrepresented in current scholarship. Studies on religion
and music in Cuba – including in anthropology, linguistics, musicology, folklore, and
other fields – overwhelmingly frame the African continent in terms of the past, where
Africa operates as a spatio-temporal, originary chronotope tied to – and frozen in –
Cuba's 19th-century colonial history of slavery (See Guanche, 1983, 1996; Hagedorn,
2001; Holbraad, 2012; James Figarola, 2006; Lachatañeré, 1939, 1942, 1992; López
Valdés, 1985, 1998, 2002; Moore, 1997, 2006; Ochoa, 2010; Ortiz, 1921, 1938, 1952-
1955; Wirtz, 2014). Few studies have addressed the immense impact of the contemporary
African continent in re-shaping religious sensibilities, gender, and cultural and religious
policy in Cuba.6 By mapping the spaces of possibility and practices of potentiality
engendered through recent dialogue with contemporary Africa, this project remedies this
gap by calling attention to the ways in which engagement between historical actors on
both sides of the Atlantic has enabled the reforumulation of religious practice – and its
relationship to the state – in Cuba’s present. Accordingly, this project presents the
relationship between Cuba and the contemporary African continent as a dynamic,

6 For a few examples of those that have, see Beliso De-Jesús, 2015a; Palmié, 2013.
ongoing, and creative one rather than as a static, historical one bound to – and suspended in – Cuba's colonial past.

In Cuba, the “Yorubizing” turn reflects the development of an increasingly polemic rift in contemporary Cuban Regla de Ochá-Ifá practice. At its root, this divide reveals the tension in Regla de Ocha-Ifá’s status as, at once, a uniquely Cuban religious formation with roots in 19th-century Yorùbáland and, simultaneously, as but one variant of òrìṣà worship within a globalized domain of contemporary Yorùbá culture as “world religion,” with its homeland increasingly located in contemporary Nigeria (Olupona and Rey, 2008). In the vying for “global authority” over claims to true African traditionality and fate-changing efficacy (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a), the (re-)“Yorubization” of Afrocuban religious formations in Cuba is taken by many as a potent threat, portending the un-doing of the theological foundations informing the practices, hierarchies and livelihoods of Cuban-style babalaoṣ, Ocha practitioners, and godchildren in Cuba and internationally. Furthermore, in the selectively intimate relation of “Afro-“ “Cuban” “religion” (Palmié, 2013) to the Cuban socialist state, the “yorubizing” turn that looks towards contemporary Nigeria’s Yorùbá religion as an acting model over Cuban Ocha-Ifá is viewed as compromising Regla de Ocha-Ifá’s central status to national culture and

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7 It’s important to note here that Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá constitutes one of the most important “diasporic assemblages” of oricha worship in the world (Delgado, 2009; Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a, 819). Importantly, however, Cuban Ocha and Ifá lineages in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and elsewhere hold their “homeland” as Cuba itself, not contemporary Nigeria (despite the Nigerian roots of Regla de Ocha-Ifá in Cuba’s 19th-century Yoruba slave past). The stakes in this distinction are high: the conception of Cuba as the root of Yoruba oricha traditionality brings religious tourism, increased networks of ahijados (spiritual godchildren) nationally and internationally for Cuban priests and practitioners, and spiritual prestige (Hagedorn, 2014).
heritage, and, crucially, to the draw of religious tourism to the island (Hagedorn, 2014; Rossbach de Olmos, 2007).

Despite attempts to police the boundaries of correct, Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá by such state-linked institutions as the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC) – the institutional arbiter of the true “Yoruba religion” in Cuba and its projection internationally (Hearn, 2008; Larduet Luaces, 2014) – the proliferation of novel ẹgbés, or Ifá divination brother and sisterhoods, dedicated to “Ifá Nigeriano” in very recent years reflects the snowballing growth of the African Traditionalist Movement in Cuba (Mártinez Betancourt, 2014). Significantly, many of these novel ẹgbés are led by young, charismatic leaders who attract young membership, both male and female, and include babalaos who defected their initiatory, Cuban-style casa-templos in favor of the new Africanist Traditionalist Movement. In philosophical, cosmological, and practical terms, these young babalawos (male priests) and Ìyánífá (female priestesses) look to the Yorùbá Religion of contemporary Nigeria – and contemporary Nigerians – as an acting model for religious purity and fate-changing efficacy over traditional Cuban Ocha-Ifá. Following

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8 Villepastour defines “ẹgbé” as “society, fraternity, or age mates,” differentiating it from the ọrìṣà Ègbé, the “Ọrìṣà of heavenly accomplices” (Villepastour, 2015b: 282-83). As she notes, the two terms are related, as “the ọrìṣà Ègbé is an esoteric society” (Villepastour, pers. comm, 2017).

9 A note here on terminology. The African Traditionalist Movement – which looks towards contemporary Yorùbáland as an acting model over Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá – is also interchangeably labeled, in reference to Ifá specifically, “Ifá Nigeriano” (“Nigerian-style Ifá”), “Ifá Africano” (African-style Ifá), “Traditional Nigerian Ifá”, or, more broadly, “African Traditionalism” (tradicionalismo africano) or the “Traditional Yoruba Religion”. This array of related, Afro-centric signifiers stands in contrast to Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, which, by comparison, is variously labeled “Ifá cubano” (Cuban-style Ifá), “Traditional Cuban Ifá”, “Ifá criollo” (“Creole”, or Cuban-engendered, Ifá), or, simply, Santería, Regla de Ocha, or Regla de Ocha-Ifá. Within this chapter, I also use these terms interchangeably. See Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a; Martínez Betancourt, 2014).

10 Literally, “house temples”.

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over a century of relative isolation between Cuban practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá and
the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of contemporary Yorùbáland, Nigeria (Abimbola,
1997, 111; Villepastour, 2015), novel exchanges between Cuba and the contemporary
African continent since the 1990s have enabled Cubans to reconnect with practitioners of
the Yorùbá Traditional Religion abroad and forge novel allegiances with contemporary
Yorùbáland. The initiation of frequent visits to the island by babaláwos of the Yorùbá
Traditional Religion abroad, heightened contact with Cuba’s “secondary diasporas” in the
United States, Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere (Frigerio, 2004; Menéndez, 2002),
the gradual opening of internet access, and, even in a few cases, direct travel to Nigeria
itself have all served to heighten the accessibility of knowledge and exchange between
members of the African Traditionalist Movement in Cuba and the globalized Yorùbá
Religion anchored in the contemporary Nigerian homeland. As Cuban ethnobotanist and
babaláwo Martínez Betancourt has documented, two of the at least twenty-two ègbés
currently active in Cuba were formed in the 1990s, seven between 2004 and 2009, and
the remaining thirteen since 2010 (Martínez Betancourt, 2014; Martínez Betancourt, pers.
comm., 2016).

**Ethnographic Encounters with Ifá nigeriano**

I lived in Cuba over the course of four years between August, 2012 and June,
2016. During this time, I served both as the Resident Director for Penn Global’s study
abroad program at the University of Havana (Falls 2012-2015) and as a foreign
ethnomusicology researcher affiliated with the Cuban Ministry of Culture’s Juan
Marinello Cultural Research Institute (*El Instituto Cubano de Investigaciones Culturales Juan Marinello, ICIC*) (January, 2014 – August, 2016). As an American woman living in Havana, this unusually extended stay in Cuba – and my dual, and often vastly discrete, professional capacities as both a director of study abroad and as an ethnographic researcher – afforded invaluable opportunities to engage with Cuban institutions, researchers, religious practitioners, and musicians in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and other regional provinces. Additionally, these four years in Cuba offered a deep and prolonged lens into a Cuban sociopolitical and economic landscape that was rapidly shifting. Shortly before my arrival, Raul Castro introduced sweeping economic reforms to expand Cuba's private and entrepreneurial sector, announcing the impending elimination of 500,000 state sector jobs and a “parallel increase in the non-state sector”, including licenses for 181 types of private-sector and entrepreneurial (“*cuentapropismo*”) work (Peters, P., 2012: 8, 11). The façades of the buildings of the neighborhoods I most frequented in Havana in my first years – Centro Habana, Vedado, and Old Havana – seemingly transformed before my eyes as hundreds of thousands of Cubans obtained licensed, private-sector work (Hamilton, A., 2011; Peters, P., 2012), opening *paladares, cafeterías*, barbershops, clothing stands, pirated DVD and CD stores, and other businesses out of their homes. Globally, these years also marked worldwide media coverage on Cuba born from the reestablishment of ties between Cuba and the United States. Fifteen months after Raúl Castro’s landmark announcement in December, 2014, President Barack Obama visited with his entire family – the first US president to do so

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11 These drastic economic policy changes were announced between September, 2010 and November, 2011 (See Peters, P., 2012: 8, 11).
since 1928 – as tourism to the island skyrocketed, with a 77 percent increase from US citizens alone (Bouchet, 2016).

Despite these changes, however, the lives of the Cubans I most deeply engaged with during these years were being profoundly re-shaped by a very different reconnection – not that of Cuba and the United States, but between Cuba and the contemporary African continent. My first encounter with Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba occurred in the fall of 2012, during my first semester in Cuba serving as Resident Director for Penn Global’s program at the University of Havana. At the time, I’d been asked to co-produce a music video for Los Caballeros de la Rumba, an amateur rumba group based out of the small city of Santiago de las Vegas on the outskirts of Havana. During one of many consecutive weekends spent in Santiago de las Vegas, Ruddy Fernández García, the group’s artistic director, introduced me to Julio Martínez Betancourt, an African Traditionalist babaláwo, ethnographer, and full-time ethnobotanist at the University of Havana-affiliated National Botanical Garden of Cuba (Jardín Botánico Nacional). Over the course of the next four years, Martínez Betancourt would become a major player in the academic study of African Traditionalism, tracing a genealogy of the twenty-two ẹgbés, or African Traditionalist brother- and sisterhoods, that have emerged in Cuba since the 1990s. In his role as both an academic researcher and practitioner of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, Martínez Betancourt laid the foundation for the academic study of African Traditionalism in Cuba while also – through his own status as a babaláwo, or priest of Ifá – serving as a messenger between – and, to a degree, organizer of – the varied African Traditionalist ẹgbés located throughout Cuba's provinces. Martínez Betancourt's dual academic and theological approaches to Ifá nigeriano – and the ways in which his academically-minded
approaches to theology and his theologically-minded approaches to ethnography informed one another – offered a profound glimpse into what anthropologist Stephen Palmié theorizes as the "ethnographic interface" at the heart of the “confection” of “Afro-” “Cuban” “Religion” since its inception as such in the early 20th century (Palmié, 2013, 9). As I encountered in my fieldwork throughout Cuba’s provinces, this dynamic is heightened in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà by several notable and influential scholars-turned-practitioners and practitioners-turned-scholars, an aspect of African Traditionalism that I explore in detail in Chapter 3.

Figure 1 Ethnobotanist and babaláwo Julio Martínez Betancourt, who has traced a genealogy of the 22 egbés in Cuba. Santiago de las Vegas, Cuba, 2015. 
Photo by Author.
Slightly over a year after first meeting Martínez Betancourt, I initiated ethnographic research as a foreign ethnomusicology researcher affiliated with the Cuban Ministry of Culture’s Juan Marinello Cultural Research Institute (El Instituto Cubano de Investigaciones Culturales Juan Marinello, ICIC) (January, 2014 – August, 2016). During this time, I conducted extensive research in Eastern and Western Cuba – including the urban centers of Havana and Santiago de Cuba – as well as in the regional provinces of Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, and Guantánamo. Martínez Betancourt served as one of my principal interlocutors during my three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Cuba, and he generously provided the initial contacts with members of the the fifteen ọgbẹs with whom I later conducted research.

As I initiated fieldwork with ọgbẹs in Havana, Santiago de las Vegas, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, and Guantánamo, I witnessed how the aural and theological interventions of “African Traditionalist” priests and musicians presented a microcosm of polemical debates in Cuba surrounding Africanity, femininity, and spiritual belonging within contexts of state-linked and actively-monitored Cuban religiosity. Additionally, I found that these musicians’ and religious practitioners’ incorporation and creative adaptation of contemporary Yorùbá theology, ritual practice, and gendered approaches respond to—and locally shape—larger shifts in the processes of religious mediation and religious policy-making that have occurred in Cuba since the “Special Period” of the 1990’s. Throughout Cuba's provinces, I encountered women and men who actively crafted sound, language, and listening as a means to articulate a Yorùbá-centric orientation to “true” African traditionality and fate-changing efficacy in ọrîṣà worship and Ifá divination. I became intrigued with the question of the relationship between
aurality (Ochoa Gautier, 2014) and predications of Africanity (Palmié, 2008) in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, and by the ways in which women and men crafted sound and listening in order to reshape gendered subjectivities and carve out novel spaces of authority and autonomy. Furthermore, I became concerned with how African Traditionalists’ discourses of Africanity, “true” traditionality, and spiritual purity – including their approaches to ritual practice and gendered norms perceived to be “traditional” to Yorùbáland – were mobilized as “regimes of truth” (Clarke, 2004, 8) within heterogeneous projects.

Figure 2 Me (bottom row, second from right), with members of the Ògbẹ Èran Àtelé Èlògbôn Baracoa [sic] during the initiation of five babaláwos, Baracoa, Cuba, May, 2016. Photo by author.

The Emergence of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba: 1987 – Present
The “Afro-” “Cuban” “Religion” (Palmié, 2013) that came to be variously known as “Regla Lucumí” (“the Lucumí religion”) (Brown, 2003: 67), “Santería” (Cabrera, 1993; De La Torres, 2004; Hagedorn, 2003), the “Yoruba religion” (Bolívar Aróstegui, 1990), and “Regla de Ocha-Ifá” (Ayorinde, 2004) emerged in Western Cuba in the 19th-and early-20th centuries in the midst – and the aftermath – of the crucible of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on the island (Brown, 2003, Ortiz, 1921). As an immense volume of scholarly and ethnographic literature delineates (Brown, 2003; Guanche, 1983; Ortiz, 1921; Palmié, 2002), the practices of Ifá and Santería came to be designated as “Lucumi” within the "religious-cum-ethnic" typology of African-inspired naciones in colonial-era Cuba (Holbraad, 2012: 12), and the Lucumi “nation” (Brown, 2003) specifically came to occupy a "pre-imminent position" among the various Afrocuban naciones (ibid). These naciones included the “Congo” (associated with the palo mayombe or palo monte religious complex; See Ochoa, 2010), the “CÀràbàlí” (associated with Abakuá; See Miller, 2009; Torres Zayas, 2010), and the “Arará” naciones, among others (See Andreu Alonso, 1995; in Holbraad, 2012: 12). The Lucumi Nation encompassed slaves believed to be descendants of the Yoruba speakers of West Africa, an ethnic-linguistic group enslaved in great numbers following the colonial-era collapse of the Òyó empire in what is now, anachronistically, called Yorùbáland (Brandon, 1993; Omojola 2014; Peel, 2000). As Brown meticulously demonstrates, the Lucumi religion that consolidated in early-20th century Cuba emerged within a turn-of-the-century environment of coexisting Lucumi institutions that "bridged the era of the old-style cabildos de nación and the period of
modern *casa-templos*” (Brown, 2003: 65).\(^\text{12}\) Within the processes of “Yoruba ecclesiogenesis” (Palmié, 2013) that necessarily accompanied the transplantation, adaptation, and creative reformulation of Yorùbá-inspired cosmology and lineage-based descent within the emergent sociohistorical landscape of 19th- and 20th-century Cuba, the Lucumí religious *ramas*, or branches, necessarily underwent significant changes in Cuba in relation to the parallel – and equally historically-contingent – evolution of their counterparts in late 19th- and 20th-century Yorùbáland (Castro Figueroa, 2012; Omojola, 2014; Villepastour, 2015). Separated by the impenetrable vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, the two coeval “Yoruba” religious systems of Cuba and Nigeria (Fabian, 1983) – both with common roots in 19th-century Yorùbáland – developed in relative isolation from one another for generations between the late-19th-century and the late 1980s.\(^\text{13}\)

In Cuba, the century between the 1880s and 1980s encompassed sweeping historical and political changes. These included the emergence of Cuba as an

\(^{12}\) For more on the *cabildos de nación*, or the Spanish colonial institutions crucial to the preservation of African traditions in Cuba, see Moreno (1999) and Ortiz (1921).

\(^{13}\) The extent of just how absolute the isolation was between Cuban practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá and their counterparts in Yorùbáland throughout the 20th century is a matter of some debate. Anthropologist Alain Konen, for example, who conducted ethnographic research with the African Traditionalist babaláwo Frank Cabrera and the Nigerian-rooted *Ilé Tun Tun* in Havana beginning in 2002, relates an oral narrative from his Cuban interlocutors that claims that the Cuban babaláwo Tata Gaitán received the Yorùbá religious title of “Àràbà of Cuba” from three visiting African Àràbàs in the “second-quarter of the twentieth century” (Konen, 2013, my translation). Though Konen acknowledges that "no written historical data confirms this narrative," he finds the 20th-century travel of Yorùbá religious leaders to Cuba as "plausible," citing Pierre Verger’s accounts of the travel of Dahomean dignitaries to Cuba and Brazil for years at a time in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century (Verger, 1952, 157 in Konen, 2013; my translation). If this visit of Yorùbá practitioners did occur in Cuba during the first half of the twentieth century, Konen notes that "no comparable event seems to have been repeated for decades,” at least until the 1987 exchange between Cuban babaláwo Filiberto O’Farrill and the visiting Qônì of Ilé-Ifé (ibid, my translation).
“independent” nation – though decidedly bound to the political and military interventions of the United States (Langley, 1983; Perez, 1986), the ensuing dictatorships of Gerardo Machado and Fulgencia Batista (Bonsal, 1971; Freyre, 2006), and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 (Lievesley, 2004; Roy, 2009). Over the course of this volatile century, state policies towards religious practice – and Afro-Cuban religion, specifically – ranged from the persecution of Afro-Cuban religious practice in the early Republican era (See Moore, 1997, 2004) to the militant, socialist-inspired atheism of the Cuban Revolutionary government (Delgado, 2009; Romeu, 2013). The “Lucumí” religion necessarily developed, transformed, and adapted within the overarching context of these political vicissitudes (Brown, 2003; Palmié, 2013), evolving within an alternate sociocultural and political reality from that of contemporary Yorùbáland.

After some one hundred years of isolation between the two domains of Yorùbá/Yoruba practice, Cubans santeros and babalao and practitioners of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Yorùbáland were afforded their first official reencounter in 1987. That year, the Qòni, or “King” (traditional ruler) of Ilé-Ifé, Oba Okunade Sijuwade, Olubuse II (1930-2015), was invited to Cuba by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) (Ayorine, 2004; Baloyra and Morris, 1993; Castro Figueroa, 2012; Menéndez, 2002; Olorunniola and Akinbami, 1992), an event that inaugurated a new era of exchange between Cuba and Yorùbáland and catalyzed the emergence of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba. The Qòni of Ilé-Ifé – considered the "father of the Yorùbá" and one of the supreme spiritual leaders of the Traditional Yorùbá Religion of Yorùbáland (Abimbola, 1997, 111) – stayed in Cuba for a five-day visit and was personally received by Fidel Castro (Baloyra and Morris, 1993). Although the Qòni
was officially hosted as an African cultural ambassador rather than as a religious leader per se, the historic visit nevertheless indicated a significant ideological shift on the part of the Cuban socialist state in its policy towards religion – and towards AfroCuban religion specifically – which had effectively been banned since the early years of the revolution (Castro Figueroa, 2012; Moore, 2004). Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Cuban Revolutionary government moved towards a state-sponsored policy of militant socialist atheism based on Marxist principles, adopting a "hostile and paternalistic attitude" towards religion (Delgado, 2009, 55; Romeu, 2013). Within this atheist approach to Revolutionary socialism, the Cuban Revolutionary government tolerated – and at times lauded – AfroCuban music and dance as popular culture and folklore at the same time that the religions from which these aural and visual practices were based were ridiculed as “superstitious” and "antithetical to scientific truth" (Castro Figueroa, 2012, 90; Delgado 2009, 55; Moore, 1997, 2006; Wirtz, 2014). Organizers of the First Congress of the Communist Party in 1975, for example, dictated that AfroCuban “music, dance, and musical instrumentation” could be “assimilated” into Revolutionary socialism as long as the "mystical elements" of these practices were eliminated (Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1976 [In Castro Figueroa, 2012, 90]). For Cuban practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá, the historic 1987 visit of the Qòni of Ile-Ifé marked a symbolic step away from the state-sponsored, militant atheism of the previous twenty-five years and towards a potential

15 As Romeu and others note, the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party announced that “its members and government officials...[could] join religious and fraternal organizations and vice versa”, effectively legalizing open religious practice for the first time in decades (Romeu, 2013, 263).

16 My translation. See original text (Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1976 [In Castro Figueroa, 2012, 90]).
future of open religious tolerance and freedoms. Equally significantly, however, the visit of the Òòni of the Ilé-Ifé marked the first documented encounter that oricha worshipers and practitioners of Ifá in Cuba had had with the contemporary Yorùbá homeland – the originary heir to the historico-mythical “chronotope” to which the fate-transformative practices of Regla de Ocha-Ifá trace their roots (Palmié, 2013; Wirtz, 2014, 18) – since the emergence of these traditions as such in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Abimbola, 1997, 111; Brown, 2003).

From the perspective of the Cuban socialist state, the extension of an invitation to the Òòni of Ilé-Ifé aligned with a politics of solidarity with the Global South that the Cuban Revolutionary state had actively cultivated in Africa beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. During these years, Cuba's foreign policy shifted away from one of reactivity to the Cold War dynamics of the United States and the Soviet Union and towards a proactive stance of engagement with countries in the Caribbean basin and Africa (Kirk and Erisman, 2009). This vision of global, “South-South” solidarity took the form of increasing diplomatic ties with Caribbean and African nations; cultivating a central role in an expanding global medical internationalism in Africa and the Americas (Cassells, 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; Huish, 2013; Kirk and Erisman, 2009); and volunteering military support for leftist Revolutionary causes, culminating in Cuba’s extensive, decades-long military intervention in the war in Angola (Bridgland, 2017; George, 2005; Peters, 2012; Polack, 2013). In addition to internationalist medical and military

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17 As Edward George notes, in a country with a population of only eleven million people, the Cuban Revolutionary government sent as many as half-a-million Cuban citizens to serve in the military conflict in Angola between the mid-1960s in 1991, a conflict that "would shape the lives of a generation of Cubans" (George, 2005).
missions in the Cold War-era “Third World” (Salehi-Nejad, 2011), Cuba cultivated diplomatic, artistic, and cultural ties with African nations, hosting visits from renowned African personalities in the arts and politics (Castro Figueroa, 2012). Even more significantly, the Cuban government extended full scholarships – including room, board, books, transportation, and uniforms – to between 13,000 and 15,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa for tertiary degrees in Cuba throughout the 1980s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; López Segrera 1988; Entralgo and González 1991). This brought students from Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sudan and other nations directly to Cuba’s *Isla de la Juventud*, or the “Island of Youth,” to study between the late 1970s and early 1990s (ibid). Additionally, the Cuban government set up schools for foreign children and teenagers from war-torn and educationally poor regions in Africa, including primary and secondary schools for thousands of children from Mozambique and child refugees and orphans from the civil war in Angola (Hatzky, 2012, 151; Richmond, 1991).

For the Cuban Revolutionary government, these efforts reflected a core value of universal education and healthcare as “human right[s]” and as a means to build “[national/ist] commitment and economic production capacity” in both Cuba and foreign nations (Hickling-Hudson et al. 2012, 15, in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015). Additionally, military internationalist missions reflected an anticolonialist vision that crafted Cuba as a global

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18 In the case of Nigeria, this included Nigerian writer and Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, who took numerous trips to Cuba (Castro Figueroa, 2012).

19 *La Isla de la Juventud* is an island separated from the mainland off of Cuba’s southwestern coast. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh notes: “Formerly known as La Isla de Pinos, this small island’s name was formally changed to La Isla de la Juventud (the Island of Youth) in 1978… The transformation of this previously under-populated Cuban island into an International Centre for Studies revolutionised both the islands demography and its economic capacity” (Alsonso Valdés, 1984; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015)
player in socialist and liberation movements abroad (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; Salehi-Nejad, 2011).

For Cubans, this direct engagement with Africa through military, medical, and diplomatic missions "simultaneously demystified" Africa as an originary chronotope tied to Cuba's colonial slave past and "elevated [Africa] in Cuban discourse" as a site of solidarity and shared anti-colonialist/liberationist vision (Peters, 2012). In relation to Cuba's bond with Angola, for example, Fidel Castro stated:

Many things link us to Angola: the common goal, shared interests, politics and ideology. But we are also connected by blood, blood in its double meaning: the blood of our ancestors and the blood that we’ve spilled together on the battlefields. (1979, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, citing Hatzky 2012: 144.).

Here, Fidel Castro succinctly bridges Cuba's Afrocuban heritage with race-blind ideologies of shared political struggles and liberationist goals as the basis for transatlantic solidarity. For Cubans of all backgrounds, these political and anti-colonialist discourses of solidarity with Africa – as well as personal experiences with the contemporary African continent through military service, medical missions, and encounters with sub-Saharan students studying at La Isla de la Juventud and other locales – served to universalize a Cuba-Africa transatlantic bond. For many black Cubans in particular, these ties contributed to "powerful feelings of identification" rooted in deeper-seated notions of common ancestry, shared cultural and religious heritage, and pan-African racial solidarity (Peters, 2012). As Christabelle Peters outlines, Cuba’s Revolutionary involvement with Africa in the 1970s and 1980s created a “collective sense of dignity” for black Cubans – or, as described to her by Martínez Furé, "self-esteem in every sense" (ibid). However,
despite discourses of solidarity and extensive military, medical, and diplomatic engagement with Angola, Mozambique, the Congo, Sudan, and other sub-Saharan nations in the 1970s and 1980s, the Cuban Revolutionary government did not facilitate exchange with contemporary Yorùbáland, Nigeria, specifically – or its traditional religious practices. Indeed, Cuba’s rich spiritual ties to West Africa fell explicitly outside of the purview of the Revolutionary government’s socialist-atheist and Global South-liberationist vision for engagement with the African continent. While practitioners of the Congo-inspired religious practices in Cuba, such as *palo mayombe*, may have benefited secondarily from contact with contemporary Angolan and Congolese practitioner-soldiers and practitioner-students during this period, practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá remained effectively isolated from the contemporary Yorùbá homeland and its religious practices. Even so, military and medical internationalism with sub-Saharan Africa brought Africa “out of the past” for many Cubans, for whom it “came to represent ‘*una fuente viva*’” (literally, a “living source”)” (Peters, 2012).

The Ọ̀ṣì of Ilé-Ifé ’s historic 1987 visit as an African cultural ambassador, then, fell in line with the Cuban Revolutionary government's continued vision of anticolonial and liberationist solidarity with the global South – and the African continent, specifically – through military, medical, and diplomatic engagement. At the same time, the extension of an invitation to the leading religious figure of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of Nigeria – a religious tradition that held common origins with the Afrocuban religious traditions of Regla de Ocha-Ifá – also reflected a shift away from the staunch, militant atheism that characterized Revolutionary policy towards religious practice in the late

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1960s and early 1970s (Castro Figueroa, 2012; Delgado, 2009; Moore, 2006).21 As Moore notes, this shift – which began in the mid-1970s – was instigated, at least in part, by Cuba's military missions in Africa, which “helped develop greater sensitivity on the part of the leadership to sub-Saharan culture” (Moore, 2006, 214). Additionally, the role of the Catholic Church and Liberation Theology in liberationist movements in Latin America – and the struggles of Oscar Romero and Camillo Torres’ in El Salvador and Colombia, respectively – indicated that a “belief in God was not inherently opposed to Marxism” and could even serve as a “tool of insurgents” (Cardenal, 1974; Cox, 1987; Moore, 2006, 214).

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21 Castro Figueroa (2012) and Moore (2006) both offer summaries of Cuban Revolutionary policies towards religion – including Catholicism and Afro-Cuban religions – from the early years of the Revolution to the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1991. Citing Clark (1992), Kirk (1989), and Vázquez Montalbán (1998), for example, Moore outlines how the Cuban Revolutionary government’s earliest conflicts with religion were primarily with the Catholic Church, which – though exhibiting less power and influence than in other Latin American nations – became "a refuge for oppositional movements” against Castro’s new regime following the 1959 Revolution (Kirk, 1989, in Moore, 2006, 202). As early as 1961, Cuba's vast and vibrant popular religious festivals – with their ideological links to Catholicism and saints’ festivals – were effectively eliminated through a lack of allocation of state resources (Moore, 2006, 202). Additionally, “images of Santa Claus and the use of Christmas trees” were banned (citing Thomas, 1971, 1257, p. 202) and important Christian holidays were re-named and re-framed as secular, Revolutionary traditions. The week preceding Easter, for example, was coined “Playa Girón week” (referencing the failed U.S. Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961) and dedicated to "mass voluntary labor” (Moore, 2006, 202; Millet and Brea 1980, 93-94). By the late 1960s, the Cuban government had effectively banned religion by no longer allowing “anyone professing a faith to be a member of the Communist Party” or to trade unions, affiliations that were “extremely beneficial to one's educational opportunities and career” (Fernández Robaina 1994: 36, in Moore, 2006, 208). During the first decades of the Revolution, Afro-Cuban religious traditions were alternately framed as “primitive”, “misguided, confused, backward, [and] uncultured” (Moore, 210) or, in more extreme examples in government and social scientist publications, as “pathological” (McGarrity, 1991:199, in Moore, 2006, 211) or evidence of “mental disorder” (ibid).
Although leading Cuban social scientists and government officials of the period continued to frame Afro-Cuban religion as antithetical to Revolutionary socialism and scientific rationalism (i.e., Guanche, 1983, 1986 and Ministerio de Educación, 1971; in McGarrity, 1991; Moore, 2006; Palmié, 2013), the government’s militant stance began to thaw in the mid-1970s (Delgado, 2009; Moore, 2006). In 1976, a group of leading babalao created a national organization entitled “Ifá Ayer, Ifá Hoy, Ifá Mannana” (“Ifá Yesterday, Ifá Today, and Ifá Tomorrow”) that – although not formally recognized by the Cuban government – was unofficially tolerated (Argyriadis and Capone, 2004; Hearn, 2008). In 1984, a symbolic step towards reconciliation with the Catholic church occurred when Castro met with the American Baptist minister and civil rights activist the Reverend Jesse Jackson, during which both leaders “publicly visited a Methodist Church” (Cox 1987 in Moore, 2006, 215). In 1986, the Revolutionary government also unofficially permitted the re-instantiation of the annual Letra del Año ("Letter of the Year") ceremony – a seminal Ifá divination tradition eliminated in Cuba following 1959 Revolution. This ceremony, which offers guidelines for the well-being and prosperity of religious communities for the coming year (See Chapter 4), was reinstituted by a group of babalao led by the renowned Miguel Febles and including future African Traditionalist pioneers Frank Cabrera and Victor Betancourt (Brown, 2003; Castro Figueroa, 2012). While the Cuban government "permitted" the formation of these groups, government

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22 Castro Figueroa sums up the equivalency between non-persecution and tolerance on the part of the Revolutionary state between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s when he states – referring to the 1986 reestablishment of the Letra del Año: “And of course, if this happened, it was because the government permitted it” (Castro Figueroa, 2012: 91).

23 As Castro Figueroa notes, the Letra del Año ceremony had been eliminated following the Revolution of 1959 (Castro Figueroa, 2012, 91)
agents from the Cuban Ministry of the Interior (MININT) reportedly made repeated efforts to infiltrate these religious organizations (Castro Figueroa, 2012, 91, 92).

Within this environment of gradually increasing religious tolerance, the Cuban state took steps towards the reestablishment of official contact with Yorùbáland, Nigeria. A few months before the Ọọ̀ni’s visit in June, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilé-Ifẹ in Nigeria, Wándé Abímbólá, arranged a visit to Cuba on a "cultural mission" in order to initiate a Spanish-Yorùbá language exchange program between the University of Ilé-Ifẹ and Havana. In addition to his academic position as Vice-Chancellor, Abímbólá, an internationally renowned Nigerian babaláwo, also served as the designated “Àwíṣẹ Awo Ní Àgbáyé”, or the “messenger and ambassador of the Yoruba religion for the world” in (Konen, 2013). Although the Yorùbá-language instruction program never came to fruition in Cuba, Abímbólá’s visit likely marked one of the first official contacts between Cuba and Yorùbáland since the abolition of the slave trade in 1886, if not significantly earlier (Abimbola, 1997, 111). For Cuban practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá, the visit of the Ọọ̀ni of Ilé-Ifẹ – or the “father of the Yorùbá” – marked the landmark reestablishment of contact with the contemporary Yorùbá homeland. Contact with the Ọọ̀ni, who reportedly “kissed the ground and declared ‘I arrive at home away from

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24 As Abímbólá notes, the lack of Spanish speakers in Yorùbáland and English- or Yorùbá- speakers in Cuba has made exchange and communication between Cuba and Yorùbáland particularly difficult. During his first visit to Cuba in the 1980s, Abímbólá hoped to establish a Spanish-Yorùbá exchange program between the University of Ilé-Ifẹ and Cuba modeled on the successful Portuguese program that he previously designed as Dean of Faculty of Arts between the University of Ilé-Ifẹ and Brazil. The Cuban Embassy sent the University of Ilé-Ifẹ Spanish instructors following Abímbólá’s visit and his establishment of a certificate course in Spanish, but failed to set up Yorùbá-language instruction in Cuba as Abímbólá originally envisioned (Abimbola, 1997, 112).

25 My translation.
home” when he arrived on Cuban soil (Olorunnisola, 1992, 66), left a profound impact on many Cuban babalao. In a period still characterized by the long shadow of militant, socialist atheism and a state context of official non-recognition, the Qòòni’s visit came as a revelation to Cuban practitioners, who had been unaware of the complexity of Nigeria’s traditional Yorùbá religious institutions or the possibilities they offered for transatlantic validation (Ayorinde, 2004). During his visit, the Qòòni made proposals that resonated with Cubans’ desires for state recognition and institutional validation, including voicing a call for the establishment of a Yorùbá Temple in Havana and the future hosting of an international Yorùbá Congress (224). From the perspective of the Qòòni, the establishment of a Yorùbá Temple and the hosting of a Yorùbá Congress in Havana fell within a globalized vision of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá as but one extension of a transcontinental domain of Yorùbá culture as “world religion” (Olupona and Rey, 2008) – with its homeland located in contemporary Yorùbáland. Furthermore, these goals reflected the Qòòni’s vision of Cuba as a "constituency" of the religious authority and jurisdiction of contemporary Ilé-Ifē and Yorùbáland (Ayorinde, 2004; Olorunnisola, 1992, 65).

26 Others Cuban babalao, however, were skeptical of the Qòòni’s visit. Palmié (2013) relates how Cuban babalao recalling the event years later framed it as “an attempt on the part of the Cuban government to strike an oil deal with Nigeria” rather than as the return of “their true sovereign,” pointing to the Qòòni’s status as a born-again Christian and a wealthy businessman (See Palmié, 2013: 108).

27 According to the Qòòni’s vision, the Yorùbá Congress would likely be modeled after the “International Congress of Òrìṣà Tradition and Culture” that a group of globally-minded oricha/òrìṣà/orixa visionaries – including Wándé Abímbólá, the Puerto Rican santera Marta Vega, and Brazilian “candomblé-priest cum ethnographer” Deoscoredes Maximiliano dos Santos – organized in 1981 under the Qòòni’s own “patronship” (Palmié, 2013, 61, 72).
Although the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC) would develop a decidedly antagonistic stance towards Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and African Traditionalism in the 1990s and 2000s, the Qòni's 1987 visit – and the landmark reestablishment of official contact with Yorùbálánd, Nigeria that it signified – served as one of the catalysts for the establishment of the institution itself in 1991 (Ayorinde, 2004; Palmié, 2013). In certain respects a manifestation of the Qòni's envisioned "Yoruba Temple" (Ayorinde, 2004, 224), the ACYC was founded in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent landmark announcement of the freedom of open religious practice by the Cuban state at the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party in 1991 (Argyriadis and Capone, 2004; Fernández Robaina 1994: 36, in Moore, 2006, 208). The ACYC's membership and leadership were drawn from the group of babalao known as Ifá Ayer, Ifá Hoy, Ifá Mannana, who were chosen by the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba for what Castro Figueroa describes as their "political reliability" (Castro Figueroa, 2012: 92).  

Originally founded in the home of the ACYC's first president José Manuel “Monolo” Ibañez González in the densely-populated Centro Habana neighborhood of Havana, the ACYC subsequently moved to the home of Antonio Castañeda Márquez in Centro Habana following the death of Ibañez shortly thereafter (Fernández, 2003).  

In 1992, the new president of the ACYC, Castañeda, helped organize the first International Workshop on the "Influence of Yoruba and Other African Cultures in Cuba" in conjunction with the Cuban Academy of Sciences (Palmié, 2013, 74). This controversial workshop marked one of the first major fissures in Cuban Regla de Ocha-

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28 My translation.
Ifá between advocates of the "Yorubization” of the Cuban religions and those who advocated vehemently against it. As Ayorinde outlines, multiple presenters at the workshop proposed "a structured yorubización (Yorubization) of santería" that entailed ridding Regla de Ocha-Ifá of its syncretic elements, "recovering ritual orthodoxy by returning to the liturgy of the Nigerian orisha cults and the Ifá corpus,” replacing Cuban religious terminology with Yorùbá-centric wording, and re-orienting Regla de Ocha-Ifá as a set of religious practices falling "under the jurisdiction of Ile Ife” (Ayorinde, 2004, 224, in Palmié, 2013, 74). These proposals sparked an outcry among other Cuban practitioners who valued Regla de Ocha-Ifá as an autonomous – and even superior – set of religious practices in relation to its counterpart in Nigeria. Lázara Menéndez’ oft-cited essay in response to the workshop in 1995, titled “¡Un cake para Obatalá,” for example, argued against the ”indiscriminate and uncritical substantivation of the Yoruba component" in Regla de Ocha-Ifá and against a Yorubizing perspective that denied the value of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá as an historically-enriched and positively-transformed system unique to the sociocultural realities of Cuba itself (Menéndez, 1995). For Menéndez, a perspective that only valued Regla de Ocha-Ifá in terms of its "conservation of its African antecedents" was both ahistorical and "naïve” (Menendez, 1995, in Palmié 2013, 75). The president of the ACYC, Antonio Castañeda Márquez, would follow this line of argumentation, developing an increasingly militant stance against the “Yorubization” of Regla de Ocha-Ifá in the 1990s and 2000's.

The long-standing isolation between Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria had, however, been breached, and notable Cuban practitioners became pioneers of the "Yorubizing” turn in Regla de Ocha-Ifá in the
1990s. The Cuban babalao Victor Betancourt Omolofaoló Estrada, considered by many to be the first pioneer of African Traditionalism in Cuba (Larduet Luaces, 2014: 163), used international contacts with his foreign ahijados, or religious “godchildren,” to obtain information about the contemporary Yorùbá religion of Nigeria following the Ọ̀rìṣà of Ìlẹ-Ife’s visit in 1987. Through the efforts of one of Betancourt’s Italian ahijados who frequently traveled to Nigeria, Betancourt established contact with Nigerian babaláwos in the late 1980s and early 1990s through letters and mailed correspondence, also obtaining books and written materials on the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (personal communication, 2016). Increasingly aware of the discrepancies between the Nigerian Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) and Cuban Regla de Ocha, Betancourt claims that he became driven with the purpose of “filling the gaps” between the two domains of òrìṣà/oricha practice (ibid).

In 1991, Betancourt founded what is considered by many to be the first African Traditionalist lineage in Cuba, Ifá Iranlówo (“salvation is in Ifá”) in Havana (Martínez Betancourt, 2014; Rauhut, 2014: 187), with the explicit purpose of “rescuing those deities, rescuing those ceremonies, and rescuing those rituals that didn't arrive in Cuba.”

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29 Rauhut (2014) notes how unusual it was for Cuban babalao to have significant contact with foreigners in the late 1980s. According to her interviews with Betancourt in 2007, his earliest contacts with written sources on the Nigerian Yorùbá religion came from contacts with practitioners in Mexico and the United States in the late 1980s (Rauhut, 2014: 187). In my own interviews with Betancourt in 2016, Betancourt claimed that his first direct contact with Nigerian babaláwos – which took the form of letters and mailed correspondence – were facilitated by an Italian ahijado. Larduet Luaces’ account of Betancourt – though it confuses Ọ̀rùnwá Pópọ̀lọ̀ as Betancourt’s first Nigerian contact (Betancourt didn’t meet Pópọ̀lọ̀ until 2004-2005, significantly later) (pers. comm., 2016) – also points to an “Italian friend” as Betancourt's initial point of contact with babaláwos of contemporary Yorùbáland (Larduet Luaces, 2014: 163). In my interview, Betancourt was unable to name the specific Nigerian babaláwos with which he first had correspondence during this early period.
and putting them "into practice" (personal communication, 2016). As part of his “Yorubizing” vision, Betancourt adopted the “pie y cabeza” (“foot and head”) style of initiation – which is “thought to be of African provenance” (Brown, 2003: 10, 137-138) – allowing neophytes to receive only one òrìṣà (the owner of the head, or dueño de la cabeza) and the deity Elegguá/Èṣù rather than the five or six additional oricha that Cuban practitioners receive in “modern” Regla de Ocha-Ifá initiations (Brown, 2003, 10, 137-138; Rauhut, 2014). Additionally, Betancourt adopted African styles of dress and, idiosyncratically, openly practiced polygamy, citing a multiplicity of wives as traditional practice in Yorùbáland (Larduet Luaces, 2014: 163). Most controversially, however, Betancourt pioneered the initiation of Ìyánífá, or female high priestesses of Ifá, in Cuba – a practice strictly prohibited in Regla de Ocha-Ifá – by initiating the first two Ìyánífá in Cuba in the year 2000 (Fernández, 2010).30 The initiation of women into the Ifá priesthood by Betancourt and the Ifá Iranlówo lineage in Cuba ultimately led to the “Iyanifa Debate” of 2004, a polemic uproar in which the ACYC issued a “worldwide proclamation to orisha practitioners condemning the practices of Ìyánífá” and demanding that the “criminal” priests involved be "blacklisted, have their priesthood titles revoked, and be excluded from their religious communities” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820-821). Ultimately, this event fueled a deepening rift between practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá

30 In relation to the history of Ìyánífá in the Americas, Beliso-De Jesús relates: “According to Maybell Padilla Pérez (2006, 3), the first Ìyánífá in the Americas was initiated in 1985 in the United States. In 2000, two Cuban women were initiated to Ifá in Havana. In 2003, a Cuban woman living in Spain, Ìyaónífa Ifáunke Maria Antonia Regojo Soto, was initiated in Ile Ife” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820). It’s important to note, however, that Betancourt Estrada’s claims to this first date of initiation (2000) are contested by some in Cuba.
and proponents of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba centered around gendered approaches to òrìṣà worship and Ifá.

In the mid-1990s, two other pioneering babaláos of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba, Filiberto O’Farrill and Frank Cabrera Suárez, also made direct contact with the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) through extensive study with the Nigerian babaláwo Táíwò Abímbólá, son of the renowned Wándé Abímbólá. Following Wándé Abímbólá’s visits to Cuba beginning in 1987, Táíwò Abímbólá received a full scholarship from the Cuban government to study medicine, and he moved to the island for several years in the mid-1990s (Argyriadis, 2004; Konen, 2013; Larduet Luaces, 2014).31 Upon learning that Táíwò Abímbólá was residing in Cuba to study tropical medicine, the Cuban babaláos Filiberto O’Farrill and Frank Cabrera Suárez made contact with Abímbólá through the Nigerian Embassy, and Abímbólá subsequently became their religious superior in their study of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà (Frank Cabrera Suárez, pers. comm., 2016). After a period of study with the Nigerian babaláwo, O’Farrill and Cabrera co-founded the Nigerian-rooted religious and cultural organization Ilé Tuntún in Havana in conjunction with Abímbólá in 1997. Significantly, the establishment of Ilé Tuntún marked the first case of the transcontinental founding of a cultural-religious organization recognized by the Nigerian government's Corporate Affairs Commission but not by the Cuban government – a pan-African, transcontinental recognition from Nigeria that stands, to this

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31 According to Frank Cabrera and others, Táíwò Abímbólá only stayed in Cuba for three-to-four years, establishing the Nigerian-rooted institution Ilé Tuntún in Havana but never completing his medical degree (Frank Cabrera, pers. comm., 2016).
day, in stark contrast to the Cuban government's continued denial of official recognition and state legitimization to African Traditionalist institutions (See Chapter 2).\(^{32}\)

For Cabrera, who succeeded O’Farrill as the leader of Ilé Tuntún following his death in 1999, Táiwò Abimbólá’s tenure in Cuba and the unusually extensive contact that both Cuban babaláos were able to have with the Nigerian babaláwo fulfilled a prophecy that Cabrera had been given through his odù, or divinatory sign of Ifá, as a young man. Through the divinatory prophecy of Ifá, Cabrera learned from his religious superiors that he was to become a "chosen one" in life, a revelation set forth in one of the caminos, or paths, of his divinatory sign, Ogbe Ché.\(^{33}\) Upon the Qòni of Ilé-Ifé Sijuwade’s visit in 1987, Cabrera explains that he became aware of the nature of his sign’s prophecy, which he interprets as a call upon him to bring the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria to Cuba (pers. comm., Frank Cabrera, 2016). For him, the patronage of the first International Congress of Ôrìṣà Tradition and Culture in 1981 by the Qòni of Ilé-Ifé Sijuwade – whose name Cabrera translates from Yorùbá as "the crown that opens to the world" – and his historic visit to Cuba in 1987 marked the beginning of a Nigerian-rooted evangelical movement prophesized to carry the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of Yorùbáland to the world.\(^{34}\) Following his co-founding of the Nigerian-rooted Ilé Tuntún in Cuba, Cabrera worked to fulfill an African Traditionalist

\(^{32}\) According to the registry of the Corporate Affairs Commission of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, the “Ile Tuntun Organisation” was officially incorporated in Nigeria in 2004, with both Táiwò and Wándé Abimbólá as sponsors (Corporate Affairs Commission, 2016).

\(^{33}\) Also rendered as “Ogbe She” (Castro Figueroa, 2012) and “Obeché” (Konen, 2013).

\(^{34}\) While Cabrera frames Nigerian-rooted, Yorùbá evangelism as prophecy, others are much more skeptical. Numerous interlocutors during my fieldwork framed Nigerian babaláwos’ increased travels to Cuba in the 1990s and 2000s as commercially, rather than spiritually, motivated.
vision of global evangelism and orisha worship. This included the establishment of a Yoruba calendar of orisha festivals in Cuba that would replace the Catholic-oriented, syncretic calendar of Regla de Ocha-Ifa saints’ and oricha days (Konen, 2013). Through extensive collaboration with Abimbola following his return to Nigeria in 1998, Cabrera continued to enrich his Yoruba-centric practices by incorporating novel Yoruba rituals, deities, praise songs, and ceremonies into the temple's practices (See Chapter 5).

Together, Victor Betancourt’s Ifa Iranlówo (1991) and Frank Cabrera’s Ilé Tuntún (1997) constituted the two African Traditionalist egbes established in Cuba in the 1990s (Martínez Betancourt, 2014). During that same decade, broad sociopolitical, economic, and political trends altered the dynamic of Cubans' possibilities for establishing relationships with foreigners, ultimately amplifying opportunities for other Cuban babalas to establish communication with contemporary Yoruba-land in the 2000s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the inauguration of the "Special Period in Times of Peace" in Cuba in 1990 precipitated drastic measures by the Cuban Revolutionary government to curtail conditions of economic collapse, fuel and food shortages, and extreme scarcity – a dire situation brought on by the loss of the Soviet Union as Cuba's primary economic and trade partner (Hernandez-Reguant, 2009). On the brink of economic disintegration, the Revolutionary government decriminalized the U.S. dollar in 1994 and, in 1995, released the National Plan for the Development of International Tourism, outlining a drastic shift in national policy reorienting the Cuban economy.

35 Following Abimbola’s return to Nigeria in 1998, Taiwo Abimbola and Frank Cabrera didn't see each other in person until Cabrera's travel to Nigeria in 2013. Despite this, they continued to communicate consistently. During my fieldwork with Ilé Tuntún in 2015 and 2016, for example, Frank Cabrera continued to speak with Taiwo Abimbola via telephone calls several times a week – and, at times, daily.
towards foreign tourism (Colantonio and Potter, 2006: 122; Hamilton, 2012; Simoni, 2016). In Cuba, which had been “previously isolated and closed to tourism in fear of its damaging influence” (Morad, 2014: 103), the shift towards tourism as a primary means of economic development marked a drastic change in Revolutionary policy and enabled Cubans unprecedented access to contact with foreign visitors. During the 1990s and 2000s, this opening of Cuba to foreign travel and tourism ultimately led to heightened communication with Cuba’s “secondary diasporas” in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere (Frigerio, 2004; Menéndez, 2002) and to the initiation of frequent visits to the island by babaláwos of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) abroad (both Nigerian and otherwise). Additionally, in the mid-2000's, selective – and often illegal – internet access further enabled a select number of Cuban babaláos to forge contacts with practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà abroad through online websites and forums (See Chapter 3). Together, these changes in (post-)Revolutionary policy – and the opening of Cuba to increased foreign contact – enabled the growth of the African Traditionalist movement in Cuba in the 2000s. By the time I completed my fieldwork in Cuba in June, 2016, Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà had extended to at least seven of Cuba's fifteen provinces, including the provinces of Havana, Matanzas, Ciego de Ávila, Villa Clara, Holguín, Guantánamo, and Santiago de Cuba (Martínez Betancourt, 2014; Martínez Betancourt, pers. comm., 2016).

Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà: Ethnographic and Methodological Conundrums
When I initiated fieldwork with African Traditionalist ęgbés throughout Cuba's provinces in 2014, I encountered a heterogeneous landscape of individuals and communities who had forged connections with the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of contemporary Nigeria in myriad ways. While three of the ęgbés founded in the regional provinces outside of Havana constituted extensions of Victor Betancourt’s Ifá Iranlówo, the remaining nineteen ęgbés, including Frank Cabrera's Ilé Tun Tun, emerged within a heterogeneous, complex, and variegated network of exchange between Cuban babalaoṣ and practitioners of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) abroad (Martínez Betancourt, 2014). Throughout Cuba's provinces, I found women and men who actively crafted sound, language, and listening as a means to articulate a Yorùbá-centric orientation to “true” African traditionality and fate-changing efficacy in ọrîṣà worship and Ifá. As this commonality became increasingly apparent, I became intrigued with the question of the relationship between aurality (Ochoa Gautier, 2014) and predications of Africanity (Palmié, 2008) in Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrîṣà, and by the ways in which women and men crafted sound and listening as a means to reshape gendered subjectivities and carve out novel spaces of authority. As an ethnographer, however, the sheer variety of ęgbés dedicated to Ifá nigeriano, the heterogeneity of their approaches, and the individuality of practitioners themselves presented a series of methodological conundrums, several of which related directly to what Palmié describes as "the well-known epistemic quandary of recursivity of scale and resolution" (Palmié, 2013, 6). As I began to “scale downward” and identify typologies of difference between Cuban-style Regla de Ocha Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrîṣà as an analytical tool, I was faced with the ontological ambiguities inherent to delimiting the boundaries of each set of practices or separating them into
discrete, objectified entities. How, for example, does an ethnographer parse out what is "African" from what is "Afrocuban" – or "Cuban," for that matter – within competing claims to “true” Africanity and Yoruba/Yorùbá traditionality in Cuban-style Regla de Ocha Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà? As a set of fate-transformative practices tracing its roots to 19th-century Yorùbáland, Nigeria, Regla de Ocha-Ifá offers its own claims to "true" African traditionality as rooted in historical – rather than contemporary – Yorùbáland.

Discursively, Cuban practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá and members of the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC) often frame the diasporic tradition as more unchanged (and therefore “traditional”) than the contemporary religion of Yorùbáland itself, which has declined significantly in influence in Nigeria in the face of the spread of Islam and Christianity (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a; Clark, 2004; Villepastour, 2015). Practitioners of Ifá nigeriano, on the other hand, mobilize discourses of loss, “lacunas”, and invenciones (“inventions”) in Regla de Ocha-Ifá, which they view as a diluted practice ravaged by the legacy of slavery and the vagaries of Catholic syncretism in the New World (See, for example, Orozco Rubio, 2016).

The task of parsing out the objective distinctions between the two traditions is, inevitably, a considerably fraught methodological and analytical endeavor. On the one hand, self-evident differences abound. Central deities crucial to òrìṣà worship and cosmology in Yorùbáland – including, for example, the òrìṣà Ègbé – did not survive as such within the pantheon of deities in Cuba (Bolívar Aróstegui, 1990; Brown, 2003; Sublette, 2004; Villepastour, 2015) and have been re-introduced into Cuba through Nigerian-style Ifá-
Beyond distinctions in the core deities worshiped in Cuba and Yorùbáland, the number of deities that a practitioner receives during initiation also differs: since the 1990s, African traditionalists have returned to a “pie y cabeza” (“foot and head”) style of initiation rather than the “modern,” multi-deity style of Regla de Ocha-Ifá initiations (Brown, 2003, 10, 137-138; Rauhut, 2014). Additionally, in Nigeria, the concept of reincarnation forms a core principle in òrìṣà worship (Bascom, 1969; McClelland, 1982). As Castro Figueroa states, this “eschatological concern” is “practically void” in the Cuban tradition, which generally concerns itself with more "concrete and immediate problems" (Castro Figueroa, 2012, 93). Having developed in the crucible of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Regla de Ocha-Ifá also emphasizes rituals and rites related to “protection and divination”, with a diminished emphasis on rites of fertility (Castro Figueroa, 2012; Orozco Rubio, 2015). Other differences also abound: the use of the contemporary Yorùbá language in Yorùbá ritual versus the vestige, non-grammatical ritual language of Lucumí in Regla de Ocha-Ifá; a discrete yearly calendar of òrìṣà days and festivals; distinct weekly and monthly cycles of rituals; and myriad differences in the musical, linguistic, and aural approaches to òrìṣà worship and communication.

Despite these self-evident differences, however, the question of what is "African," "Afrocuban," “Yorùbá,” or “Cuban” about these practices – among myriad other potential descriptors – remained a lingering methodological and epistemological concern. On both sides of the Atlantic, Cuban and Nigerian practitioners lay claim to "true" African

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36 Notably, however, remnants of òrìṣàs such as Ògbé and Òrì survive through selected practices, such as in loosely related Egún rituals and feeding the head in Regla de Ocha-Ifá (Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017).

37 My translation.
traditionality as rooted in a pre-colonial, pre-20th century, and often mythical Yorùbáland – one inevitably separated from the present by the vagaries of each countries' respective colonial and postcolonial histories and by the dynamism of living traditions that inevitably transform and adapt through time. As Matory (1999, 2005) has shown, however, the very emergence of the concept of “Yorùbáland” and of “Yorùbá tradition” itself is inexorably linked to the “coeval” (Fabian, 1983) dialogue that occurred between Africa and the Americas in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Matory’s dialogic – rather than linear – formulation of the relation between Africa and its diasporas complicates formulations of purportedly “true” Yorùbá traditionality and purity that often characterize discursive mobilizations of a Yorùbá “baseline” (Matory 1999:74) in both Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. As he states:

What came to be classified as ‘Yorùbá' tradition [in the 19th and early-20th centuries] fed on cultural precedents in the hinterland of Lagos, but its overall name, shape, contents, standards of membership, meaning, means of transmission, and degree of prestige would have been radically different – if they had come into existence at all – were it not for the intervention of a set of transnational financial, professional, and ideological interests that converged on the West African Coast. Returnees from Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, North America, the Virgin Islands, and Sierra Leone converged on Lagos during the 19th century and not only composed a novel African ethnic identity but, through a literate and politicized struggle, guaranteed that it would be respected in a unique way by generations of students of Africa and its diaspora (Matory, 2005: 70).

The influence of Brazilian, Cuban, and other returnees to Lagos in the 19th century on shaping the formation and prestige of a "'Yorùbá’ tradition" – which, in turn, influenced the writings of the pioneering Cuban scholar of Afrocuban culture and religion, Fernando Ortiz, in the early 20th century (112-113) – points to the emergence of “Yorùbá traditionality” as fundamentally dialogic, coeval, and dialectical both on and off the
African continent (ibid). The mobilization of contemporary formulations of Yorùbá traditionality, then, rests not only in the "story of Africa in the Americas" but on the story of "the Americas in Africa," as Matory succinctly states (1).38

Palmié’s approach to addressing “Africa” and “Africanity” as “theoretical problems instead of ontological givens" (Palmié, 2008, 14) additionally offers a productive lens through which to examine the ways in which Cuban-style Regla de Ocha and Nigerian-style Ifá-órisà practitioners mobilize “predications of Africanity” (Palmié, 2008, 32) in the service of contemporary – and historically-situated – projects. Indeed, the polemic surrounding African Traditionalism in Cuba and the contested nature of Africanity itself points to African pasts as "fundamentally emergent" in nature (32), a view of “African-inspired” practices (Ochoa, 2010) that pushes against linear, 20th-century, Herskovitsian models of African cultural “retentions” in the New World (Herskovits, 1958; Price and Price, 2003). As Palmié and others have shown, attributions of Africanity in the Americas are “ill-understood as mere transcontinental and transtemporal reflexes, residues, or memories of an originary set of dispositions or essences” (Ochoa, 2010; Palmié, 2008, 32; Wirtz, 2014). Even so, the mobilization of discourses of purity in the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) and, concomitantly, discourses of barbaridades (“barbarities”), loss, and lacunas in Ifá criollo forms a foundational discursive aspect of African traditionalism, a discursive posturing that mirrors the Herskovitzian logics of retention/dilution that emerged in the 20th-century anthropology of "Afro-American" forms in the New World (Price and Price, 2003).

38 For further historiographical analyses of the transnationally-informed emergence of a Yorùbá ethnicity, language, and tradition in 19th and 20th century Yorùbáland, see Peel (1989, 2000).
Rather than undertake the fraught methodological and epistemological task of parsing out “true” historical authenticity vis-à-vis an historiography of New and Old World comparisons, in this project I interrogate predications of Africanity as foundationally emergent, historically-constituted ascriptions mobilized by contemporary Cuban women and men in the service of specific, yet heterogeneous, projects.

As historically emergent articulations, the predications of Africanity that ground Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba have necessarily been constituted through acts of disarticulation, adaptation, and translation. Brent Hayes Edwards’ formulation of “décalage" (Edwards, 2003) as central to the articulation (following Hall, 1980) of black diasporic forms, discourses, and practices in the Americas offers a fruitful framework through which to examine the work of translation inherent to articulations of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba. The unequal, heterogeneous, and imperfect means by which information and ideologies surrounding the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) travel to Cuba underscores Edwards' formulation of décalage, which focuses on “gap[s]”, “discrepancies”, and “lag” (Edwards, 2003, 13). In African Traditionalism, linguistic translations between Yorùbá, English, and Spanish circulate unevenly between Nigeria, the Americas, Europe, and Cuba itself, generating a variegated, traveling archive – itself a "generative system" (Scott, 1992 and Foucault, 1972 [in Edwards, 2003, 7]) – of information, correspondences, and print and digital media. This mobile archive instantiates proliferating iterations of difference that, as I argue here, ultimately enable Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà articulations on the island.

Notably, practitioners of Ifá nigeriano in Cuba rarely speak English or Yorùbá. As such, African Traditionalists rely heavily on amateur Spanish-language translations of
Yorùbá- and English-language publications, including both popular and academic publications in the fields of religion, anthropology, history, or linguistics. Often, documents that circulate the sacred verses of the odù of the Ifá corpus or specific instructions for religious ritual are passed digitally and authored anonymously. Many of these documents arrive in the hands of Cuban practitioners via unofficial Spanish translations of English-language texts originally translated from Yorùbá, a labor undertaken by Spanish-speaking practitioners throughout the Americas and Europe with varying degrees of direct contact with contemporary Yorùbáland. Spanish-language blogs, forums, and websites based out of Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Spain, Colombia, or other countries in Latin America provide further means of digital exchange – a novel phenomenon afforded to Cubans through the recent, and painfully-gradual, changes to the infrastructural and state-mandated impediments to Cuba’s internet accessibility (BBC, 2011; Rodriguez, 2017).

Beyond the linguistic dimensions of the Yorùbá-English to English-Spanish translations that enable Cubans accessibility to information on the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR), the décalage inherent to diasporic articulations of Ifá nigeriano encompasses broader philosophical, ideological, and cultural (mis)translations. As Edwards notes, décalage transcends the merely linguistic/semantic, constituting “the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged”, “the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water,” or the “changing core of difference” inherent to points of differentiated, and unequal, contact (Edwards, 2003, 14). However, while Edwards foregrounds the "unhappy" dimensions of décalage as a foundational aspect of the act of translation – or what he refers to as the “necessary haunting"
attendant to its proliferation of misunderstandings, disarticulations, and (mis)translations
(15) – in this project I examine the ways in which African traditionalists mobilize sites of
disjuncture and disarticulation precisely as fields of productive and creative potentiality.

If décalage – and the act of translation itself – is a metaphorical two-sided coin, its
iterabillity as a "gap", “discrepancy”, or “lag” (13) both provides the possibility for the
negative proliferation of difference and mistranslation(s) that “haunt” its one side while,
simultaneously, enabling generative and productive potentialities on its other.

Translation, as a site of disjuncture and disarticulation, then, enables interstitial spaces of
potentiality that provide the grounds for generative acts of reconfiguration. In Nigerian-
style Ifá-órìṣà in Cuba, African Traditionalists continuously harness the interstitial
potentiality of translation in order to creatively adapt aspects of Nigerian-rooted Yorùbá
religious practice to suit their own objectives and needs. Rather than merely copying
Nigerian forms of Ifá-Órisá worship wholesale (a practical – and undesired –
impossibility), practitioners creatively refashion and selectively fuse tenets of Cuban-
style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Òrisá-Ifá to create novel forms of worship
that enable the realization of specific projects and emancipatory desires. Indeed, it is the
act of translation itself that creates interstitial and generative spaces for acts of
reconfiguration in Nigerian-style Ifá-Ôrisá in Cuba. Furthermore, it is precisely at the
interstices between these two religious domains that spaces of potentiality for the
transformation of gender and fate-altering ritual occur.

A perspective that acknowledges décalage as an inherent aspect of sites of
unequal, differentiated contact additionally points to academic ethnography itself as a
practice inherently marked by its own “gaps” and (mis)translations. This is particularly
true of the encounter of alternate logics of race within sites of academic ethnography. In Cuba, particularly, a theoretical approach that recognizes both formulations of “race” and predications of Africanity as foundationally emergent, historically-constituted ascriptions avoids the pitfalls of a North American academic perspective that often conflates blackness and cultural Africanity as an ontological given (Jackson, 2006; Michaels, 1992) – one dictated a priori by "entrenched Western geopolitical commonsense” (Palmié, 2008, 4). In Cuba, the widespread racial heterogeneity of practitioners of "Afro-“ “Cuban” “Religions” – which have incorporated white, Fillipino, Chinese, and mixed-race practitioners since the early days of the development of these religions in the mid-to late-19th century (Brown, 2003, 59; López, 2013: 104-105; Paravisini-Gebert, 2008: 152; Palmié 2013) – defies the facile syllogism of blackness-as-racial-alterity and cultural authenticity so typical of a North American academic perspective (Jackson, 2006; Michaels, 1992). As Palmié notes, “the fact, so deeply puzzling from a North American perspective, [is] that ‘Africanity’ and ‘blackness’ often do not, and simply need not coincide” (Palmié, 2013, 27).

Within the universalizing racial scope of Nigerian-style Ifá-órisà worship in Cuba, this conceptual divorce of Africanity from blackness forms a foundational philosophical and theological tenet of the universalizing approach of numerous – though not all – African Traditionalist ĝebēs. This occurs even as “Africa” as a chronotope continues to constitute a “vital point of reference for any construction (or contestation) of ‘authenticity’ and ‘legitimacy’ in contemporary Afro-Cuban ritual practice” (Palmié, 2013: 28). The ongoing conceptual divorce of Africanity from blackness also characterizes much Cuban scholarship on “Afro-“ “Cuban” “Religion” itself, which is
now officially labeled by the Cuban government and numerous Cuban scholars not as "Afrocuban religion" but as "Cuban religions of African origins (religiones cubanas de orígen africano)" – a subtle but telling distinction (25). As Palmié notes, as early as the 1930s, Cuban ethnographers such as the renowned scholar Fernando Ortiz developed what he frames as a "brilliant" “distinction between Africanity as an external attribution (as, e.g., visible in civil documents listing a person’s birth in Africa)” and as a “willed form of identification in which people of all phenotypes and ancestries had begun to engage” (Palmié, 2013, 26). Here, I am concerned with Africanity precisely as a “willed form of identification” in which both “black" and "non-black” Cubans engage. Additionally, this perspective points to the ways in which Africanity serves as a contested discursive domain not only in Cuba but both on and off of the African continent itself (Clarke, 2004; Palmié, 2008). Following Palmié, I use the case of African Traditionalism in Cuba as an inquiry into “the politics and poetics of ‘Africanization’” (Palmié, 2008, 32). This theoretical approach engages “the production and reproduction of ‘Africa’, ‘Africanity’, and ‘African origins’ as socially salient signifiers, claims, and projects” by heterogeneous social actors, including both Cubans and foreigners involved in “scholarly communities of discourse” (ibid).

**Aurality and Predications of Africanity in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà: Chapter Outline**

In this dissertation, I offer a series of case studies that examine the intersections of aurality (Moreno, 2016; Ochoa Gautier, 2014) and predications of Africanity (Palmié, 2008) in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. In the first (Chapter 2), I turn towards the case of the
recent importation of the dùndún "talking drums" of contemporary Yorùbáland into the rituals and processions of Havana’s ègbés. In this chapter, I argue that members of Aworeni lineage temples mobilize the dùndún "talking drums" as aural and visual emblems of contemporary Yorùbáland, sounding the dùndún as a means to assert a Yorùbá-centric approach to Ifá-òrìṣà worship and to announce the spread of African Traditionalism in Cuba. Additionally, I interrogate the ways in which members of the Aworeni lineage utilize the dùndún as a means to promote the spread of Nigerian-rooted Yorùbá religious institutions in Cuba – institutions that, in turn, challenge the religious and legal monopoly of the state-linked Yorùbá Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC).

Through an analysis of the dùndún in Havana’s ègbés, this chapter serves as an inquiry into the boundaries of religious practice in Cuba’s post-Atheist political environment and to the limits of its burgeoning civil society. Additionally, this chapter points to the ways in which novel, pan-African affective ties and institutional affiliations challenge the circumscribed boundaries of state-recognized and officially-legitimated órìṣà/oricha worship in Cuba.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn towards the polemic of gender in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. Specifically, I interrogate the ways in which African Traditionalists (and women, in particular) use the crafting of sound and listening as a means to reshape theology, fate-altering ritual, and gendered prohibitions in Regla de Ocha-Ifá. In Chapter 3, for example, I examine the events surrounding June 22, 2015, when Nagybe Madariaga Pouymirò, a professional percussionist and life-long proponent for women’s right to play consecrated batá drum set in Cuba and internationally, succeeded in crafting the first authorized grupo de fundamento de mujeres, or group of women authorized to play the
previously-prohibited *tambores de aña*. This historic event marked the first known instance in which three women were authorized to play the Cuban consecrated *batá* set on the island or internationally, and it was authorized and overseen by Enrique Orozco Rubio, an African traditionalist babaláwo, or priest, and *omo aña*. In utilizing *Ifá* Nigeriano as an avenue for carving out novel forms of access to the consecrated *batá* in Cuba, Pouymiró circumvented both *criollo* prohibitions against women playing sacred *batá* and Ocha orthodoxy regarding the *batá* set’s ritual use. In re-contextualizing sacred *batá* performance within *Ifá* Nigeriano, I argue that Pouymiró furthermore carved a path for a larger and explicitly generative project of refashioning the ritual uses of the sacred *batá*, thus re-conceptualizing the epistemic and ontological bases of *batá* within Cuban “cults of affliction” (Ochoa, 2010; Palmié, 2013; Turner, 1968).

In Chapter 4, I turn towards the “Iyanifá debate” in Cuba (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a), or the gendered polemic surrounding the initiation of priestesses into *Ifá*. In it, I interrogate the ways in which practitioners of Nigerian-style *Ifá-*òrìṣà turn towards the gender norms of contemporary Yorùbáland as an acting model in order to reshape female participation and gendered subjectivity in Cuban *Ifá*. Through an analysis of aurality in the annual *Letra de Año* ("Letter of the Year") divination ceremony in the *Egbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi* [sic] of Santiago de Cuba, this chapter interrogates the importance of the voice – and of the contemporary Yorùbá language, specifically – to African Traditionalist assertions of Ìyánífá as central to Yorùbá-rooted philosophies of community health and equilibrium. Through an analysis of contemporary Yorùbá praise
poetry and praise songs utilized in the *Letra de Año* ceremony, this chapter offers a glance into the creative re-adaptation of select elements of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) within African Traditionalism. Finally, Chapter 5 explores the recent introduction of the Yorùbá cult of *Egúngún* in Cuba, a masquerade and ritual tradition of òrìṣà worship dedicated to the dead, or the ancestors. Through a comparison of the discrete historical trajectories of the introduction of Egúngún ritual cults of worship and *mascaradas* (full-body masks) in Eastern and Western Cuba, this chapter interrogates the phenomenon of regionalism in African Traditionalism as evidenced in the cult of Egúngún specifically.

The multiple case studies I outline in this project point to the centrality of *aurality* – both as “that which is heard or references the ear” and as an “audible configuration” or “historical mode of audibility” (Ochoa Gautier, 2014, 140, 149) - to the cosmological contestations and “politics of life” inherent to the polemic of African Traditionalism in Cuba (213). Drawing from Ochoa Gautier’s formulation of the inextricability of listening, the sonic and the sensorial to knowledge formation and to the ontological and epistemological bases for the crafting of proper personhood in 19th-century Colombia, I argue here that the aural in the Ifá Nigeriano polemic serves as a locus of contested “ontologies and epistemologies of the acoustic” (2) that mediate notions of divinized personhood, proper cosmological femininity, and juridico-theological belonging within contexts of state-linked and actively-monitored Cuban religiosity. In its multiple status as at once “‘a force that constitutes the world and a medium for constructing knowledge about it’” (ibid), the aural operates multiply within the Ifá Nigeriano debate as, at once, a channel of communication between humans and oricha/òrìṣà, a political domain for the
reformulation of religious feminity and female ritual and epistemic access, the grounds for “epistemologies of purification” (67) that turn towards Nigeria as an acting spiritual model in the realm of the linguistic, and as a policed domain of notions of proper Cuban religiosity within a nationalized and selectively state-monitored “Afro-“ “Cuban” “culture”. Within these multiple imbrications, African traditionalists’ “yorubizing” project underlines the multiple ways in which listening, sound, the sensorial, and cosmological truth are bound within contested domains of oricha/òrìṣà worship.
In Cuba, emergent circulations with the contemporary African continent are transforming the landscape of gender and belief in Regla de Ocha-Ifá. Through the controversial “Yorubization” – or “re-Yorubization” – of the religions of Regla de Ocha, also known as Santeria, and Ifá, its parallel branch of divination, African Traditionalists reformulate the gendered, theological, and audible boundaries of orishà/oricha worship in Cuba and challenge the religious and juridical monopoly of the state-linked Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC). In this chapter, I offer a single case study. It examines the recent importation of the dùndún "talking drums" of contemporary Yorùbáland into Havana ẹgbés. The dùndún "talking drums" of Yorùbáland have arrived in conjunction with a novel religious movement – Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, also known as Ifá nigeriano or African Traditionalism – that aims to validate the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of contemporary Nigeria as the reigning authority in Cuban orishà/oricha worship. I argue here that the dùndún ensemble – as an aural and visual emblem of contemporary Yorùbáland - serves to “re-Yorubize” Cuban Ifá and to promote and legitimize the spread of Nigerian-rooted, Yorùbá institutions in Cuba. Through the foundation of temples, the crafting of novel geographical constituencies, and the establishment of hierarchical councils of chiefs, members of the Nigerian-rooted Aworeni lineage build a network of pan-African, Yorùbá-rooted institutions throughout Cuba that, in turn, challenge the religious and juridical monopoly of the state-linked Yorùbá Cultural Association of Cuba (the ACYC). Members of the Aworeni lineage mobilize the dùndún – a pan-Yorùbá ensemble of "talking drums" used for various types of speech
surrogacy in Nigeria – as key tools in “re-Yorubizing” Cuban Ifá through the re-introduction of Yorùbá percussion into Ifá ceremonies and ritual. Additionally, through their use in public processions, the dündún are sounded to promote the spread of Nigerian-rooted institutions throughout Cuba. Here, I examine the ways in which women and men of the Aworeni lineage use sound and language to carve out novel spaces for religious autonomy and authority. In a broad sense, then, this case serves as an inquiry into the boundaries of religious freedoms in Cuba’s post-atheist political environment and to the limitations of its burgeoning civil society.

The "Àràbà of Havana" and the Introduction of the Dùndún: Novel Yorùbá Titles and Geographical Constituencies in Cuba

In December, 2013, the Nigerian national news network TVC interviewed Cuban doctor Ángel William Viera Bravo on-site in Òṣogbo, Nigeria following his coronation as “Àràbà of Havana” by the esteemed Nigerian babaláwo, musician, and playwright Ifáyemi Èlẹbuibọn (b. 1940). In contemporary Yorûbáland, the title "Àràbà” designates a position of spiritual leadership and authority over a given geographical region, denoting its recipient as the "head diviner" or babaláwo of a town or region (Bascom, 1969: 91).

Additionally, the title of Àràbà converts the “Chief”, or wearer of the “crown”, into a living reincarnation of the oríṣà Òrùmínlà, the deity of wisdom and divination (Omidire, 2014). Named after the Silk Cotton tree (ceiba pentandra), which, “because of its size, is spoken of as ‘Araba, father of trees’ (Araba baba igi),” the title of Àràbà emerges from the traditional Òkè Ètasè Ifá lineage of contemporary Nigeria, which is based out of the World Ifá Temple
of Òkè Ìtasè in Ilé-Ìfè (Bascom, 1969: 91). Significantly, the crowning of the Viera as the “Àràbà of Havana” marked the first documented case of a Nigerian Àràbà crowning a non-Nigerian babaláwo as the “Àràbà” of a geographical region located outside of Yorùbáland – in this case, Cuba’s capital city of Havana. As “Àràbà of Havana,” Dr. Viera now held the status of supreme spiritual leader for all followers of the Yorùbá Religion in Havana, Cuba – a newly-minted geographical constituency some 5,800 miles away.

40 There is, however, an unconfirmed oral narrative of the potential crowning of an “Àràbà” in Cuba by visiting Nigerian babaláwos in the first half of the 20th century. Anthropologist Alain Konen, who conducted ethnographic research with the African Traditionalist babaláwo Frank Cabrera and the Nigerian-rooted Ilé Tun Tun in Havana beginning in 2002, relates an oral narrative from his Cuban interlocutors that claims that the Cuban babalao Tata Gaitán received the Yorùbá religious title of “Àràbà of Cuba” from three visiting African Àràbàs in the “second-quarter of the twentieth century” (Konen, 2013, my translation). Though Konen acknowledges that “no written historical data confirms this narrative,” he finds the 20th-century travel of Yorùbá religious leaders to Cuba as “plausible,” citing Pierre Verger’s accounts of the travel of Dahomean dignitaries to Cuba and Brazil for years at a time in the 19th century (Verger, 1952, 157 in Konen, 2013; my translation). Notably, the Àràbà of the United States, the Nigerian Àràbà Adedayo Ologundudu, was crowned the year after Dr. Viera, on June 28, 2014, and was born in Ilé-Ìfè (Chief Dayo, 2014). As such, he is a Nigerian babaláwo residing permanently in the United States.
In Cuba, the religions of Regla de Ocha and Ifá trace their roots to 19th-century Yorùbáland – a region encompassing southwestern Nigeria, southeastern Benin Republic, and the north-central region of the Republic of Togo – where members of the various ethnic groups now anachronistically known as the “Yorùbá” were forced to Cuba as slaves, bringing their cosmological and spiritual worldview with them (Fádépè, 1970; Peel, 2003). In Cuba, Regla de Ocha-Ifá flourished into its own, idiosyncratic set of fate-transformative practices, to the extent that many consider it to be a distinct system of worship and divination from its Nigerian counterpart (Castro Figueroa, 2012: 94). For the Nigerian priests in Òṣogbo and for many African Traditionalists in Cuba, however, the crowning of the Cuban Dr. Viera

Figure 3 Cuban Babaláwo (Ifá Priest) Ángel William Viera Bravo is crowned “Àràbà of Havana,” Òṣogbo, Nigeria, December, 2013. Photo courtesy of Ángel William Viera Bravo.
as the “Àràbà of Havana” marked the re-adoption of Cuban worshipers of the oricha into the religious hierarchies and authority of contemporary Yorùbáland, including its complex network of institutions, temples, and titles. The president of the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC), however – the state-linked, institutional arbiter of a presumably Cuban-rooted, true “Yoruba religion” and its projection internationally – responded by labeling the Nigerian-rooted title as an "African thing” (José Manuel Pérez Andino, pers. comm., 2016), framing all Nigerian-rooted institutions and titles as legally unrecognized and invalidated on the island. The crowning of the "Àràbà of Havana” in Nigeria, then, instigated a polemical debate in Cuba surrounding African Traditionalism, pointing to the contested landscape of òrìṣà/oricha worship and authority.

Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba and the Nigerian-Rooted Aworeni Lineage in Cuba

Babaláwo Ángel William Viera Bravo’s religious house in Havana, the Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba, serves as a principal nexus for the African Traditionalist Movement in Western Cuba. Like other African Traditionalist babaláwos, or priests, Viera established unprecedented ties with contemporary Nigeria through contact with Cuba’s “secondary diasporas” abroad (Frigerio, 2004; Menéndez, 2002), the visits of Nigerian babaláwos to the island, and even, in 2013, through direct travel to Nigeria itself. Despite stringent opposition and attempts to police correct, Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá by the state-linked Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba, African Traditionalist ègbèṣ, or Ifá divination brother and sisterhoods like Viera’s, continue to
proliferate. As ethnobotanist, babaláwo, and ethnographer Julio Martínez Betancourt has shown, of the at least 22 ẹgbés currently active in Cuba, two were formed in the 1990s, seven between 2004 and 2009, and the remaining 13 since 2010 (Martínez Betancourt, 2014; Martínez Betancourt, pers. comm., 2016). In line with the African Traditionalist Movement in Cuba, Dr. Viera’s Aworeni lineage circumvents Cuban prohibitions against female initiation into the priesthood of Ifá by looking towards the gender norms of contemporary Yorùbáland. In the various Aworeni temples, as in contemporary Nigeria, women are initiated as Ifá diviners and can achieve status as Ìyánífá, or high female priestesses, a practice strictly prohibited in Cuban-style Ifá.

Ángel William Viera Bravo was born in 1978 in the densely-populated Centro Habana neighborhood of Havana. Flanked on one side by the neoclassical mansions and eclectic Art Deco architecture of the historically wealthy Vedado neighborhood, and on the other by the beautifully-restored colonial and touristic areas of Old Havana (Scarpaci, 2005), Centro Habana, by comparison, offers a striking contrast in urban decay and decline. With the highest population density in the city (Colantonio and Potter, 2006), Centro Habana’s residents have long suffered from state-directed efforts to steer tourists away from their streets and towards adjacent neighborhoods, isolating them from the tourist industry so crucial to revitalizing Cuba’s economy since the fall of the Soviet Union (Anguelovski, 2014). A neighborhood with a strong black and mixed-race presence (De la Fuente, 2001), Centro Habana is also well-known for its thriving Afro-Cuban traditions. Viera entered this Afrocuban religious milieu as a young teenager, receiving his mano de Orúla – an initial step of initiation into Cuban-style Ifá – at age thirteen. As a young adult, he became initiated into numerous Afrocuban religious
traditions, including Ifá, Regla de Ocha and the Congo-inspired practice of *palo mayombe*. During this period, Viera additionally studied medicine, graduating and working as a medical doctor in Havana with a specialization in general comprehensive medicine and psychiatry.

Viera first came into contact with Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in 2008-2009 through contact with a Mexican babaláwo named Eli Torres Gongora. The Torres Gongora was first introduced to Regla de Ocha-Ifá in Mexico by means of contact with Cuba’s “secondary diasporas” abroad, and he first traveled to Cuba as a “spiritual tourist” (Hagedorn, 2014) to be initiated into Ifá in 1996. In subsequent years, Torres Gongora traveled frequently to Cuba for religious purposes, and in 2003, he was named as the Mexican delegate to the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture held in Havana in conjunction with the renowned Nigerian babaláwo Wándé Abimbólá (Torres, 2016). As the influence of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria increased globally in the 1990s and 2000's, Torres ultimately established direct contact with contemporary Yorùbáland. In 2006, Torres Gongora traveled directly to Nigeria to receive his *Itenifa*, or Nigerian-style initiation into Ifá, at the Odewale Village of Alakuko in Lagos, Nigeria.\(^{41}\) In traveling directly to Nigeria to (re-)initiate into Nigerian-style Ifá, Torres Gongora enacted an ideological transfer of the concept of the “homeland” of òrìṣà worship from Cuba to contemporary Nigeria, a move reflective of the trajectory of numerous other òrìṣà practitioners in the Spanish- and English-speaking Americas. Like Torres Gongora, babaláwos and òrìṣà practitioners of what Clarke terms "òrìṣà revivalism" in the Americas often first come into contact with the Yorùbá religion

\(^{41}\) Also called “Itẹ̀fà,” See Drewal (1992: 64).
through the "secondary diaspora" (Frigerio, 2004) of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá before connecting directly with contemporary Yorùbáland (Clarke, 2004; Martínez Betancourt, 2015; Ovalle, 2014). For many Cuban babalos on the island, however, this turned towards contemporary Yorùbáland as the "homeland" for ọrìṣà worship is perceived as threatening, potentially compromising the religious authority of Regla de Ocha-Ifá, the babalos’ national and international network of ahijados, or godchildren, and religious tourism to the island (Hagedorn, 2014; Rossbach de Olmos, 2007).

Following Torres Gongora’s first visit to Nigeria in 2006, the International Council for Ifá Religion (ICFIR), a globally-focused Yorùbá religious organization based in the Nigerian city of Ilé-Iṣẹ̀, named Torres its National Coordinator of Mexico and its Regional Coordinator of Latin America (Torres, 2016). As the ICFIR’s Latin American Regional Coordinator, Torres Gongora began his role as a “transatlantic messenger” (Palmié, 2013: 70) between the African continent and the Americas, spreading information about contemporary Yorùbáland through repeated visits to Cuba and other

42 As Clarke outlines, James Knight, or Ọba Oseijeman Adéfúnmi I, an African-American man born in Detroit, Michigan in 1928 and the founder of the Ọyọtúnjí Village in South Carolina in 1970, was first initiated into Regla de Ocha-Ifá in Matanzas, Cuba in 1959. The "first African-American in American history to become initiated into the ọrìṣà voodoo African priesthood with Afro-Cubans at Matanzas, Cuba,” Clarke notes that Knight’s initiation " marked the beginning of the spread of the Yorùbá religion and culture among African-Americans" (Clarke, 2004; 192). Following his initiation in Matanzas, Cuba, Knight founded the Ọyọtúnjí Village in South Carolina in 1970. In subsequent decades, Knight turned directly towards contemporary Yorùbáland as an acting model, traveling directly to Nigeria itself (ibid).

43 As Ovalle notes, for many practitioners of Regla de Ocha-Ifá outside of Cuba, this reconnection with contemporary Yorùbáland – and the subsequent defection from the “lukumi” tradition in favor of Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà – is “spurred on by the internet” (Ovalle, 2014).
Latin American nations. In Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Cuba, Torres Gongora organized religious meetings and academic conferences on the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of contemporary Nigeria (Torres, 2016), including, in 2015, the “First Hispanicophone Encounter of the Ifá-Ọríṣà Tradition (Primer Encuentro Hispanoparlante de la Tradición Ifá-Ọríṣà)” at the Casa de la Poesía in Havana, which constituted one of the first attempts to unite the different African Traditionalist ẹgbés throughout Cuba’s provinces in a formal meeting.

Torres Gongora has also traveled in the Americas with his Nigerian religious superior, the renowned Nigerian babaláwo Chief Ọṣọlagbádé Pópóólá. Pópóólá is a sociologist, anthropologist, and author of numerous books on the Yorùbá Traditional Religion in Yorùbáland (Omidire, 2014; Pópóólá, 2017). He additionally serves as chairman of Ethics and Scripture for the ICFIR. Previously, Pópóólá established numerous chapters of his own Nigerian-rooted religious association, the International Ifá Training Institute (or IITI), in various Latin American countries, including Mexico, Venezuela, Trinidad, and Colombia (ibid). It was during one such visit to Cuba with Pópóólá in late 2008 and early 2009 that the Dr. Viera, the future “Àràbà of Havana,” was first introduced to Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà through Torres Gongora and Pópóólá. Dr.

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44 Palmié uses the term “transatlantic messenger” in reference to the mid-20th century French “photographer, inveterate traveler, ethnographer, and historian” Pierre Verger, who “had been criss-crossing the Atlantic” from Benin and Nigeria to Brazil and Cuba “ever since the late 1940’s” (Palmié, 2013: 69).
45 In this conference, Torres Gongora and other conference participants blended academic and theological argumentation about the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) of contemporary Nigeria in order to promote Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà in Cuba and throughout the Americas (See also Chapter 3). In this particular case, Torres Gongora and other panelists examined, for example, the medicinal properties of plants from a scientific and ritual perspective, Yorùbá etymology and ritual linguistics, and competing perspectives on gender in Cuban- and Nigerian-style Ifá.
Viera was impressed with the Nigerian babaláwo and the claims of the other African Traditionalists he met during Pópóọlá’s visit. These babaláwos held contemporary Yorùbáland as the true homeland for religious purity and fate-changing efficacy, and they viewed Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá as a diluted spiritual practice damaged by the legacy of slavery, the loss of the Yorùbá language, and the syncretic influence of Catholicism (See, for example, Orozco Rubio, 2016). After meeting Torres and Pópóọlá, Viera turned resolutely towards African Traditionalism. In 2011, he received his first Nigerian consecrations from Pópóọlá, including accoutrements for the òrìṣà Ọ̀ṣà, Ọ̀bàtálá, and Ori imported directly from Yorùbáland. The following year, Dr. Viera moved beyond his connections with Pópóọlá and made direct contact with the Aworeni religious lineage of the World Ifá Temple of Òkè Ìtasè in Ilé-Ìfẹ̀, a connection that would ultimately lead to his coronation as “Àràbà of Havana.”

For the Yorùbá, the Nigerian city of Ilé-Ìfẹ̀ represents the cradle of the Yorùbá civilization and the birthplace of humankind (Ogunleye, 2007; Abimbola, 1997). Ilé-Ìfẹ̀ is home to the World Ifá Temple of Òkè Ìtasè, one of the most important pilgrimage sites in southwestern Nigeria (Olupona, 2011), where the Àrabbà Àgbáyé – literally, the "Àrabbà for the whole world" and the purported direct, blood descendent of the deity Ọ̀rùnmílà (Omidire, 2014) – presides. The Àrabbà Àgbáyé also serves as the spiritual head of the Aworeni lineage, one of the most prominent Ifá lineages in Yorùbáland, which is based out of the temple of Òkè Ìtasè. Through the connections of two international friends and babaláwos, Dr. Viera made contact with the Àrabbà Àgbáyé and the Aworeni lineage in 2012. That same year, the Àrabbà Àgbáyé sent one of his sons, Babaláwo Owolabi Awodotun Aworeni, a member of Òkè Ìtasè’s council of high priests, from Ilé-Ìfẹ̀ to
Havana to found the first Nigerian-rooted Aworeni Temple. The Àrèbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfẹ Ifá Temple of Cuba [sic] was founded in Dr. Viera’s home in Centro Habana – only twenty-five blocks away from the Yorùbá Association of Cuba (ACYC) – with Dr. Viera as its Chief Olùwò, or spiritual leader.

After its founding, the temple hosted a visit in 2012 from the Àrèbà of the city of Òṣogbo, Nigeria, the renowned babaláwo Ifáyèmí Èlèbuìbọ̀n. Hailed as “by far the most successful religious entrepreneur of oríṣa worship in Oṣogbo,” Èlèbuìbọ̀n established a successful career as an authority on Ìfá worship and the Yorùbá religion in Nigeria beginning in the late 1960s, when he began producing radio programs, audio cassettes, films, and books examining Ìfá and other aspects of the Yorùbá religion (Probst, 2004: 352). As a poet and playwright, Èlèbuìbọ̀n traveled to France, Brazil, and the US in the mid-1970s as part of renowned Nigerian dramatist and playwright Duro Lapiddo’s National Theater (Probst, 2011). In the 1980s, Èlèbuìbọ̀n “expanded his business ventures in the U.S. and Latin America”, where he “established himself as a poet, filmmaker, and authority on Ìfá divination” (89).

As Palmié outlines, Ifáyèmí Èlèbuìbọ̀n also played a crucial role in the fierce controversy surrounding the Cuban American babalao José Miguel Gómez Barberas in Miami in the late 1970s (Palmié, 2013: 68-72). After being denied access to the “crucial reproductive resource of the olofin—a sacrum indispensable to the initiation of new babalao, and therefore a key to the strategic building of religious descent-lines (ramas)” by the infamous Cuban babalao Miguel Febles y Padrón (67), the Cuban American

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46 For more on Babaláwo Owolabi Awodotun Aworeni, see his interview with Roots and Rooted (Roots and Rooted, 2010).
47 Ilé Ijuba Ifá Àrèbà Aworeni Ilé Ìfẹ.
Barberas, who lived in Miami, took matters into his own hands. In 1977, he contacted the ethnographer and “exiled grande dame of Afro-Cuban studies” Lydia Cabrera about the possibility of becoming “(re-)consecrated” into Ifá in Nigeria (68). This move effectively side-stepped the Cuban babalao Miguel Febles’ tight control over other babalao’s ability to initiate new babalao and establish new religious descent-lines in Cuba and the United States by turning instead towards Nigeria as a source for the coveted olofin (called “olojin” or “oloji” in Cuba and, often, “Odù” in Nigeria, See Villepastour, 2015: 288). Through Cabrera’s contact with the French ethnographer Pierre Verger, Barberas ultimately succeeded in breaking with the tradition of descent-based ritual lines in Cuban Ifá, traveling to Òṣogbo, Nigeria in 1978 to be (re-)initiated into Ifá by Òlẹ́bùíbọ̀n. As Palmié notes, Òlẹ́bùíbọ̀n “bestowed upon his Cuban-American colleague the crucial consecrations” that enabled Barberas to initiate others into Ifá in Miami, and Barberas’ new olofin/Odù “went viral almost immediately after” (71). By providing Barberas with the crucial reproductive mechanism of the olofin/Odù, Òlẹ́bùíbọ̀n emerged as a central player in one of the earliest turns towards Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in the Cuban American religious community in Miami in the late 1970s. This radical break from the descent-based rama of Cuban Ifá would serve as an important catalyst in the development of a rift between practitioners of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà on and off the island in subsequent decades.

Over thirty years after his (re-)consecration of the Cuban American José Miguel Gómez Barberas in Nigeria, Òlẹ́bùíbọ̀n continued his role as a “major transatlantic player” (Palmié, 2013, 71) by facilitating and overseeing the crowning of the Cuban Dr. Ángel William Viera Bravo as the "Àràbà of Havana" in Òṣogbo, Nigeria in 2013. Cheryl
Tawede Grills, an American clinical psychologist, professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, and spiritual “godchild” of Elébuibön’s, put Elébuibön in touch with Viera after meeting him during one of her visits to Cuba. Through their shared professional interests in community psychology and psychiatry, Viera and Grills became friends, even collaborating together on an academic publication exploring drug addiction and personal and community health in Havana (See Aguilar Amaya et. al., 2014). In 2012, Grills facilitated an informal, two-day conference in Viera’s Àrâbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfá Temple of Cuba in Havana, with Elébuibön as the primary speaker (Ovalle, 2014). Throughout the conference, Elébuibön led discussions on Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion YTR). As Elébuibön would later relate, he was impressed by how Viera and other members of the Aworeni lineage in Cuba took great interest in the extensive knowledge that the elderly babaláwo held of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion and of the practices of Ifá and órìṣà in Yorùbáland. To him, the attitudes of these African Traditionalists stood in stark contrast to the positioning of the other Cuban babaláos and practitioners of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá whom he met during his travels, who struck Elébuibön as “arrogant” and and unwilling to "pay respect to the homeland".48

After the conference, Elébuibön, the Àrâbà of Òṣogbo, reciprocated his visit by inviting Viera to stay with him in Òṣogbo, Nigeria the following year. Importantly, Elébuibön’s invitation to Òṣogbo coincided with a key policy change in Cuba’s travel laws. In 2013, Cuban President Raúl Castro passed a law lifting the restriction that required Cubans to obtain exit visas prior to international travel (Cave, 2012; De Ferrari,

48 Quotations of Elébuibön taken from video footage of Viera’s consecration ceremony as “Àrâbà of Havana” in Òṣogbo, Nigeria. Courtesy of Ángel William Viera Bravo.
2014; Gupta, 2013). For the first time in decades, Cubans with financial means were granted unprecedented opportunity to travel abroad.\(^49\) That same year, Viera became one of the first two African Traditionalist babaláwos residing permanently in Cuba to travel directly to Nigeria for the first time, effectively ending a prolonged period of physical isolation between Cuban practitioners of Nigerian-style Ìfá-òrìṣà on the island and contemporary Yorùbáland.\(^50\) During this first trip to Yorùbáland, Êlébuibon hosted Viera in his home, escorting Viera to sites of religious importance in and around Òṣogbo and preparing him for his upcoming coronation. In a ceremony covered by Nigerian national news and by the Cuban-American press in Miami, Florida (Oshisada, 2014; Ovalle, 2014), Êlébuibon crowned Viera as the "Àrâbà of Havana" in Òṣogbo, Nigeria in late 2013.

**The Dùndún "Talking Drums" of Yorùbáland, Nigeria Arrive in Havana Ëghés**

With the title of “Àrâbà”, Viera became an official "representative” of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Yorùbáland in Cuba and, from the perspective of

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\(^{49}\) As De Ferrarri notes, the lifting of the exit visas did not, however, enable all Cubans to travel freely. As he states, "the decree defends the right to deny exit to some people ‘in order to preserve the human capital created by the Revolution.’” (De Ferrarri, 2014). Additionally, Gupta notes that the lifting of the exit visas does little to lift the extreme monetary restrictions that most Cubans have two traveling abroad: “for many the benefits will likely be more psychological than practical” (Gupta, 2013).

\(^{50}\) Frank Cabrera Suárez, the founder of Ilé Tun Tun, also traveled to Nigeria for the first time in 2013, staying with his Nigerian religious advisor, Táiwò Abimbólá. By 2013, Other Cuban practitioners of Nigerian-style Ìfá-òrìṣà living outside of the island had already traveled directly to Nigeria. This includes the founders of the Odugbemi lineage in Cuba Juan Manuel Rodríguez Camejo (“Ifashade”) and Frank Alberto Hernández Reyes (“Ifálere Odugbemi”), both of whom reside in Europe, among numerous others.
Elébuibón and his other religious superiors in Yorùbáland, the leader and religious authority for “all” practitioners of the Yorùbá religion in Cuba's capital city of Havana (Viera, pers. comm., 2016).\(^{51}\) As “Àràbà”, Viera was now responsible for spreading the “true” Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria, including its Nigerian-rooted institutions, titles, and hierarchies, throughout Cuba. To aid with this African Traditionalist, evangelical goal, the new “Àràbà of Havana” purchased a set of Yorùbá dundún "talking drums" in Òṣogbo to introduce to the Àràbà Aworeni Ilẹ Ìfẹ̀ Ifá Temple of Cuba in Havana (Martínez Betancourt, 2015). For Chief Viera, the dundún drums would "re-Yorubize" Cuban Ifá – which does not have its own set of sacred drums in the Cuban tradition – re-animating Ifá ritual and heightening communication with the òrìṣà. Additionally, the sounding of the dundún drums in the temple and in street processions throughout Havana would promote and legitimize the arrival of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba. Framing himself as a pioneer in bringing the Yorùbá Traditional Religion to the island, Dr. Viera proclaimed the dundún as “the first Ifá drums to be used to play for Òrùnmílå [in Cuba]” (Viera, pers. comm., 2016), and he subsequently integrated the "talking" instruments into Aworeni rituals, ceremonies, and public processions.

In Nigeria, the dundún "talking drums" constitute the most widely-used percussion ensemble in Yorùbáland, followed in popularity by the sacred bátá set of Oyó state (Euba, 1990; Omojola, 2014; Villepastour, 2010). Varying in size and instrumentation, the ensemble consists of a series of hourglass-shaped tension drums, including the iyálà, or lead drum, and the smaller aguda, kànàngó, and gángan, as well

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\(^{51}\) Elébuibón referred to Viera as an official “representative” of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion in Viera’s consecration ceremony as “Àràbà of Havana” in Òṣogbo, Nigeria. Video footage courtesy of Ángel William Viera Bravo.
as the bowl-shaped gúdúgúdú (Euba, 1990; King, 1960; Omojola, 2014). The lead iyáälù is the principle drum that "speaks". By tightening or releasing the tension on the cords of the drum, iyáälù drummers are able to mimic the tonal properties of Yorùbá speech, playfully alternating narrative phrases with non-semantic rhythmic improvisations (Omojola, 2014). Accompanying the iyáälù, the supporting aguda, kànàngó, gánógán, or gúdúgúdú drummers reiterate contrasting patterns, creating rich polyrhythms (ibid). The Yorùbá language is especially well-suited to this type of “speech surrogacy” because it is a tonal language (Villepastour, 2010, 2015b: 3). Like Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, or Punjabi, semantic meaning in the Yorùbá language depends not only on a combination of vowels and consonants – as in stress languages such as English and other European languages – but on the relative pitch and melodic contour of enunciated tones (Sublette, 2016). As Nigerian linguist Túndé Adégòlá explains: “drum language [in Yorùbá music] is the sounding of the melody that is inherent in Yorùbá speech…because Yorùbá is a tone language, there is inherent melody in the language” (ibid).

Notably, numerous Nigerian and foreign scholars view the dùndún as an exogenous instrument of relatively recent arrival in Yorùbáland. The Nigerian

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52 The aguda is also referred to as the kekikeri (Omojola, 2014).
53 The gánógán also talks (ibid).
54 Villepastour notes that the Yorùbá language is “best suited” to speech surrogacy because “it has three tone bands. Languages with two tone bands increases ambiguity, while band languages with four or more become too complex” (Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017).
55 As Villepastour outlines, the dùndún were introduced from the Hausa in the north (Vincent, 2006). Notably, the bátá were also introduced from the Hausa (ibid), though scholars and players often view the bátá as older, “Yorùbá” instruments in relation to the dùndún (See Omojola, 2014).
musicologist Akin Euba, for example, dates the appearance of the dundún to the 15th century (Euba, 1990: 60). Other scholars differ on the timeline of the dundún's arrival. As Villepastour outlines, estimates range from the 15th century (Euba, 1990) and the late 16th century (King, 1961: 3), to, in the case of Gerhard Kubik (1999: 131), the mid-19th century onwards (Villepastour, 2010: 77). In addition to likely being exogenous to Yorubaland, the dundún differ markedly from other drum ensembles in the region in that they are "tied to no particular context" (Euba, 1990: 33). Unlike other drum ensembles restricted to the worship of specific orisâ, the dundún are free "to participate in all kinds" of religious and secular rituals and festivities (ibid). This freedom differs, for example, from the ipêsê drums associated with Ifa; the àgèrè associated with Ogûn; or the ìgbìn “associated with Òbatálá and other divinities”; among others (ibid).\footnote{56 Much scholarship on the bátá also frames the drumming ensemble as historically restricted to Egúngún masquerades and religious contexts related to the worship of the orisâ Sângó (See, for example, Euba, 1990). This restriction is often contrasted with the use of the batá for most of the oricha in Cuba (See, for example, Sublette, 2004: 216; Vaughan, 258). Villepastour, however, suggests that the extensive bátá repertoire extant in Yorúbáland throughout the 20th century (including repertoire dedicated to “dozens” of orisâ) along with “transatlantic cognate rhythms” between the Nigerian bátá and Cuban bátá repertoires without evidence of recent exchange provides evidence that the bátá were already used for orisâs beyond Sângó and Egúngún by the time the instruments arrived in Cuba in the 19th century (Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017).} Due, in part, to this flexibility, the dundún "talking" tension drums proliferated dramatically in Yorùbáland, increasing in popularity and visibility.

Throughout the 20th century, the dundún drums became the most ubiquitous drum ensemble in Yorùbáland, gradually displacing other sacred ensembles linked to specific orisâ (Euba, 1990; Omojola, 2014; Villepastour, 2010). The popularity of the dundún ensemble draws from a variety of factors, but undeniably, the dundún owes its spread in
large part to the ìyáàlù’s uncanny capacity to mimic the tonal properties of Yorùbá speech (Euba, 1990; Omojola, 2014). As Nigerian musicologist Akin Euba states, the tension drums are particularly well-suited to simulating speech sounds because “they can not only reproduce level tones but also the various glides between level tones which are characteristic of Yorùbá speech” (Euba, 1990: 34). The ability to glide between tones distinguishes the dundún ensemble from other "talking drums" in Yorùbáland, such as the batá drums associated with the òrìṣà Ọjọ́ (Villepastour, 2010). Unlike the dundun, the batá are fixed-tone, non-tension drums. As such, batá drummers have developed a spoken, coded language known as ẹnà bá tà that serves as the basis for surrogate speech on the báta. This coded language consists of a repertoire of drum vocables and is spoken only by báta drummers (and the lineage of Ôjè masqueraders with whom they intermarry). For this and other reasons, the báta’s surrogate speech is difficult to understand for outsiders (Villepastour, 2010; Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017). The dundún drums, on the other hand, are generally intelligible to the common Yorùbá speaker (Adégbolá in Sublette, 2016). In addition to their enhanced capability to serve as speech surrogates, the ubiquity of the dundún is also aided by the fact that they are highly portable, a quality that differentiates them from other drumming ensembles linked to specific òrìṣà, including the larger ìpèsè drums associated with Ifá (Euba, 1990: 34). Additionally, the dundún do not suffer from the same stigmatization as the báta, which are more directly associated with the òrìṣà in Yorùbáland (Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017). Because of these advantages, the dundún are widely used within secular

57 Even on the ìyáàlù, however, the “restricted capacity for glissando” has led drummers to code the glides between tones with flams (Villepastour, 2010; pers. comm., 2017).
celebrations to communicate praise poetry, or oríkì, for guests at events such as house parties, weddings, or child-naming ceremonies (Euba, 1990; Omojola, 2014; Sublette, 2016). Increasingly, the dùndún have entered sacred spaces in Yorùbáland as well. This has occurred to such an extent that the dùndún are replacing drum ensembles traditionally linked to specific òrìṣà, creating alarm for members of what Villepastour terms the "endangered" òrìṣà drumming traditions of Yorùbáland (Villepastour, 2010: 15; Omojola, 2014).

The “endangered” status of the òrìṣà drumming traditions is inexorably tied to the endangerment of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) itself, which has declined steeply in significance in Nigeria in the face of the spread of Islam and Christianity (Clarke, 2004; Villepastour, 2010). As Villepastour notes, “most Yorùbá people are now Muslim or Christian (said to be fifty per cent and forty-five per cent respectively)” (Villepastour, 2010: 15). Accordingly, the vast majority of both Àyàn drummers dedicated to bàtá drumming and dùndún “talking” drummers are Muslim (Euba, 1990; Villepastour, 2010). This is true to such an extent that Euba, in 1990, stated: “I have not yet come across a dùndún drummer who is a devotee of Yorùbá òrìṣà, although such drummers may exist” (Euba, 1990: 95-96). While the dùndún have spread as a ubiquitous, pan-Yorùbá instrument increasingly used within religious contexts dedicated to the òrìṣà, many dùndún drummers fall outside of these spiritual traditions in terms of their own religious orientation. “Though the roots of Yorùbá traditions are seen as emerging from Africa,” Clarke states, "Nigerian òrìṣà practitioners are few in number” (Clarke, 2004: 6). This declining significance of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion in Yorùbáland itself, however, inversely correlates with an increased interest in the Yorùbá
Traditional Religion abroad (Clarke, 2004, 2006; Villepastour, 2010). In the United States, Europe, and Latin America, interest in the Yorùbá homeland increases as the number of practitioners of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) internationally grows (Clarke, 2004, 2006; De La Torres, 2004). As Ọlábíyí Babalọlá Yáì succinctly states, “the òrìṣà tradition has its foot in Africa and its head in the Americas” (Yáì, 2001; 6).

When the "Àràbà of Havana," Chief Viera first visited Yorùbáland in 2013, he was impressed by the ubiquity of the dùndún drums, the agogo bells, the ́ṣèkèrè, and the ipèṣè instruments in ìfá ceremonies and processions. In Nigeria, he marveled, "everything" is accompanied with instruments (Viera, pers. com., 2016). The use of percussion in ceremonies and processions related to ìfá worship marks a key distinction between Nigerian-style ìfá and Cuban-style ìfá. In Cuba, ìfá does not have it's own specific instruemtnal ensembles as in the case of ìfá in Yorùbáland (i.e., the ipèṣè and the agogo) (Euba, 1990). The repertoire of songs associated with Cuban-style ìfá are generally sung a cappella, and the only sound that joins the practitioners’ voices is the distinctive, percussive rattle of the irofá, a thin, carved, wooden ideophone that is sounded to invoke the deity Òrúnmilà ("irôke" in Yorùbá) (Martínez Betancourt, 2014; Bascom, 1969: 36). In Cuba, the batá ensemble most strongly associated with the òrìṣàs Sango and Egúngún in the Òyó region of Yorùbáland came to stand in for most orichas of the Cuban pantheon, as the specific drumming traditions associated with individual òrìṣà (i.e., the ipèṣè/agogo for ìfá, the àgèrè for Ogún, the ìgbìn/agogo for Òbàtálá) were lost or marginalized. In Cuban Regla de Ocha, the consecrated batá, or tambores de Aña,

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58 Chékere in Lucumí.
59 Notably, a capella singing, accompanied by the iròke, is also common in Yorùbáland.
60 See Marcuzzi, 2005.
are used within specific ceremonies related to the orichas, such as “presentations” of new initiates to Àńá, anniversaries of santeros’ initiations (cumpleaños de santo), or toques de santo marked through Ifá or dilogín divination (Schweter, 2013: 48). Unlike the ipésè drum ensemble and agogo specifically associated with Ifá in Yorùbáland, the Cuban Ifá tradition does not have its own specific drum ensemble, and the sacred batá drums are more directly associated with Ifá’s intersecting, yet divergent branch of oricha worship, Regla de Ocha.

As a means to “re-Yorubize” the practice of Nigerian-style Ifá in Cuba, the new Àrábà of Havana purchased two leading instruments of the dùndún ensemble in Òṣogbo to integrate into his Àrábà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba in Havana. These included the lead iyàlà “talking drum” and the gúdúgúdú, a small, bowl-shaped supporting drum. The Àrábà of Havana's choice of the dùndún ensemble rather than the ipésè drums traditionally associated with Ifá, however, speaks to the rise of the dùndún as the quintessential, pan-Yorùbá instrument and to its displacement of traditional òrìṣà drumming ensembles in Yorùbáland. By wielding the dùndún ensemble as an aural tool in “re-Yorubizing” Cuban Ifá and asserting a Nigerian-rooted conception of traditionality, Àrábà Viera creatively adapts a concept of Yorùbá traditionality and purity itself grounded in evolution, transformation, and change. Despite the dùndún ensemble’s relatively recent adoption into Yorùbá òrìṣà practice (in comparison to, for example, the bátá, see Omojola, 2014), Àrábà Viera views the talking drums of Yorùbáland as a means to re-Yorubize Cuban òrìṣà worship and adopt a more spiritually pure and potent Ifá practice. This creative reformulation of "true" Yorùbá traditionality as rooted in the aural and sonic practices of contemporary Yorùbáland – including an exogenous instrument
that Nigerian scholars and Òrìṣà drummers alike deem not "traditional," and even invasive, to Yorùbá Òrìṣà worship (Euba, 1990; Omojola, 2014) – is reflected in the name that Viera gives to the dundún themselves. Viera and other members of the Aworeni lineage in Cuba refer to the instruments as “Ilú Ifá,” or, literally in Yorùbá, "drums of Ifá" (Martínez Betancourt, 2015). While the individual instruments are referred to by their Yorùbá-language correlates (i.e., iyáàlù, gángan, or gúdúgúdú, etc.), during my three years of fieldwork with the Aworeni lineage the instruments were consistently collectively termed “drums of Ifá” (Ilú Ifá) or, alternatively, “drums of Òrúnmilà” (tambores de Òrúnmilà). The term “dundún” was one that I never encountered.61 This adaptive re-naming of the dundún ensemble in African Traditionalist temples in Cuba creatively reformulates the history and essence of the instruments themselves, which, as “Ilú Ifá,” transform from instruments exogenous to the Yorùbá tradition to specifically Yorùbá – and highly traditional – “talking drums” dedicated to the practice of Ifá.

Nigerian-Rooted Yorùbá Institutions in Havana

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61 Interestingly, when I questioned Àràbà Viera about the term "dundún," he was unfamiliar with the name. Given that the Aworeni drummers use the Yorùbá-language correlates of the individual instruments of the ensemble, I initially thought that this may point to the lack of the usage of the collective term “dundún” in Yorùbáland (as argued by Euba, 1990: 19). Writing in 1990, Euba claimed that dundún drummers refer to the ensemble not as "dundún" but rather by the names of a given ensemble’s leading instruments, i.e., as “iyáàlù, gángan, ádàmò, kànàngó” or “kósó.” (Euba, 1990: 19). As he stated, “indeed, the musicians do not appear to have a ready conception of the overall definition of dundún” (ibid). Villepastour, however, who has conducted extensive fieldwork in Nigeria since 1999 and spoken with Viera in 2016, argues that the term dundún is now “generic” in Yorùbáland, suggesting that, perhaps, Viera’s unfamiliarity with the term may be due to his to his self-confessed lack of knowledge of the Yorùbá language and reliance on interpreters during his two trips to Nigeria in 2013 and 2015.
When I first met Viera in January, 2014, the new "Àràbà of Havana" had just returned from his first trip to Òṣogbo, Nigeria with two dùndún drums, the lead iyáàlù “talking drum” and the smaller gúdúgúdú. Not a drummer himself, Viera assembled a group of percussionists from among the temples' members and assigned them the task of learning to play the iyáàlù and gúdúgúdú. To assist them, Viera provided the percussionists with videos and recordings of dùndún drumming in Yorùbáland. These included the recent òrìṣà praise albums of well-known Nigerian babaláwos and Ìyánífá, including *Orin Orisa: Yoruba Traditional songs of praises for Orisa by the Nigerian babaláwó Adedayo Ologundudu* (2009) and *Isese L'agba" (Tradition And Culture Is The Best) by Ìyánífá Asabioje Afenapa* (2007).62 Both of these albums offer praise songs to Ifá and other òrìṣà recorded over traditional Yorùbá instrumentation, including the dùndún and batá ensembles. Through autodidactic approximations of the Yorùbá rhythms and songs, the percussionists began to incorporate the dùndún into the temple’s Ifá rituals and ceremonies.

62 The *Nigerian-born babaláwo Adedayo Ologundudu was crowned as* the Àràbà of the United States on June 28, 2014 following Viera’s coronation as “Àràbà of Havana” in 2013 (ChiefDayo, 2014). Notably, I encountered these recordings by Ologundudu and Afenapa in various African Traditionalist ègbèş during my fieldwork in both Eastern and Western Cuba.
Figure 4 The lead iyáälù drum (above) and the supporting gúdágúdú drum (below), Havana, Cuba, 2016. *Photos by author.*
In 2015, Àràbà Viera traveled to Nigeria for a second time, where he was promoted from "Àràbà of Havana" to “Àràbà of Cuba” by the Àràbà Àgbáyé, Chief Adisa Makoranwale Aworeni, or, literally, the Àràbà for “the whole world” (Abimbola, 1997: 63). The Àràbà Àgbáyé is considered to be the supreme religious leader of Ifá for the Yorùbá and “the representative of Orúnmila on earth” (Alarcón, 2008: 138). Additionally, the Àràbà Àgbáyé serves as the head of the Aworeni lineage and presides over the World Ifá Temple of Ôkè Îtasè in Ilé-Ifè (Alarcón, 2008: 138; Omidire, 2014).

From the perspective of his Nigerian superiors in Ilé-Ifè, Viera now held the status of supreme spiritual leader for all worshipers of the òrìṣà and Ifá in Cuba. During this second trip, Viera also purchased three additional dundún instruments to bring back to Havana from Ilé-Ifè, including the gàngan drum. When he returned from Nigeria, the “Àràbà of Cuba” began a concerted effort to spread Nigerian-rooted Aworeni institutions in Cuba and to establish a council of titled “Chiefs” that would mirror the religious hierarchies of contemporary Yorùbáland. In September, 2015, Viera founded the first subsidiary temple of the national Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba in the Havana neighborhood of Alamar. Titled the “Aworeni Temple of Havana”, the subsidiary temple would function under the guidance of the national temple and serve the inhabitants of the city of Havana, specifically. In June, 2016, Viera founded another subsidiary temple in the beachside town of Guanabo, located about thirty kilometers east of the city, designating it as the official Aworeni Temple of Eastern Havana. By carving out novel geographical constituencies legitimized through the authority of the Àràbà Àgbáyé and the World Ifá Temple of Ôkè Îtasè in Ilé-Ifè, Viera used his status as "Àràbà of Cuba" to chart a new cartography of Yorùbá religious jurisdiction throughout Cuba.
Notably, each Aworeni temple in Cuba is officially registered with the International Council for Ifá Religion, or ICFIR, in Ilé-Ifé. The ICFIR, in turn, is registered with the Nigerian government's Corporate Affairs Commission of the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism (See Corporate Affairs Commission, 2016). For Viera and other African traditionalists in Cuba, this Nigerian legal affiliation holds a
special significance, and it stands in stark contrast to the Cuban government’s official stance of non-recognition. In Cuba, the Ministry of Justice and the Communist Party’s Office of Religious Affairs only recognize one organization, the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC) to represent the Yoruba religion on the island (Argyriadis and Capone, 2004). Since the ACYC’s founding in 1991 – the same year that the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party announced a new, post-atheist era of religious freedoms in Cuba (Argyriadis and Capone, 2004; Fernández Robaina 1994: 36; Moore, 2006) – the organization has wielded the legal right to delineate the boundaries of Yorùbá religious practice and to enforce a religious politics of delegitimization – and tacit criminalization – of African Traditionalism. This has taken the form of barring the entry of African traditionalists into the organization, disseminating pamphlets aimed at discrediting African traditionalism, and, on occasion, sending representatives to harass religious practitioners who are seen as falling out of line (See Chapter 3). In February, 2015, for example, the ACYC’s official bulletin included an essay that labeled Ṣọ́lágbádé Pópólo – the same influential Nigerian babaláwo who provided Viera with his first Nigerian consecrations – as a “fraud,” a falsifier of the sacred verses of Ifá, and a "liar" (Águila de Ifá, 2015: 16-17). Framed acerbically as a “response to the mafia heads and religious hitmen of the Nigerian tradition” – a hyperbolic discursive posturing associating Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà with criminality and base immorality – the essay also declares the initiation of women into Ifá as Ìyánífá to be a "cruel scam" (20). To battle what is framed

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63 As Vélez notes, the Office of Religious Affairs was established in 1984 as a part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, marking a "radical change" in-state policy towards religion in the 1980s (Vélez, 2000: 90).
64 All Águila de Ifá quotes (2015) my translation.
as the falsified "invention" of Ìyánífá in the Yorùbá tradition, the essay goes on to proclamation that the “27,000 members” of the ACYC:

will not accept in any of our homes – making this extensive call to the entire… Regla de Ocha and Ifá [community] – the presence of these women who claim to be Ìyánífá… and much less… [the presence of] those babaláwos who have lent themselves to this farce (32).

This statement effectively bars African traditionalist women and men not only from the ACYC itself but from the private domain of its members’ temples and homes.⁶⁵

Beyond a heated campaign to discredit and ostracize African Traditionalists, their exclusion from the ACYC also carries legal consequences. The ACYC holds the exclusive right to grant foreign visas for religious tourism in conjunction with Department of Immigration, and one must be a member of the ACYC to apply for this visa (José Manuel Pérez Andino, Interview, 2016; See also Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b and Hearn, 2008). This policy effectively criminalizes African traditionalists who host foreigners for religious purposes, a common occurrence that serves as a source of income for Cuban babaláwos and Ìyánífá overseeing initiations and as an opportunity to dialogue with religious figures from abroad. Accordingly, African traditionalist priests and Ìyánífá are vulnerable to harassment from immigration officials or, worse to exorbitant fines for illegally hosting foreigners.

⁶⁵ The banishment of offending, Nigerian-style Ìyánífá and babaláwos from ACYC members’ “homes” (casas) also implicitly refers to their banishment from religious temples (i.e., casa-templos, or “house-temples”), which are located in Cuban practitioners’ private homes.
After founding the Aworeni Temple of Cuba, Viera petitioned the Cuban government to receive legal incorporation and official licensure as an association through the Ministry of Justice. Cuban law, however, "prohibits two or more legally inscribed bodies to execute the same functions," so that "the recognition of the ACYC legally preempts all further claims" by alternative Yorùbá institutions (Palmié, 2013: 74). Following the rejection, the Aworeni Temple placed a trilingual banner on the outside of the temple – in Yorùbá, English, and Spanish – that listed the Temple's name, its registration number with the ICFIR, Viera's accreditation and contact information, and a picture of the Aworeni lineage’s religious superiors in Ilé-Ifé. Shortly thereafter, a representative from the Cuban Institute of Physical Planning (Instituto de planificación...
física), which grants permits to restaurants, casas particulares, and other businesses within Cuba's slowly-burgeoning private sector (EcuRed, 2017; Feinberg and Newfamer, 2016), informed members of the temple that the banner violated Cuban law regarding publicly visible signs and placards, forcing them to remove the banner from public view (Daily Rondon Ocaña, Interview, 2016). The institutional restrictions on the open practice of African Traditionalism and the oppositional stance of the ACYC point to the juridical boundaries of religious practice in Cuba and to the confines of its burgeoning civil society – even within an ostensibly post-atheist and religiously tolerant period of (post-)Revolutionary socialism. In this restrictive environment, the legal recognition of the Aworeni lineage in Nigeria – including its registration with the Nigerian government’s Corporate Affairs Commission and the ICFIR – serves as a potent symbol of nationally transcendent legitimacy and pan-African affiliative authority in the face of Cuban non-recognition.

The Dùndún Ensemble and the Spread of Nigerian-Rooted Yorùbá Institutions in Havana

Within this environment of legal restriction, Àràbà Viera mobilizes the dùndún ensemble as a tool in promoting the spread of Yorùbá temples and institutions in western Cuba. The instruments feature prominently in ceremonies for the coronation of new

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66 *Casas particulares* are rooms in private homes that Cubans can rent to foreigners for overnight stays. The legalization of *casa particulares* in Cuba came in 1993, during the Cuban government’s turn towards tourism as a means to revive the economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the “Special Period” (See Becker, 2016).
Chiefs, in rituals for the consecration of new temples and geographic constituencies, and in public processions announcing the arrival of African traditionalism and its Yorùbá hierarchies in Havana. Since the establishment of the Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba in 2012, Àràbà Viera has worked to both establish subsidiary temples of the national temple in Eastern and Western Havana and to establish hierarchical councils of “Chiefs” for the national and subsidiary temples. As I outline below, members of the Aworeni lineage promote the establishment of subsidiary temples and the foundation of temples’ "staffs" – or councils of titled chiefs – by sounding the dùndún in public processions in Havana’s streets. Through the use of dùndún in public spaces, Àràbà Viera and other members of the temple craft a Yorùbá-inflected aurality that reflects and validates the spread of African Traditionalist institutions in Cuba.

The coronation of a council of sixteen chiefs in Aworeni temples marks an indispensable component of the establishment of new temples and mirrors the sixteen-member council of elders that exist in the Òkè Ìtasè compound of Ilé-Ifè. Known as the “Awoolodumeringidolgun,” the sixteen-member group of religious leaders in the World Ifá Temple of Òkè Ìtasè encompasses the "highest ranking babaláwos" of Yorùbáland, and it is presided over by the Àràbà Àgbáyé, the highest-ranked babaláwo in the world (Abimbola, 1997; Araba Agbaye, 2013). In the Yorùbá Traditional Religion, the sixteen members of the council of elders are considered to be living reincarnations of the sixteen méji, or the sixteen principal odù (divinatory signs) of the divining system of Ifá (Viera,

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67 As of this writing – and due to the relative infancy of the Aworeni temples in Cuba - the national and subsidiary Aworeni temples in Cuba do not yet hold a full council of sixteen coronated chiefs (though the number of coronated chiefs grows incrementally each year).
Each individual member of the council of elder babaláwos receives a specific title indicative of occupational responsibility and rank. These include such designations as Àgbọngbọn, the "immediate deputy of the Àrābà" (Abimbola, 1997: 71); Àwíṣẹ, the "messenger" or "ambassador" of the temple (Viera, 2015; Konen, 2013); or Akọda, the "sword-bearer" and "one who arrives first" (Bascom, 1969: 92). In addition to this first set of sixteen highest-ranking babaláwos, an additional set of sixteen “chieftancy titles” – thought to be “born” out of the higher-ranking first set – follows (Araba Agbaye, 2013). Beyond these initial two sets of sixteen "Chiefs,” further lower-ranked chieftaincy titles follow, including the titles of Oluwo, Lodagba, Olori Eledgan, and others (ibid).

The complex organizational hierarchy of titles, chieftaincies, and rank in the Aworeni lineage indicates what Bascom frames as the “wealth” of “institutional detail” within the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of Nigeria (Bascom, 1950: 68), which differs markedly from Cuban Ifá (Bascom, 1950; Brown, 2003: 282). In Yorùbáland, the complex system of religious lineages grew out of the politico-religious "royal dynasties" of traditional Yorùbáland, which are often mythologically framed as extensions of the royal, descent-based lineages established by the ancient "deified grandsons of [the òrìṣà] Odudua” (Sklar, 1963: 10). As Peel outlines, these politico-theological lineages constituted the political centers of the traditional Yorùbá ìlú, or "town" or "community" (Peel, 2003: 30), and they were presided over by an òba, or semi-divine “king,” and a
council of chiefs or titleholders ("ijoye or oloye, from oye, ‘title’") (31). As Peel notes, in the “title system” an ilu, or community:

achieved a two-way flow of control, resources, and information between its center (the ọba) and its periphery (the household heads, or bale)... Power and dependents, title and power, were reciprocally linked. Titles might be conferred as a recognition, and serve as an expression, of power otherwise attained (as by a successful hunter, farmer, or warrior); but in established title also conferred power, since it gave his holder the presumptive support of a given constituency, and, by virtue of its place in the title system, a certain access to resources distributed from the center (32-33).

In the most prominent lineages of Yorùbáland, such as that of the Alafin, or the traditional ruler of Òyó, the ọba’s power was complemented and counterbalanced by the council of titled chiefs (Sklar, 1963: 11). Although many of the highest-ranked positions within discrete lineages are hereditary (i.e., the titles of Àrabà Àgbáyé and Àgbòngbôn in the council of elders of Ilé-Ifé), other chieftancy titles ae awarded according to merit and prestige (Abimbola, 1997: 72). In contemporary Yorùbáland, the lineages of the traditional "principal royal dynasties," such as those of the Alafin of Òyó or the Qóni of Ilé-Ifé, are supplemented by innumerable minor, and often offshoot, religious lineages, compounds, and temples dedicated to specific ọrìṣàs or to Ifá, many of which hold their own individualized systems of chieftancy titles and hierarchies (Olajubu, 2003; Sklar, 1963:10; Bascom, 1969: 91). As Bascom and Viera note, the titles’ names – and even the number of titles that constitute the council of elders – vary from lineage to lineage

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70 For more on the relationship between familial lineages, extended familial compounds, and occupational and religious practices in Yorùbáland, see Olajubu (2003) and Barber, 1991 [in Olajubu (2003)]. For a discussion of the Àyán bátá drumming lineages and compounds, see Villepastour (2015a).
and have inevitably shifted over time (Bascom, 1969; Viera, 2015). The title of Àrâbà itself may have originated in Òyọ before traveling to the Aworeni lineage of Ilé-Ife in "fairly recent times" (Bascom, 1969: 93), and some of Bascom’s informants maintained that there were originally seventeen titles in the council of elders, rather than sixteen, "in accordance with the 17 palm nuts" of Ifá divination (93).

The institutionally rich and complexly hierarchical political and religious systems of the Yorùbá were effectively dismantled in Cuba (Bascom, 1950; Brown, 2003). As Brown notes, the Lucumí Religion flourished within the "'niches' provided by the stratified colonial society and early Republic, particularly the networks of cabildos and houses of Ocha" (Brown, 2003: 282). In Cuba, a "new wealth of institutional detail" was reformulated to adapt to the realities of the colonial and Republican Cuban context, replacing the complexity and politico-religious structures of the Kings and councils of the Yorùbá ilu (ibid). As Castellanos and Castellanos outline (1992, 3: 84-86, in Brown, 2003: 343), the hierarchy of Cuban babaláos shifted from the structure of chieftaincy titles and councils of rank to a specifically Cuban system of rank re-contextualized within the framework of casa-templos. They outline the Cuban hierarchy, from lowest- to highest-ranked, as follows: “Omofá (Hand of Orula), Awó (a babaláwo initiated in Ocha first), Oluo (a babaláwo of rank), Adofín – next after Oluo, Aró – third in rank at this high level” (Brown, 2003: 343, citing Castellanos and Castellanos, 1992, 3: 84-86). The Cuban ranks outlined by Castellanos and Castellanos bear direct linguistic resemblance to prominent Yorùbá titles, including Oluwo (from “olu awo”, “meaning chief or master of secrets”) and Awo (meaning “secrets or mysteries”) (Bascom, 1969: 83). The latter forms a foundational term within Nigerian Ifá and is widely used within Yorùbá terms and
titles, including in babaláwo ("expert [or master] in the realm of awo") (Oyèwùmí, 2006: 20), awo egan, or "secret of egan – considered the lowest rank of Ifá diviners in Yorùbáland – or Awòni/Awo Ọni, the highest-ranking category of the counsel of Ifá diviners of the Oòni, or the king of Ilé-Ifè (81, 83). Despite the differentiations in rank in Cuba as outlined by Castellanos and Castellanos, however, Cuban Ifá differs markedly from the level of institutionalization of hierarchies and the complexity of systems of rank in Yorùbáland – including its structures of formalized councils and chieftaincy titles (Bascom, 1950; Brown, 2003).

As the president of the ACYC, José Manuel Pérez Andino (Babalao Manolo Ogbeyao) succinctly stated in 2016: "the greatest title a [Cuban] babalao has is being Olofista [a possessor of Olofin]” (Interview, José Manuel Pérez Andino, 2016). Rejecting the recent importation of African titles in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba and their bearing on the island, Pérez Andino maintains that "[the title of] Àràbà of Cuba is an African title…He [Viera] is not ‘Àràbà of Cuba' because Africa is Africa. That African; it's not Cuban…[the title] is not [part of] the Afro Cuban transcendence” (ibid). Despite the rejection of claims to Yorùbá-rooted hierarchies and titles by practitioners of Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, including the president of the ACYC, practitioners of the Aworeni lineage view the establishment of Yorùbá rooted in institutions, temples, and councils of titled chiefs as an indispensable part of the spread African Traditionalism and “correct,” Yorùbá-style Ifá and Òrìṣà practice in Cuba. This vision reflects, in part, the striking complexity of the hierarchies and structures of Ifá diviners in Ilé-Ifè, where the Aworeni

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71 Oyèwùmí intervenes against the common gendering of the translation of babaláwo as “father of the secret” or “father has secrets,” arguing that the accurate translation of the term “refer[s] to both male and female diviners” (Oyèwùmí, 2006: 20).
lineage is rooted. As Bascom noted in 1969, "organizations of comparable complexity" are not found in other parts of Yorùbáland, even though "other Yoruba kings have their special diviners" (Bascom, 1969: 91). Within the Aworeni lineage, specifically, which is rooted out of the World Ifá Temple of Òkè Ìtasè in Ilé-Ìfẹ, the foundation of highly intricate and hierarchical titled councils of Chiefs marks an indispensable part of Ifá worship and divination. As "Àràbà of Cuba," Viera views the spread of Nigerian-rooted Aworeni institutions and the establishment of hierarchical councils of Chiefs as an ordained duty, one that links Cuban órìṣà practice directly to the Yorùbá homeland.

For members of the Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba and the national temple's subsidiary temples, receiving the title of “chief” not only bestows a babaláwo with a position of rank within a temple but, additionally, converts the title-holder into a "king," guaranteeing spiritual elevation and prosperity in life. The chieftancy title is thought to elevate one's àṣẹ, or “vital force” (Hallgren, 2005) – a Yorùbá philosophical and religious concept denoting the power to “effect change” or engender "the materialization of a given desire" (Afolabi, 2005: 108). In addition to increasing one's àṣẹ and fate-transformative capacity (Ochoa, 2010), the chieftaincy titles also guarantee titleholders ire, or "blessings" in life. These include the blessings of “money (ire ajé),” “long life (ire àìkú),” wives (ire obìnrin),” “children (ire ọmọ),” and "defeat of one's enemy" (Bascom, 1993 [1980]: 8; Interviews, Ángel William Viera Bravo and Daily Rondon Ocaña, 2016). Chieftancy titles are highly prized because they are difficult to attain. Chieftancy titles are life-long, and, accordingly, chiefs are carefully selected (Viera, 2015). To attain a chieftaincy title, one must consult with Ifá to determine if receiving a title is part of one's Ori, a Yorùbá philosophical concept denoting an
individual’s "inner or spiritual head," "personal divinity," or "essence of luck" and which “governs” the individual's life (Abimbola, 1996: 98). If divination confirms that receiving the title is indeed part of one's Ori, a prospective Chief must additionally pass a vote among the temple’s "staff," or council of chiefs, who decide if the individual is worthy of the rank and responsibility (Interview, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016). Finally, a prospective chief must possess the money to pay for the coronation, a largely prohibitive cost in Cuba. Chieftancy titles cost hundreds and even thousands of dollars – an exorbitant price within a country where the official average state wage is 687 pesos, about $29 per month (Rose, 2016; Whitefield, 2016). Receiving the title of "King" or "chief" therefore inherently denotes a position of economic prosperity far out of reach for the average Cuban – a show of wealth that members of the Aworeni lineage often discursively link to notions of Yorùbá royalty. Notably, the councils of chiefs of Aworeni temples in Cuba are also gender-specific, and the chieftancy titles are reserved exclusively for men.

**Ethnographic Encounters with the Dùndún and the Establishment of Councils of Chiefs**

In June, 2016, I witnessed how members of the Aworeni lineage use the dùndún to announce and promote the establishment of new temples and councils of titled Chiefs through public processions in Havana's streets. That year, the national Aworeni Temple

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72 At the Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba, I met African Traditionalist babaláwos who aspired to a chieftancy title but were unable to afford it, including percussionists who played the dùndún.
of Cuba culminated its annual Ifá Festival with a ceremony that marked the foundation of 
the Aworeni Temple of Eastern Havana and the coronation of six new lineage chiefs. 
This celebration marked the close of a two-week, annual festival dedicated to Ifá which 
occurring at the beginning of June. During the Ifá festival, the Aworeni Ifá Temple of Cuba 
held daily ceremonies dedicated to specific orishà to mark the festival's cycle, including 
ceremonies for the orishàs Ògún, Ifá, Ògbé, Ori, and others. During the culminating 
ceremony on June 16th, members of the Aworeni Temple of Cuba and the Aworeni 
Temple of Havana gathered to mark the foundation of the Aworeni Temple of Eastern 
Havana and the coronation of six new lineage chiefs. The new titles included three chiefs 
for the national Aworeni Temple of Cuba (Chief Aseda, Chief Lori, and Chief Balogún), 
one chief for the Aworeni Temple of Havana (Chief Aseda), and two chiefs for the 
newly-founded Aworeni Temple of Eastern Havana (Chief Oluwo and Chief 
Àgbọngbòn). The dundún featured prominently throughout the culminating ceremony, 
including during the coronation rituals inside of the Aworeni Temple of Cuba and in the 
public procession of the newly-coronated chiefs throughout Havana's streets.

The Aworeni Temple's annual Ifá Festival is modeled after the extensive and 
intricate Ifá Festival of Yorùbáland, which begins in the first week of June (Abimbola, 
1997: 118). As Olupona outlines, this "complex ritual" in Ilé-Ifẹ involves ceremonies 
and festivities that span the course of three months (Olupona, 2011). In Yorùbáland, the 
Ifá Festival "renews the communal life of the sacred city," ensuring "the community’s 
personal, collective, and agricultural well-being," by “bestowing the blessings of Ifá's 
abundance upon the diviners and the sacred king" (Olupona, 2011: 184). The festival 
includes the principal events of the Ọdun Ifá-Àgbọnnirègun festival, or the King's Ifá
Festival, in Ilé-Ifé, which marks the beginning of the Yorùbá calendar in the first week of June, as well as the King's New Yam Ceremony (Égbodò Qòñi, which takes place towards the end of the month (Abimbola, , 1997: 118; Bascom, 1969a; Olupona, 2011: 184). As Abímúólá describes, the Òdún Ìfá-Àgbọnnirègun festival encompasses divination ceremonies as well as all-night "chanting, dancing, and drumming" on the top of sacred Òkè Ìtäsè mountain (Abimbola, , 1997: 118). During the Òdún Ìfá-Àgbọnnirègun celebration, the festivities focus on the Àràbà Àgbáyé as the spiritual head of the Òkè Ìtäsè lineage, who serves as a custodian of the Yorùbá’s "central Ifá shrine in Temple" (Olupona, 2011: 184).

In Cuba, Ilé Tun Tun’s co-founder, the African Traditionalist babaláwo Frank Cabrera Suárez, is credited with first introducing the Yorùbá Ifá Festival and, accordingly, the Yorùbá religious calendar, to the island in 1999 (Konen, 2013). In subsequent years, numerous Nigerian-style egbes throughout Cuba’s provinces incorporated the annual Ifá festival into their yearly calendar, including, during the course of my fieldwork, Frank Cabrera’s Ilé Tun Tun in Havana, Babaláwo Yuneski González Ramírez’ (Ifáṣe Abodunde) Ègbé Ìfá Olodu in Santiago de las Vegas, and Babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio’s Ègbé Irán Àtele Ilogbon Odugbemi in Santiago de Cuba, among others. This shift towards a Yorùbá calendar of oríṣà and Ifá festivals marks a breach with Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, whose calendar of oricha “feast days” and festivals became linked with the Catholic calendar of saints’ days and festivals during the colonial period (i.e., Changó’s celebration on December 4, the day dedicated to Saint Barbara in the Catholic Church) (Azorena , 1961; Deschamps Chapeaux, 1968; O’Brien, 2004; Ortiz, [1920] 1960). This turn towards the Yorùbá calendar of oríṣà and Ifá festivals in
Nigerian-style Ifá-órìṣà mirrors a broader turn towards the Nigerian calendar within the Yorùbá revivalist movement throughout the Americas. With the globalization of Yorùbá órìṣà and Ifá worship as a "world religion" (Olupona and Rey, 2008), Ifá and other órìṣà festivals are celebrated in innumerable locales in the United States and Latin America, including in the Yorùbá revivalist Òyọtúnjí Village in South Carolina (Clarke, 2004; Pinn, 1998), the Ile Ise Ejiogbe Ifá Temple in Washington, DC (Adogame, 2009), the Orisa Lifestyle Academy in Oakland, CA (Origunwa, 2016), and the Ògbé Mimo Awo Bábá Eégúngún Digbolègún Elekuro Olúwo Ifátejú Aworeni in Argentina (DarkRaven66675, 2013), among others.\(^{73}\)

On this particular hot summer day in mid-June, 2016, I arrive at the Àràbà Aworeni Ilè Ìfè Ifá Temple of Cuba in Centro Habana to find members of all three Aworeni temples – the national Temple of Cuba, the Temple of Havana, and the Temple of Eastern Havana – in attendance at the culminating ceremony of the annual Ifá Festival, with each temples’ council of chiefs dressed in Yorùbá-centric regalia indicative of stature and rank. The temple’s designated jefe de los tambores, or “Chief of the drums”, begins the ceremony by leading the dundún ensemble in a medium-tempo polyrhythm built over the agogo Ifá, a metal bell imported from Nigeria and used when reciting Òṣẹ̀rẹ Ifá, or divination chants for Òrùnmilà (Ẹlẹbuibon, 1999; Ológundúdú, 2009).\(^{74}\) Over the agogo Ifá, the dundún drummers sound the iyáàlù, the gángan, and theugudugudú instruments as the six new chiefs proceed from a private ritual room into the public patio.

\(^{73}\) In the case of the “Odunfá” Ifá Festival in Oakland, CA in 2016, the festival was presided over by none other than Ifáyẹmí Ẹlẹbuibon (Origunwa, 2016).

\(^{74}\) The agogo was the first imported instrument that Àràbà Viera received directly from Nigeria after his turn from Regla de Ocha-Ifá to Nigerian-style Ifá-órìṣà in 2008-2009, and he received it circa 2011 (Interview, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016).
of the Temple of Cuba. Standing in the cramped patio space and overflowing onto the
street, approximately one hundred people wait in attendance, including babaláwos,
Íyánífá, and friends and family of the of temple's members. Àràbà Viera proceeds to
coronate each chief individually, first formally outlining the babaláwo’s educational and
professional achievements before detailing the spiritual and moral demands of each title.
After reciting verses and prayers in Yorùbá drawn from the odù of Ifá, Viera offers the
babaláwos their chiefly regalia. The regalia includes intricately-detailed, beaded
necklaces with a double-sided, triangular emblem displaying the title and rank, hand-
beaded royal staffs, and brightly-colored bracelets and necklaces made of
precious and semiprecious coral, jade, and fire agate stones. The intricate beadwork
reflects the aesthetics of beadworking used to craft the crowns, staffs, caps, necklaces,
and bracelets of the Yorùbá kings and babaláwos of Nigeria.75 As Àràbà Viera hands
each new chief his regalia, he explains that the “expensive” stones of the necklaces and
bracelets serve as symbols of royalty – and economic prosperity – for the chiefs as
newly-coronated “Kings.”

75 On the use of glass beads among Yorùbá royalty, Bascom notes that excavations of
glass beads at Ilé-Ifẹ́ indicate "that it was a center of the glass making industry in
precontact times" (Bascom, 1969: 102). In the 1930s, when Bascom conducted fieldwork
in Nigeria, he noted that the Yorùbá Kings wore beaded crowns as "the symbols of their
authority" and that the beads themselves were often imported from Europe, though
“coral, red stone beads, and a highly prized tubular blue bead (ṣẹ̀gì) were probably of
African origin” (30, 102).
To end the coronation ceremony, the dùndún ensemble and the six new chiefs pour into the streets of Centro Habana, announcing the foundation of the temple and the coronation of the chiefs. In 6/8 time, the *agogo Ifá* player intones the *clave*, or the unvarying, rhythmic backbone of the song. The *gángan* player, Hugo Máximo Mendoza Marin, plays a repeated, two-note phrase that provides rhythmic contrast to the *clave* of the *agogo Ifá*, holding the cords of the smaller talking drum tightly to maintain a high-

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76 The *clave* is a Cuban variation of what Ghanaian musicologist J. H. Kwame Nketia coined, in the 1950’s, as the "timeline" – or a cyclic, two-bar asymmetric pattern that forms a central organizing principle in Yoruba and West African music (Sublette, 2004: 95). Following the usage of the Cuban term in other Afrocuban musical genres (*rumba, bembé, son*, etc.), members of the Aworeni lineage refer to the unvarying, organizing rhythm of the *agogo Ifá* – the song’s "rhythmic key" (ibid.) – as the "clave.”
pitched tone. The iyààlù player and designated drum chief, Francisco Mario Delgado Iglesias, improvises a “talking” rhythm on the lead instrument, playfully sliding between low and high pitches by tightening and loosening the cords. Leading the procession, the gúdúgúdú player, Osniel González, leads a call-and-response. In it, he alternates variations on the call “olóyé” – the Yorùbá term for titleholder (derived from the word oye, “title”) (Peel 2003: 31) – prompting the crowd’s response, “Enu olóyé”, “from the mouth of the titleholder”. González improvises by alternating the word Olóyé with the title names of newly-coronated chiefs: “Ágbọ̀ngbọ̀n Olóyé”, the "immediate deputy" (Abimbola, 1997: 71); “Oluwo Olóyé” – the “principal religious leader and high priest" of a temple (Viera, 2015), and “Oyugbona Olóyé” – the temple’s “messenger” and head of sacrifice (Interview, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016). Weaving through the crowd, the newly-coronated chiefs pass out Cuban bills, placing the money on the foreheads of the dùndún players, a symbol of their economic prosperity and generosity as newly-coronated "Kings."

77 Òràbà Viera provided this approximate translation from the original Yorùbá (Interview, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016).
78 Viera notes that the Oyugbona is also in charge of sacrificial offerings to the òrìṣà (Interview, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016).
The aural and spatial takeover of the streets of Havana's most densely-populated Centro Habana neighborhood asserts the arrival of African traditionalism in Cuba. The gliding pitches and unique, roped design of the dùndún "talking drums" serve as aural and visual emblems of contemporary Yorùbáland, announcing a Yorùbá-centric sensorial orientation to African traditionality and fate-changing efficacy that contrasts with Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá. The use of the Yorùbá language and the chiefs' adornment with traditional Yorùbá dress and beadwork likewise contributes to a Yorùbá-inflicted aurality and visuality, one that temporarily engulfs Havana's streets in a potent spiritual and political statement of presence and authority. In Cuba, this public religious procession holds a specific resonance. The babaláwos, Ìyánífá, friends, family members, and neighbors who join in or film the procession on their cell phones momentarily violate Cuban law, which requires authorization for public assemblies of three or more persons.
and which has prohibited processions since 1961 (Boyle and Sheen, 2003 [1997]: 125). The Aworeni lineage’s choice to parade through Centro Habana with the dundún ensemble – a mere twenty-five blocks from the ACYC – exhibits a bold instance of self-legitimization of the presence of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in the face of a state environment of delegitimization and official non-recognition.79 As the procession pours onto Infanta, one of the principal thoroughfares of Havana, the gliding pitches of the dundún and the shouts, claps, and singing of the participants mix with the honking of cars and motorcycles, whose agitated drivers are forced into the oncoming lane to get past the marchers. For a few minutes, the members of the Aworeni lineage temporarily circumvent state mandates on legal and civic order, inhabiting Havana's public streets and spaces as their own.

In May, 2016, I witnessed another instance in which the Aworeni Temple of Havana held a street procession as a means to announce the future establishment of a temple in the west Havana neighborhood of Playa. This procession began several blocks away from the home of Santiago Ariosa Hercey, the Chief Akoda of the Aworeni Temple of Havana, who planned to found and oversee the future Aworeni Temple there. To begin the procession, Damián Valdés, the Chief Oyugbona of the Temple of Cuba, makes an offering to the ancestors (egúngún) with a series of Yorùbá prayers, saying:

79 While Frank Cabrera’s Ilé Tun Tun also braves the Cuban law by holding religious processions in an outlying neighborhood off of the Calzada de Bejucal road in Havana (see Chapter Five), African Traditionalist ẹgbẹs in Cuba's regional provinces expressed concern for the law, which is "punishable by up to three months in prison and a fine" (Boyle and Sheen, 2003 [1997]: 125). In Eastern Cuban cities, practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá- ọrìṣà opt out of processions that constitute otherwise indispensable features of the recently-introduced Yorùbá worship lineages of Egúngún (See Chapter Five).
Today we make an offering to the ancestors of this community so that they allow our *isese* practice, our traditional Nigerian practice, to be accepted [and] prolific here in this territory, with the temple that will later be founded here.

Surrounding Chief Oyugbona Valdés, the temple’s babaláwos and Ìyánífá rattle the *iroke*, creating a distinctive, percussive tapestry through which they interject his phrases with the word “*Àṣẹ*!” , invoking the Yorùbá concept of the “generative force” of change and transformation (Drewal, 1992: 27). Through his words, Chief Valdés expresses an evangelical calling to spread “*isese,*” or the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of Nigeria, throughout Cuba, a calling furthered by the establishment of future Aworeni temples and their acceptance in this and other locales.\(^8^0\) Valdés then kicks off the procession with the Yorùbá song “*Eni rere,*” accompanied by the iyáàlù, the gúdúgúdú, and the chékere of the dùndún ensemble. Exuberantly, the babaláwos and Ìyánífá of the Temple of Havana follow Chief Valdés and the dùndún ensemble through the streets as they parade, singing and clapping, to the home of the awaiting Chief Akoda:

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eni rere la nwa o  
eniyan rere la npe  
irete meji ba wa se  
ba wa se o eni rere la nwa o [sic]
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We’re looking for good people  
It’s only good people we need  
Irete Meji come and help me  
Help me to find them\(^8^1\)
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\(^8^0\) *Isese* is a Yorùbá term referring to tradition in the Yorùbá Traditional Religion. Ìyánífá Asabioje Afenapa’s album *Isese L’agba* translates *isese* as "tradition and culture” (Afenapa, 2007), while Fatoba translates it as "foundation/beginning" (Fatoba, 2005). In Cuba, the term is used interchangeably with the Yorùbá Traditional Religion and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà.

\(^8^1\) My translation of anonymous Yorùbá-Spanish digital document provided by Santiago Ariosa Hercey.
This contemporary Yorùbá praise song is a contraction of the sacred verses of the odù “Osa Ika” (Interview, Erick Gómez Rodríguez, 2016). In Yorùbáland, “Eni rere” is widely used in ritual and festive contexts, including during key moments of initiation into Ifá as well as during public processions and festivals. Thematically, the song calls out in search of “good people”, expressing a longing for others to join in the religious community. It's a fitting theme for the day’s procession, which, as Valdes expressed, aims to promote the future acceptance of African traditionalism in the Playa neighborhood of Havana and its "prolific" spread throughout Cuba’s geographical territories. One by one, the song calls out for the sixteen méji, or the sixteen principal odù of Ifá (i.e., “Irete Méji”), to offer assistance in attracting “good people” to the religious community.

The members of the Aworeni lineage first learned this contemporary Yorùbá praise song through an informal audio recording of the Nigerian babaláwo Ifá Femi that was passed to them – along with its amateur transcription and translation into Spanish as a text file – through digital exchanges with visitors from abroad. This means of travel reflects the décalage (Edwards, 2003) inherent to the acts of disarticulation, adaptation, and translation between Africa and the Americas that enable Nigerian-style Ifá-óriṣà in Cuba, including the proliferation of amateur – and often anonymously authored – Spanish-language translations of Yorùbá texts, praise songs, and ritual procedures. When the Àràbà Àgbáyé’s son, the Babaláwo Owolabi Awodotun Aworeni, visited the Aworeni Temple of Cuba in April, 2016, the Nigerian babaláwo additionally spent time teaching and explaining the meaning of “Eni rere” to members of the Aworeni lineage. In videos taken by the members of the Aworeni Temple of Havana in the neighborhood of Alamar,
Owolabi communicates with the Cuban practitioners by speaking in English as Àràbà Viera – who has a limited understanding of English – roughly translates the Nigerian babaláwo’s explanations of the Yorùbá-language praise song. The double act of translation – Owolabi’s translation from Yorùbá to English and Viera's rough translation from English to Spanish – exemplifies the *décalage* inherent to the mechanisms through which African Traditionalists gain access to knowledge of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion, even in instances of direct encounter with Nigerian babaláwos.

Figure 9 Dùndún procession announcing the establishment of a temple in Playa, Havana, Cuba, May, 2016. *Photo by author.*
A month after Owolabi’s visit, Chief Oyugbona Valdés and other babaláwos and Ìyánífá parade through the streets of Playa singing "Eni rere” over the polyrhythmic percussion of the dùndún ensemble. As they sing, their voices necessarily level the vocal glissandi and microtonal intonations characteristic of Ifá Femi and Owolabi’s Yorùbá vocal technique, eliding the intricacies of Yorùbá tonality present in the original recording and in Owolabi’s vocalizations. Accordingly, the melody of the Yorùbá praise song necessarily adapts to Spanish-language – and, particularly, Cuban – aesthetics of vocal intonation, slipping into a stress-based melodic style that discards the melodic contours maintaining relative pitch in Yorùbá (and which, accordingly, are crucial to rendering the language semantically intelligible).

The practical limitations to Cubans’ mobilization of the tonality of the Yorùbá language – which African Traditionalists consider to be both sacred and superior to Afrocuban Lucumí, or the vestige, non-grammatical ritual lexicon used in Regla de Ocha-Ifá (see Chapter 4) – reveals the contradictions inherent to ideologies of increased spiritual efficacy and fate-transformative capacity in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà via linguistic fidelity to the contemporary Yorùbá language of Nigeria. Notably, these linguistic limitations also apply to the dùndún "talking drums," which are mobilized as speech surrogates capable of communicating oríkì (Yorùbá praise poetry) and owe (proverbs) to the orìṣà as well as to human practitioner-listeners. The Aworeni dùndún drummers in Havana are limited not only by their lack of fluency in the Yorùbá language and their inability to wield its tonality and syntax but also, pedagogically, by their physical isolation from the lineages of dùndún drummers in Nigeria who could teach them how to play. As Villepastour notes, heightened exchange between Nigerian and
Cuban babaláwos/babalaos since the 1990s has not, as of yet, translated into heightened exchange between drummers themselves, "primarily because most Nigerian Àyàn drummers are Muslims" (Villepastour, 2015b: 7). Those Nigerian babaláwos who have travelled to Cuba to spread the Yorùbá Traditional Religion – including Pópóolá, Êlébúiibọn, Owolabi, and others – specialize in the esoteric verses and divinatory practices of Ifá, and not in dùndún or bàtá drumming. This pedagogical isolation from Yorùbá dùndún drummers curtails Cuban percussionists’ ability to sound the dùndún as speech surrogates through tonally-informed rhythmic coding (Villepastour, 2010, 2015a, 2015b). In the absence of Nigerian mentors, the Aworeni dùndún drummers are left to approximating rhythms gleaned from an assortment of digital videos and recordings. Often, the drummers improvise the rhythms played in rituals and processions over the rhythmic foundation of the clave of the agogo Ifá, discarding the link between the dùndún as "talking drums" and the Yorùbá language altogether (Interviews, Francisco Mario Delgado Iglesias, Osniel González, Ángel William Viera Bravo, 2016).

Conclusion

In Cuba, the dùndún "talking drums" of Yorùbálánd have arrived in tandem with a new religious movement – African Traditionalism – that aims to validate the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria as the reigning authority in Cuban òrìṣà worship. Through the crafting of novel geographical constituencies, the foundation of temples, and the establishment of hierarchical councils of chiefs, the Aworeni lineage builds a network of internationally-recognized Yorùbá institutions that stand in
opposition to the juridical and religious monopoly of the state-linked Yorùbá Cultural Association of Cuba, or ACYC. As potent aural and visual emblems of contemporary Yorùbáland, the dùndún ensemble – a pan-Yorùbá instrument used for various types of speech surrogacy in Nigeria – are employed to promote the foundation of Aworeni temples and the coronation of chiefs through public processions through Havana’s neighborhoods. Despite the limitations on the communicative capacity of the use of Yorùbá language and on the instruments’ potential as speech surrogates, the dùndún drums are nevertheless viewed as a key tool in “re-Yorubizing” Cuban Ifá through the re-introduction of Yorùbá percussion and sound into Ifá ceremonies and processions.
CHAPTER 3

¡POR FIN, LAS MUJERES ROMPENOS EL CÓDIGO!: WOMEN AND CONSECRATED BATÁ IN NIGERIAN-STYLE IFÁ-ÒRÌṢÀ

Within the “Yorubization” polemic in Cuba, the crux of the most heated and passionate outcries against Ifá Nigeriano by Cuban babalao and the ACYC revolve around issues of gender and sexuality (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a, Fernández, 2010; Padilla, 2006) – or, more accurately, those gendered and sexual prohibitions in Cuban Ocha-Ifá perceived as threatened, or potentially threatened, by the turn to Nigeria as an acting model. In this chapter, I examine the events surrounding June 22, 2015, when Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró, a professional percussionist and life-long proponent for women’s right to play consecrated batá in Cuba and internationally, succeeded in crafting the first authorized grupo de fundamento de mujeres, or group of women authorized to play the previously-prohibited tambores de aña. Marking the first known instance in which three women were authorized to play the consecrated batá set in Cuba or internationally, this historic event was authorized and overseen by African traditionalist babaláwo and omo aña Baba Enrique Orozco Rubio. In utilizing Ifá Nigeriano as an avenue for carving out novel forms of access to the consecrated batá in Cuba, Pouymiró circumvented both criollo prohibitions against women playing sacred batá and Ocha orthodoxy regarding the batá set’s ritual use. In re-contextualizing sacred batá performance within Ifá Nigeriano, Pouymiró furthermore carved a path for a larger and explicitly generative project of
refashioning the ritual uses of the sacred *batá*, thus re-conceptualizing the epistemic and ontological bases of *batá* within Cuban “cults of affliction”.

*Égbé Ifá Égbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi and the African Traditionalist Movement in Eastern Cuba*

Babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio’s religious house in the eastern Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba, *Égbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi* (or “Community of descendants of the great mystic house of Ifá of the Odugbemi lineage” in Yorùbá) serves as a principal nexus for the African Traditionalist Movement in Eastern Cuba. Attracting initiates from Santiago de Cuba and the surrounding provinces of Holguín and Guantánamo since 2007, the *égbé* serves as a sacred space for Ifá divination and practice and as a pedagogical school with a semi-formalized training center (*Centro de entrenamiento*) dedicated to Ifá-òrìṣà study. Open to babaláwos (priests), Ìyánífá (priestesses), lower-ranked initiates, and even, in certain cases, non-initiates, the *égbé* circumvents Cuban prohibitions regarding female initiation into the priesthood of Ifá and general norms regarding epistemic access to ritual and liturgy, justifying each by looking towards the norms of contemporary Yorùbáland. In the *égbé*, as in contemporary Nigeria, women are initiated into the priesthood of Ifá and can achieve status as Ìyánífá, or priestesses, which

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82 For more on Palo and Regla de Ocha-Ifá as “cults of affliction” in Cuba, see Ochoa (2010), Palmié (2013), and Turner (1968).
83 “Comunidad de descendientes de la gran casa mística de Ifá”, my translation.
is prohibited in Cuban Ifá (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a; Fernández, 2010; Olajubu, 2003; Padilla, 2006). Furthermore, the study of Ifá cosmology and participation in rituals and rites is encouraged prior to initiations, reflecting a more open didactic model in Nigeria whereby would-be initiates study Ifá for years or even decades before being initiated (Abimbola, 1979, 1997). This Nigeria-centric didactic approach to Ifá circumvents Cuban strictures regarding the chronology of initiation and subsequent access to the guarded secrecy of liturgical knowledge.85

Figure 10 Ìyánífá Noerlinda Burgal Hechevarria at the Egbé Ifá Egbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi’s annual Letra del Año yearly divination ceremony, June, 2015. Photo by author.

85 On the relationship of actionable knowledge to power, prestige, and secrecy in Afrocuban religions, Todd Ramón Ochoa states, “it is a truism that madrinas and padrinos, godmothers and godfathers, the people who initiate ‘godchildren’ into Palo and Ocha/ Santo practice, are possessive of their initiates”. This possessiveness can translate into purposeful withholding of guarded knowledge to keep initiates perpetually economically and spiritually bound to the padrino/madrina or casa temple (See Ochoa, 2010).
Born in 1975, Orozco Rubio’s childhood home was a renowned house-temple of Spiritism in Santiago de Cuba, although, notably, he deliberately avoided Spritism and other Cuban religions as a young man. Following military service, Orozco Rubio received academic training as a psychologist at the University of Oriente (2003), working for a decade after graduating as professor of psychology at the University of Oriente (Universidad de Oriente) and the Superior Institute of Medical Sciences (Instituto Superior de Ciencias Médicas) in Santiago de Cuba. Through contact with a fellow psychology student, Orozco Rubio was introduced to a community of Cuban-style babalas in the city of Holguín, who stood out to Orozco for being intellectuals, wealthy, and, importantly, white – all traits that he previously disassociated with Ifá as an “Afro-” religion of the (black) underclasses. Furthermore, their academic formation and skin color stood out to him in even sharper relief in Holguín, a province stereotypically known throughout Cuba as being the “most racist”. Curious, Orozco Rubio received the initiatory “hand of Órula” – though “without believing” – and began regular travel to Holguín to visit with the Ifá priests from his home in Santiago de Cuba. In February, 2004, Orozco Rubio was initiated into Cuban-style Ifá by Babalao Félix Arsenio Fuentes Cáceres, who officiated as his padrino (godfather), and Yanier

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86 As Ned Sublette notes, Regla de Ochao-Ifá has served as one of the most dynamic facets of the informal economy in Revolutionary Cuba since the 1950s (Sublette, 2004). For priests and religious leaders of Ocha-Ifá and palo in Cuba and internationally, palo and Regla de Ocha-Ifá can, at times, be highly lucrative.

87 On the associations of “Afrocuban religions” to blackness, witchcraft, the underclasses, and criminality, see Beliso-De Jesús (2015a), Fuente (2001), Sublette (2004), and Ortiz (1906). For a look at the non-correlation of Africaneity and blackness in Afrocuban religions and elsewhere, see Palmié, 2008.

88 Mano de Orula.

Torres Tamayo, who officiated as *Oyûbona* (second godparent). That same month, he was additionally initiated into Ocha (with Yemayá as his titular deity) by Kirenia del Carmen Mejías.\(^{90}\)

That Orozco Rubio was initiated into Regla de Ocha-Ifá in Holguín, rather than Santiago de Cuba, proved to be both a source of great autonomy for him and a major “stumbling block” upon his return home. In Santiago de Cuba, local *babalao*s and *santero*s viewed the complete circumventing of local spiritual hierarchies through initiation in another province as a “betrayal” and “lack of respect”\(^{91}\) for local networks of authority by the locally born-and-raised Orozco Rubio. However, the lack of entanglement in local hierarchies of Ifá divination and oricha worship granted Orozco Rubio a level of autonomy and spiritual freedom necessary to craft his own Ṣẹgbẹ in Santiago de Cuba in 2007. There, and without the need to answer or justify his practices to local spiritual authorities, he was able to break from traditional Cuban Ocha-Ifá and turn towards the African Traditionalist Movement in his spiritual philosophy, teachings, and practice.

Orozco Rubio’s first contact with the “Ifá Nigeriano” and the African Traditionalist Movement occurred through his *padrino*, Félix Arsenio Fuentes Cáceres, who had illegally acquired access to dial-up internet in his Holguín home.\(^{92}\) During

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\(^{90}\) This, and all other biographical information on and quotations from Orozco Rubio come from interviews conducted with him in 2015.

\(^{91}\) *falta de respeto*. In Cuba, it’s a regularly-used colloquial phrase denoting mild to serious offense, and often directly spoken to the offender.

\(^{92}\) Internet access has been notoriously restrictively limited by the Cuban state, and Cubans were only granted official, public access to (very limited and slow) Wi Fi hotspots in July 2015. Nonetheless, some Cubans have been able to receive dial-up access in their homes through the accounts of foreigners (among the only people in Cuban granted access to internet in their homes).
Orozco Rubio’s frequent travels to Holguín, Fuentes Cáceres often searched for information about Ifá on websites, blogs, and international forums. There, he began to come across information in Spanish about Traditional Nigerian Ifá and its incipient growth in Cuban-rooted Ifá lineages in Venezuela and other locations in the Americas, where babaláos had established contact with - and generally had increased access to information on - Ifá as practiced in contemporary Nigeria. Orozco Rubio, in particular, became fascinated by Nigerian-style Ifá’s claims to authority over the Cuban style, constantly arguing with his padrino - who Orozco Rubio maintains had a “very, very, very open mind” - over the possibilities of incorporating obras ("works") and other ritual criteria into their Cuban-style practice. Utilizing “tinkering” as a means of confronting the opacity of the unknown at the crossroads between contested cosmological domains of truth and fate-transforming efficacy (Taleb, 2012), Orozco Rubio faced the conundrum of a novel, Nigerian-style cosmology on a practical level, convincing his padrino to test out the claims of Ifá Nigeriano by putting them into action. “We’re going to put this into practice”, Orozco argued, “and we’re going to see what happens. If it doesn’t work, we turn away.”

Following their initial contact with Nigerian-style Ifá through the internet, books, and other reference materials that were made available to them, Orozco Rubio and Fuentes Cáceres made their first substantial contact with Nigerian-style Ifá abroad by initiating a dialogue with Venezuelan babaláwo and African Traditionalist José Hidalgo Edibere Gamés. As Félix Ayoh’ Omidire relates in his study of the re-Africanization of Cuban-style Ocha-Ifá in Venezuela (Omidire, 2014), santero and babalao José Hidalgo Edibere is known for initiating the trend of re-Yorubizing the Ocha-Ifá lineage there.
Originally a direct descendant of ritual lineages of Ocha and Ifá rooted in Cuba, Edibere initiated the “re-Africanization” of Ocha-Ifá in Venezuela after a visit to contemporary Yorùbáland, Nigeria with his wife in 2006-2007 (ibid). There, he attended the annual Òdun Ifá-Àgbọnnrègun Ifá festival and met the Àràbà Àgbáyé Chief Adisa Mókorànálé Awóreni, considered “the highest priest of Ifá worldwide” and a direct descendant of the “mystical founder of Ifá religion”, Òrùnmìlá-Àbara-Àgbonnrègun (210). As Ómidere elaborates, after inviting the Àràbà Àgbáyé to Venezuela for a month-long visit in 2007, Edibere broke with the traditional hierarchy of Cuban-rooted Ifá lineage in the diaspora, deriving his authority as a priest of Ifá and Òrisa from Àràbà Àgbáyé instead of from his original Cuban-born lineage. With an African Tradionalist approach to Ifá legitimated through contact with contemporary Yorùbáland, Edibere established his Egbé Òrisà-Oko as a highly proliferative community of African-style babalòwos in Venezuela and in the Americas (ibid).

Through a continued dialogue with Fuentes Cáceres, Edibere volunteered to travel from Venezuela to Holguín to initiate Fuentes Cáceres’ wife (also Orozco Rubio’s madrina de santo) as Ìyánífá, marking the first instance in which a woman would be initiated into Ifá in an Eastern Cuban province.93 Edibere’s visit with a delegation from his Egbé Òrisà-Oko marked a turning point for Fuentes Cáceres and Orozco Rubio in their turn towards Traditional Nigerian Ifá. As Orozco Rubio recalls, Edibere introduced Fuentes Cáceres and Orozco Rubio to the deity Igba Odù, the divinity with which practitioners are initiated in Yorùbáland (Olofin in Cuban-style Ifá), in addition to

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93 Before this, women from Santiago de Cuba had been initiated as Ìyánífá through travel to Victor Betancourt’s egbè in Havana, but none had yet been initiated directly by a priest in Eastern Cuba.
Yorùbá-style oríkì (praise poetry), orin (songs), and “works”.⁹⁴ Orozco Rubio notes that following the delegation’s visit, he and Fuentes Cáceres “began to want to pray the same way that the Africans do”, “make African ‘works’ [obras]”, and use the same “traditional [African] praise poetry [oríkì]”. Slowly, both men integrated these elements into their respective Holguín and Santiago de Cuba ẹgbés. Following Edibere’s visit, Fuentes Cáceres and Orozco Rubio continued to seek information on Nigerian-style Ifá through any means possible: internet forums and websites, books passed digitally among other African-style Cuban babaláwos or Cuban academics, and crucially, direct contact with African-style delegations visiting Cuba from abroad. Since 2007, these visits have included delegations representing eight distinct lineages of Ifá rooted in contemporary Yorùbáland,⁹⁵ visiting either directly from Nigeria or from other Latin American countries (i.e., Venezuela, Mexico, and Argentina). Importantly, the diversity of Ifá lineages represented by these discrete delegations provided Fuentes Cáceres and Orozco Rubio with a wider scope of the richness and diversity of the contemporary lineages of Ifá as practiced in Nigerian Yorùbáland.

Fuentes Cáceres and Orozco Rubio’s transition from Cuban Ifá to Traditional Nigerian Ifá was not without its costs, and Fuentes Cáceres in particular suffered such polemical opposition to the turn to African Traditionalism and to the initiation of his wife as Ìyánífá from Cuban babaláwos in Holguín – including the defection of many from his own ẹgbé - that Orozco Rubio attributes the uproar to contributing to Fuentes Cáceres subsequent emigration to Colombia. Meanwhile, in Santiago de Cuba, Orozco Rubio

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⁹⁴ Obras (Spanish).
⁹⁵ For more on the distinct lineages of Ifá in Yorùbáland, see Adegbindin (2014), Bascom (1969), Olupona and Rey (2014), and Peel (2003).
continued on his the path towards Traditional Nigerian Ifá within his Ọgbé, losing certain membership while also steadily building a following within the African Traditionalist Movement.

In 2014, Orozco Rubio officially legitimized his authority as a babaláwo of direct African lineage by (re-)initiating into the Nigerian-rooted “Odugbemi” lineage of Ifá, an initiation overseen by Cuban babaláwo Baba Àràbà Ifalere Odugbemi. In so doing, Orozco Rubio – like Edibere before him – broke with the traditional hierarchies and ritual lineages of Cuban-style Ifá, deriving his spiritual authority as babaláwo instead from the Odugbemi lineage rooted in contemporary Nigeria. This move temporally transformed the “African traditionality” so crucial to claims of authority in Ifá and Afro-Cuban religions in general (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015; Palmié, 2013) from a chronotope of Africa as rooted in Cuba’s 19th-century historical slave past (Wirtz, 2014) to an African traditionality rooted in Africa’s contemporary present. Furthermore, the circumventing of Cuban hierarchies and ritual lineages through (re-)initiation into the Odugbemi lineage provided Orozco Rubio an even larger degree of autonomy as babaláwo and spiritual leader of the African Traditionalist Movement in Santiago de Cuba and in Cuba generally. As the Ọgbé’s mission statement clarifies, “We do not surrender explanations or accounts of our actions to anyone who is not a religious elder of the Odugbemi lineage” (Orozco Rubio, 2015). This discursive and, in a more broad sense, ecclesiastical move effectively eliminated the Ọgbé’s embroilment in the local networks of indebtedness, responsibility, and deference inherent to the hierarchies of Cuban Ifá.

The “Confection” at the “Ethnographic Interface” and (Relative) Feminisms
Of the many notable aspects of Orozco Rubio’s *Ẹgbé Iràn Átele Ilogbon Odu*

cosmology and praxis stands out, in particular, as a heightening of what anthropologist
Stephen Palmié theorizes as the “the ethnographic interface” at the heart of the crafting of
“Afro-“ “Cuban” “Religion” since its inception as such in the early 20th century (Palmié, 2013). In noting the centrality of anthropological, ethnographic, criminological, sociological, or other studies of “Afrocuban religion” as indispensable ingredients in the “confection” of the religion itself, Palmié frames Afrocuban religion as an entity formed precisely at the intersections between two operative fields: 1) the field of “Afrocuban religion” as an objectified entity and 2) the field of its study. As he elaborates, “Afro-“ “Cuban” “Religion” is constituted precisely at the interface between:

two practical as well as discursive fields that have been in constant and intimate interaction ever since they emerged as such around the turn of the twentieth century: one circumscribed by the handy, but problematic, label “Afro-Cuban religion,” and the other designated by whatever label one might like to affix to the study of it…[What emerges, then, is] a permeable membrane or interface between two worlds at which different actors attempt to recruit and enlist each other into their own projects, try to entangle each other in discursive engagement, and, by reflexively monitoring their own actions and utterances (as well as those of their counterparts across a porous divide) set in motion the kinds of “looping effects” (Hacking 1999) that increasingly turned some [of] them into practitioners, others into anthropologists of Afro-Cuban religion— or both. (9-10)

Like many *santeros, paleros,* and *babalao*s before him, Orozco Rubio has long integrated mid-twentieth century Cuban ethnographies on Afrocuban religion, such as those by Fernando Ortiz, Lydia Cabrera, Rómulo Lachatañeré, and Teodoro Díaz Fabelo, into his Ocha-Ifá practice, essentially transforming these ethnographic texts into religious
guidebooks that use descriptions of rituals and belief from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s as sources of closer-to-the-root Yorùbá traditionality in Cuba.

Furthermore, as a university-trained professor of psychology turned Ocha-Ifá practitioner, Orozco Rubio pushes forward an explicitly academically-minded epistemological approach to Ifá cosmology and praxis, promoting the academic study of Afrocuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian Ifá-Ôrìṣà (including publications in the fields of anthropology, religious studies, sociology, gender and sexuality, and language) among his Ògbé members as key tools in liturgical formulations of correct Ifá practice. Boasting an overwhelmingly professional and academically-trained Ògbé membership - in which “90% or our members are professionals of the distinct branches of the sciences, with a large representation from the social sciences and humanities, medicine, and engineering” (Orozco Rubio, 2015) - Orozco Rubio furthermore actively promotes research, publication, and participation in regional, national, and international academic conferences as a key means to strengthen - and promote - the cosmological tenets of his Nigerian-style Ifá practice. In so doing, Orozco Rubio and other members of the Ògbé blur easy demarcations between the purported first-order and second-order discourses of Afrocuban religion and its study (Palmié, 2013, 7) and also problematize the purportedly separate ontological and epistemological realms of academic scholarship and religious praxis.

Since 2013, Orozco Rubio’s academic research has focused specifically on what he discursively frames as the “emancipation of women” in Afrocuban Ifá-Ôrìṣà, including a master’s thesis and academic conference presentations on gender and Ifá-Ôrìṣà in contemporary Nigeria. As Beliso-De Jesús (2015) demonstrates, however, discourses of
female “emancipation” in African-style Ifá by women and men alike belie the ways in which the polemics surrounding female Ìyánífá initiations in Cuba serve to naturalize notions of appropriate femininity in a purportedly African traditional sense: i.e., as explicitly heterosexual, with heightened emphasis on women’s power to conceive children and to be good wives and mothers (833). Beliso-De Jesús notes how, during the Ìyánífá debate of 2004, for example, “male heterosexual priests dominate[d] the public discourses of the debate, speaking for women, arguing over women’s roles, and regulating how women and which women are allowed to represent acceptable femininity” (818). Furthermore, the rhetoric of “total inclusion” mobilized by Orozco Rubio and other babaláwos and Ìyánífá of the Ēgbé elides the fact that Ìyánífá are denied access to the deity Òrìṣà Òdù, effectively disabling them from initiating other priests and breaking off from the ēgbé to form their own ritual lineages (as babaláwos are enabled to do) (ibid). In the hierarchy of Traditional Nigerian Ifá, then, Ìyánífá do not inhabit statures entirely equal to that of a babaláwo, even if the initiation of women into the priesthood of Ifá and their ability to perform oracular divination marks a radical departure from the prohibitions and strictures of Cuban-style Ifá.
Figure 11 Babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio presents “Ìyámi Òṣóròngá: Myth and Reality” (Ìyámi Òṣóròngá: Mito y Realidad) [sic] at the Casa de Caribe’s annual Festival de Caribe academic conference. July 7, 2015. Photo by author.
Orozco Rubio’s explicit project of female “religious emancipation” (Orozco Rubio, 2015) indeed reflects the contradictions inherent to discourses of so-called female liberation within the African Traditionalist Movement. As Beliso-De Jesús argues, these discourses often serve more to “circumscribe nationalized gendered normativities between competing African and Cuban diasporic assemblages” rather than to domesticate so-called “American imperialist feminisms”, such as liberalized (homo)sexualities or other (white) feminist ideologies surrounding female emancipation from gender norms (819). At the same time, however, Orozco Rubio’s academically-minded and idiosyncratic epistemological and practical approaches to Ifá-Órìṣà mark a radical departure from Cuban gendered strictures and prohibitions. Furthermore, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró’s explicitly “feminist” interventions into Regla de Ocha-Ifá mark a departure from the purported “African traditional” notions of appropriate femininity re-naturalized during the Ìyánífá Debate of 2004 (Beliso-De Jesús). As I argue here, Orozco Rubio and Pouymiró’s interventions call for a more nuanced look at the larger question of the place of feminism(s), female egalitarianism, and desires for personal freedom in Cuba and in the realm of Regla de Ocha-Ifá more specifically.

Importantly, Orozco Rubio grounds his African Traditionalist vision as a Cuban project emerging from within the “Afrocuban Ifá-òrìṣà system”. The “emancipation of women” in Cuban Òrìṣà, then, forms part of a larger objective to “correct and rescue in the religious inheritance of our nation those elements that today constitute lacunas and, for a multitude of factors, aren’t here [in Cuba] or have been lost” (Orozco Rubio, 2015).

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96 In the case of Pouymiró, however, feminism is not located “outside” of Cuba but rather within it, problematizing oversimplified demarcations of ideologies of female egalitarianism and liberations as mere importations. More on this below.
These lacunas include an entire host of cosmological tenets, religious dictates, and material cultures (deities, praise poetry, songs, odù, medicinal and plant knowledge, linguistic and semantic intelligibility, religious material culture, etc.) as well as, crucially, the centrality of women to contemporary Nigerian cosmology and practice. In uniting academic scholarship and religious practice as two arms in the Ògbé’s mission to “solidify the theological system bequeathed by our Yorùbá ancestors and safeguard the rich tangible and non-tangible heritage of Ifá”, Orozco Rubio at once ambiguously roots the Ògbé as an inheritor of Afrocuban cultural and religious lineages of Ocha-Ifá and, simultaneously, as an inheritor of the contemporary Nigerian Odugbemi lineage that ideologically circumvents Cuba’s history of Ocha-Ifá worship entirely (a contradiction evident in the very orthography of the designation “Afrocuban Ifá-Òrìṣà”).

Furthermore, Orozco Rubio’s mission statement discursively aligns the Ògbé with international organization’s efforts to safeguard “tangible” and “intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2015), marking Ifá study and practice as universally relevant contributions to national and world culture.

The discursive ambiguity in nationalizing the Ògbé as “Afrocuban” while also turning to an explicitly Nigeria-centric vision of fate-changing efficacy as rooted in the

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97 As Holbraad outlines, the odù constitute the 256 divinatory signs or configurations of Ifá, through which "all aspects of life are accounted for” through interpretation of the narrative “myths associated with each of the oddù” (Holbraad, 118). These aspects of life can be “as specific as the boiling of water or the color of cocunuts, as technical as cures for dieases, as profound as the relationship between life and death, and even as topical as the invention of the internet (according to one informant)" (ibid). The odù also function as archetypes for comportment, almost like astrological signs but with imperatives for action. “Each signo [odù] includes esoteric instructions for achieving specific ends” (108).

98 The orthographic inscription and phrasing in Cuba might traditionally be (although not exclusively so) “Afrocuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá”.

contemporary Nigerian Odugbemi lineage brings to the fore questions of the place of those elements of Cuban Ocha-Ifá regarded as “national culture” and “heritage” within the new African Traditionalist Movement. As seen below, Orozco Rubio and Nagybe Madariaga Pouyriró’s idiosyncratic approach to re-contextualizing the sacred batá within Ifá Nigeriano reveals the ways in which the African Traditionalist Movement in Cuba has selectively incorporated cosmological and cultural elements from both Cuban Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian Ifá-Órìṣà, ultimately creating novel forms of oricha/oriṣà worship in Cuba.

Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró: Radical Feminisms and Female-Crafted Toques in Regla de Ocha

On June 22, 2015, Baba Enrique Orozco Rubio authorized three female initiates from his Ẹgbé to play his consecrated set of tambores de aña, including professional percussionist Nagbye Madariaga Pouymiró, Íyánífá Caridad Rubio Fonseca (Orozco Rubio’s mother), and Anais López Rubio (his sister). Marking the first known instance in which three women were authorized to play the consecrated batá set in Cuba or internationally, this historic event marked the apex of a decades-long struggle by Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró to “emancipate” women’s right to play the consecrated batá in Cuba and internationally.99 From Orozco Rubio’s perspective, this move constituted a step forward within the Ẹgbé’s theological mission to foment the “religious emancipation” of women in Nigerian-style Ifá-Órìṣà, a project theologically justified by turning to contemporary norms surrounding female access in Yorùbáland. The events that

99 Quotation taken from my interviews with Pouymiró, 2015.
led to the first authorized execution of the *tambores de fundamento* by women are best understood, then, as a convergence of overlapping – and yet discrete – ideological initiatives: on the one hand, Orozco Rubio’s theological mission in accordance with the tenets of the Nigeria-centric African Traditionalist Movement, and, on the other, Pouymiró’s life-long personal struggle to enable female access to the consecrated *batá* in Cuba and internationally in accordance with an updated cosmological understanding of femininity and Añá in Regla de Ocha.

Born in Czechoslovakia (1958) to Cuban parents completing their university studies abroad, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró first became interested in percussion in her early twenties in Santiago de Cuba while working as an actress in a theatre troupe (Pryor, 1999, 6). As she relates in a 1996 interview with Andrea Pryor, one of the percussionists for the theater troupe broke his arm the day before the troupe’s opening performance, so Pouymiró stepped in to fill the role. Shortly thereafter, the Conjunto Folclórico de Oriente opened a school for Afrocuban percussion, song and dance in Santiago de Cuba (1984), and Pouymiró auditioned and was accepted. Despite her merit-based entrance, she claims to have been subjected to virulent *machismo* while playing conga, bongó, and other Afrocuban folkloric instruments, and she was initially prohibited entirely from approaching the batá in the Conjunto (ibid). “They told me, ‘No’, that I could not have access to this type of percussion because it was prohibited for women. I asked, ‘Why?’ They said, ‘because it is prohibited.’”

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100 For more on the formation of Revolutionary dance troupes, amateur clubs, and folkloric ensembles as part of the cultural arm of the socialist Revolution, see Moore, 2006.

101 These and all other quotes are taken from my interviews with Pouymiró in Santiago de Cuba (2015). My translations.
The shallowness of the explanation proved to be what Pouymiró terms a “propitious negation”, an auspicious and even favorable exclusion that instilled in her the drive and clarity to promise herself that she would use her status as a professional percussionist to break the barriers and stigmas surrounding female access to the batá – in both its unconsecrated (aberinkulá) and, eventually, consecrated forms. Originally, though, it seems that her indignation arose from a secular rather than theological sense that the Conjunto Folclórico de Oriente - as a state-paid cultural arm of the Revolutionary government - was violating the constitutional guarantee of women to full equality within “economic, political, social, and familiar” spheres as written in the 1976 Cuban Constitution, including their right to equal access to employment (See República de Cuba, 1976, Chapter V, “Equality”, Article 43). “Imagine, I was raised in a society where women’s right to equality within society is a constitutional law. In other words, I was formed, and I have learned to think, under the cannons of feminism, because Cuban society allows you [women] to freely elect your destiny.” Grounding feminism as a socialist egalitarian, Cuban Revolutionary value rather than as an “American imperialism” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015), Pouymiró frames the Conjunto’s negation of her playing batá as “an inexplicable prohibition. And since they prohibited me and let me know in such a grotesque way, that [the answer was] ‘No’, well, I swore to myself, ‘Yes.’”

Pouymiró encountered her first avenue towards approaching the unconsecrated, aberinkulá batá set in the 1980s through Buenaventura Bell Morales (b. 1942), a percussionist, dancer, singer, and instructor of the Conjunto Folclórico de Oriente. Bell Morales served as a member of the Conjunto since he was a young man in the early
1960s, following its establishment in June, 1959 in the wake of the Cuban Revolution (Dirección Provincial de Cultura, 2006; EcuRed, 2016; Moore, 2006). Upon learning that santeros in Havana were imparting batá classes to foreign women in exchange for hard currency, Bell Morales became sympathetic to Pouymiró, telling her, “Well, if foreign women are receiving [batá instruction], then why not Cuban women if this is your culture?” Bell Morales began giving Pouymiró private lessons on batá in secret and helped her purchase her first unconsecrated set, which as Pouymiró notes, would never have been sold to her directly if the artisan had known that she was a woman. After three years of study with Bell Morales, Pouymiró continued her studies with Mililián Galí (b. 1939), a respected olubata, omo Añá, and santero known for bringing the first consecrated set of batá from Matanzas to Santiago de Cuba (Chatelain, 2003; Larduet Luaces, 2014) and, additionally, for forming the first all-female Afrocuban folkloric percussion group, Obbini Irawó, in Santiago de Cuba in the early 1990s (Pouymiró, 2015). Pouymiró spent three years learning technique and ritual singing over the toques (rhythms) with Galí, supplementing their lessons autodidactically by imitating the recordings of well-known ritual singers (akpwónes) Lázaro Ros and Mercedita Valdégz.

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102 Pouymiró’s paraphrasing, not Bell Morales’ direct words.
103 Owner of a consecrated batá set.
104 Rhythms, or rhythmic archetypes (Vaughan, 2012).
105 Ritual singers of Regla de Ocha, also spelled akpón.
Figure 12 Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró on chèkere and Buenaventura Bell Morales on tumbadora (seated in white with blue-and-white cap) at Ègbé Ifá Ègbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi’s annual Letra del Año yearly divination ceremony, June, 2015. Photo by author.
Playing the unconsecrated batá set in her house did come with costs, however, and, as word traveled that the sounds of the batá were emanating from Pouymiró’s home, she was visited by a member of Santiago de Cuba’s cultural research institute Casa de Caribe demanding answers as to “what she was doing and why she was doing it”. As Pouymiró claims, this apparent attempt at intimidation followed a visit to Santiago de Cuba by representatives of the Asociación Cultural Yorubá de Cuba (ACYC) in Havana, who, as institutional arbiters of Regla de Ocha-Ifá practice in Cuba since the Association’s establishment in 1991, had become increasingly concerned over the fact that women were beginning to play the unconsecrated batá in Eastern Cuba. Pouymiró continued playing, however, and following one of her public performances on the batá was assaulted, physically beaten, and hospitalized, an event she directly attributes to her continued batá playing in the face of male intimidation and scorn. Undeterred, she continued playing batá publically. However, in seeing that her performances were continuing to be rejected by Regla de Ocha practitioners, Pouymiró turned towards academic and theological publications and presentations as a stage for voicing arguments – both of secular and theological impetus – for the right of women to play consecrated batá in Regla de Ocha.

In 1992, Pouymiró prepared one such conference presentation, entitled “Las mujeres y los Tambores Bata” (Women and the Batá Drums), for the Casa de Caribe’s annual Festival De Caribe, a music and cultural festival that includes a series of academic workshops on research related to music, poetry, and popular religion. The Festival de Caribe, initiated in 1981, serves as an international stage for promoting a pan-American vision of shared cultural and religious heritage between Cuba and other Caribbean and
Latin American nations, including, up to the year of Pouymiró’s initial presentation in 1992, hosted delegations from Granada, Haiti, Guyana, Brazil, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela (Casa de Caribe, 2013). Importantly, the festival and its academic conferences are frequented by Cuban and international attendees, including scholars, religious practitioners, and musicians who visit from the United States, Europe, and other Latin American and Caribbean nations. The at once nationally- and internationally-focused nature of the academic festival provided Pouymiró with a stage for voicing her arguments surrounding women and batá to Cuban and international audiences, and, also, for making contact with other women involved internationally in promoting female access to consecrated batá, including US researchers Elizabeth Sayre, Andrea Pryor, and others. In keeping with the ambiguity often inherent to the dividing line between academic scholarship and religious praxis in conferences sponsored by Casa de Caribe and other Cuban cultural institutes - where practitioners-turned-scholars and scholars-turned-practitioners’ presentations blend theological as well as ostensibly secular academic argumentation - Pouymiró used the opportunity to discursively employ a mixture of secular and theological claims to women’s rights to equality within the contexts of batá performance in Regla de Ocha. Additionally, she performed on batá at the festival, accompanied on batá and vocals by her teachers, Bell Morales and Galí.

The discursive use of a mixture of secular humanist, feminist egalitarian, and theological arguments by Pouymiró marks a running thread in her writings and presentations from the 1980s to the present. Academically trained as a physicist,

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106 This is a phenomenon I have witnessed at academic conferences hosted by other cultural institutions in Cuba as well, including the annual conference hosted by the Casa de África in Havana.
Pouymiró’s writings on gender and batá include numerous self-published books and research papers dating from shortly after her “propitious negation” from playing in the mid-1980s. The titles include *The Right to Female Equality in Afrocuban Santería* (1985), *Women and the Batá Drums* (1992), *Women vs. Myth* (2011), *Ilú Ni Ochún: Ritual Rhythms for Women Dedicated to the Deity Ochún,* (2012), *Women vs. Myth, Part Two* (2012), *Rhythms for Batá, By and For Women* (2015), and, perhaps most idiosyncratically, *The Physical-Acoustic Phenomenon of the Batá* (2010). This last book, co-written in conjunction with her father Edward Ernesto Madariaga Santaló, an engineer, constitutes a physical-acoustical treatise on the batá’s acoustic properties, with extensive charts detailing the frequencies and harmonic pitches of different batá strokes and formulas for determining the frequencies outside of and within the physical spaces of the drums. Reflecting a didactic approach divergent from the hierarchies of traditional batá knowledge as passed down through male *omo Aña* lineages (and which were withheld from Pouymiró during her struggles to learn batá in the 1980s) (Vaughan, 2012; Vélez, 2012; Schweitzer, 2013; Sayre, 2000), the book claims to put forward the precise physical-acoustic properties of the different batá strokes for the purpose of recording the complex interactions of the batá rhythms in Western musical notation. This, the book argues, provides a future framework for a series of transcriptions of the *toques* that are universally accessible and preserved for future generations.

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Within these writings, Pouymiró uses a variety of discursive techniques to ground her argument, blending theological, nationalist, socialist egalitarian, and historical argumentation to make her case for “women’s right to equality” in playing the consecrated batá. The self-published treatise *New Batá Rhythms For the Right to Gender Equality* (2015) is indicative of this trend. In the introduction, Pouymiró discursively aligns her project of fighting for gender equality in batá to the freedom fighting of 19th-century national heroines Mariana Grajales Coello, an icon in Cuba’s fight for independence, and slaves Fermina “Lucumí” and Carlota, known as architects of the Triumvirato slave rebellion in Matanzas in 1843 (Stoner, 1991; Shepherd, 2005; Godfried, 2006). Nationalizing her struggle within the lineage of these valiant 19th-century Cuban women who fought and died for freedom, Pouymiró continues, “It’s for them, [and] for love for the *batá*, that I defend my truth in defense of the right to equality of gender and of opportunities…putting forward the reasons that help me say that women can and should better their position in Santería …so that there is an easing of the dogmas that have been perpetuated against her” (9). She then confronts theological arguments against women playing batá in Regla de Ocha, including the claim that women are prohibited from playing batá due to their menstruation - “a strange and anything but noble argument” (17). For Pouymiró menstruation, far from being emblematic of


109 Famously, Fermina “Lucumí” and Carlota purportedly used Yoruban “talking drums” to announce the initiation of the rebellion (Godfried, 2006).

110 Elizabeth Sayre outlines a few of the varied (and often contradictory) menstruation arguments as follows: “Women cleanse themselves through menstruation and therefore do not need to play batá, because playing is itself a cleansing”; “Because women menstruate, it is dangerous for them to approach the consecrated drums, because their menstrual blood may be mistaken as an offering to Añá”; and “Because the menstrual cycle is associated with the Aje, or “witches”—antisocial, feminine spiritual forces—
impurity or dangerous feminine energies (ibid), is but one indication of the sacredness of women as possessors of the “powers of gestation, maternity, and birth”, powers which “guarantee the perpetuity of the species” (15). “Far from being rejected”, she continues, “women should be considered as sacred for being a source of life…without which the existence of priests to officiate in any religion would not be possible” (ibid).

Following an exegesis of references to positive female power and presence with the Regla de Ocha-Ifá liturgical corpus (including pattakíes, or narrative “mythical verses”, and the odu of the Ocha and Ifá oracles), Pouymiró proceeds to justify her decades-long refusal to undergo initiation into Santería despite her impassioned interest in batá. Initially framing this non-initiation as a consequence of her Catholic upbringing, which bequeathed her a belief in “God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, Pouymiró then turns to those aspects of contemporary Regla de Ocha-Ifá that she finds spiritually untenable. These include, first, the exploitative costs of religious ceremonies and the denial of services to those who can’t pay (“as if the mercy and blessings of God could have a price”) and, second, the hierarchical nature of a male-dominated religious system that creates “a liturgical caste against women that confines her to a lower stature” (13). Together, these dynamics serve the sole purpose of “consolidating norms and criteria that contribute to the male sex obtaining more money, power, and personal triumph within the religion” (20-21). In response to this “plainly patriarchal and masculine interpretation” which relegates women to a debased stature (37), Pouymiró then proposes a novel and quite radical project: “[the creation of] new rhythms that demonstrate a renewing,

female contact with Añá will void the consecration of the drums (Marcuzzi 1995)” (2000).
feminine interpretation and perception”. This act, Pouymiró proposes, will serve the purpose of inciting “polemic argument” within the religion, thus paving the way for “the development of and respect towards feminine liturgical thought” in Regla de Ocha (ibid).

Pouymiró’s radical project, as outlined in this treatise, not only claims access to the consecrated batá as a female right but also puts forward the creation of novel ritual toques inspired by an explicitly feminine (and feminist) interpretation of Regla de Ocha-Ifá cosmology. Demonstrating the breadth of her personal and spiritual commitment to breaking the patriarchal hierarchies and prohibitions of Ocha-Ifá, this treatise shows the consolidation of Pouymiró’s personal and spiritual convictions and thought in the years – and, in this case, months – preceding her initial meeting with Orozco Rubio. It would be through Orozco Rubio and his Ēgbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi, with its theological dedication to strengthening the polemical tenets of African Traditionalism, that Pouymiró encountered her first avenue for the concrete realization of a decades-long dream of establishing female access to the tambores de fundamento and, secondly, for enabling women’s groups to officiate rituals using these tambores. Additionally, it was in Orozco Rubio’s ēgbé that Pouymiró encountered a path forward in the even more radical and generative project of creating novel toques – brought into being by and crafted for women – to be used within oricha/òrìṣa ritual ceremonies.

Pouymiró and Orozco Rubio: Generative Instantiations of “Yoruba Ecclesiogenesis”
In 2014, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró learned of African Traditionalist babaláwo, and \textit{olubata} Orozco Rubio through a mutual friend and percussionist in Santiago de Cuba, and, curious to learn more about the role of women in traditional Yorùbáland and in his Œgbé, approached him interested in Ìyánífá as well as in the female secret societies that were rumored to exist in contemporary Nigeria. Impressed with Orozco Rubio’s academic and theological mission to re-instate women’s roles in Nigerian Ifá within the contexts of Afrocuban Ifá-Óriṣà, Pouymiró outlined her own research, publications, and creative vision for a \textit{tambor de fundamento de mujeres} in the hopes that the Œgbé might serve as an avenue for the realization of these projects. Orozco Rubio agreed that this was permitted within the African Traditionalist Movement, having learned through contact with African Traditionalist babaláwos in the Americas, visiting Nigerian babaláwos, and digital videos of contemporary sacred drumming in Yorùbáland that in contemporary Nigeria men, women, non-initiates, and even children were allowed to approach the sacred drums of Ifá and Óriṣà. Furthermore, although female sacred percussionists were rare, there was no theological impediment or stigma to their playing. Orozco Rubio outlined that Pouymiró would need to make the necessary consultations with the Ifá oracle to ensure the soundness of her project within the Œgbé, and, once that was completed, agreed to incorporate Pouymiró as an initiate within a larger group of paying initiates at the Œgbé to receive her \textit{mano de Ifá},\footnote{\textit{mano de Ifá}, rather than \textit{mano de Órula} (Regla de Ocha), indicates a first level of initiation into Traditional Nigerian Ifá. Personal communication, Orozco Rubio.} since she was unable to afford the cost of the initiation ceremony and rites on her own.
Clarifying the moment of her decision to initiate into a religion of òrìṣà worship in Cuba after decades of abstention, Pouymiró relates, “When Enrique explains to me what this is about [the African Traditionalist Movement in his Ègbè], I say to myself…here, it’s here where the gods I think that I have to worship are, it’s here where I should be, and, also, it’s here where I can teach Ìyánífá so that they have, in their liturgy, the possibility to officiate ceremonies using the tambor.” Together, Pouymiró and Orozco Rubio came to a mutual agreement, outlining objectives that would satisfy key elements of Pouymiró’s vision and also, simultaneously, elevate women’s stature within the aural and cosmological configurations of oricha/òrìṣà worship in Cuba in accordance with Orozco Rubio’s African Traditionalist vision. Upon initiation in Ègbè Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi, Pouymiró founded a didactic and generative project centered around women
and Ìyánífá in the Ègbé, with the future objectives of 1) enabling initiated women and Ìyánífá access to the consecrated batá, 2) instructing Ègbé members – both male and female - in batá performance in an effort to enable them to officiate Ifá and Òrìṣà ceremonies and 3) composing novel *toques* for the batá, inspired in part by a feminist interpretation of the cosmological tenets of Ifá, to be used within Ègbé ritual ceremonies. Immediately, Pouymiró began working to fulfill the second and third objectives, initiating instruction for women and Ìyánífá in the Ègbé on how to play the unconsecrated *aberinkulá batá* set and, also, composing new *toques* inspired by Ìyánífá and other references to feminine authority and power in the odù of Ifá.

It’s worth noting here the degree to which these objectives within the Ègbé mark a radical departure from orthodoxy regarding *batá* performance as it has developed, for generations, in Cuban Regla de Ocha. First, the use of consecrated *batá* within Traditional Nigerian Ifá ceremonies radically re-contextualizes their function in traditional Regla de Ocha-Ifá. In Regla de Ocha, the *tambores de Aña* are traditionally reserved for specific ceremonies, including “presentations,” in which the *iyawó* (new initiate) is presented before Añá (deity of the *batá*) or anniversaries of santeros’ initiations (*cumpleaños de santo*) (Schweitzer, 2013). In these Ocha contexts, the “voice” of Aña, mobilized by the execution of the *batá* by male *omo añas*, functions as a medium of communication enticing the oricha to come down (*bajar*) and offer advice, dancing, and healing to those gathered (Schwetzer, 2013; Vaughan, 2012; Vélez, 2000). The Cuban batá, then, are *not* traditional to the specific ritual ceremonies of Ifá, which forms a “parallel” but increasingly divergent branch of oricha worship from that of Regla de Ocha (Holbraad, 2012, 109; Larduet Luaces, 2014).
Second, Pouymiró’s didactic project of teaching *batá* to men and women for future ritual use circumvents male lineages of initiation and apprenticeship in the cult of Añá (the oricha of the drum) (Schwetzer, 2013; Vaughan, 2012; Vález, 2000). In so doing, her didactic approach radically reconfigures the bases of ritual and epistemic access to the *batá* for both men and women. In Regla de Ocha, the *lavado de manos* (“hand-washing” initiation) and *juramento* (“full Añá initiation” that marks “formal entry into the Añá brotherhood”) is reserved exclusively for heterosexual males, whose “undisputed heterosexuality” is a “non-negotiable requirement for eligibility” (Vincent, 2006: 117-118). In assuming didactic leadership over the passage of knowledge to students with the purpose of using *tambores de aña* to officiate future rituals, Pouymiró circumvents the all-male master-student relationship of Añá lineages that have been maintained for generations.\(^{112}\) Furthermore, she explicitly feminizes access to the Añá deity that resides within the *batá*, upending the theological strictures that justify the prohibition of female contact with consecrated *batá* and with the Oricha Añá.\(^{113}\)

Third, Pouymiró’s project of female-centered crafting of novel *toques* inspired by an explicitly feminist interpretation of Ifá-Ōríṣà cosmology radically breaks with

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\(^{112}\) The first set of consecrated *batá* drums are claimed to have been created by Lucumí slaves in Cuba in 1830 (Ortiz, 1954).

\(^{113}\) As Elizabeth Sayre outlines, these include varying – and often contradictory – views, including that “Añá (the orisha of the drums) is a feminine force, therefore a woman playing the drum creates an improper imbalance of gendered energies”; “the *batá* drums belong to the orisha Changó, the epitome of virility, and a woman player cannot enact the masculinity appropriate to this situation”, or, that “because women menstruate, it is dangerous for them to approach the consecrated drums, because their menstrual blood may be mistaken as an offering to Añá” (Sayre, 2000). It’s worth noting here, as well, that Pouymiró’s elders in learning the *batá* were not *omo aña* Orozco Rubio, but rather *omo añas* Buenaventura Bell Morales and Mililián Gál.
conceptions of the rich, complex corpus of batá *toques* as a relatively fixed set of “archetypes” tied to specific orichas and sequences. Despite histories of regional variation, fluidity in execution, and the value placed on personal style, these “arquetypes” are approached with a certain degree of fidelity in Regla de Ocha (Schweitzer, 2013; Vaughan, 2012). As Vaughan notes, *toques* aren’t merely static; rather, “improvisation on gestural and rhythmic ‘archetypes’ enhances the divine potential of the performance” (Vaughan, 2012, my emphasis). However, Pouymiró’s generative approach to creating new *toques* that aim to break the “plainly patriarchal and masculine interpretation” inherent to Regla de Ocha moves far beyond the fluidity of personal style and improvisation. Rather, it proposes a generative project of creating a novel batá liturgy engendered by feminist interpretations and craft.

Together, these radical breaks in epistemic, liturgical, theological and gendered approaches to the consecrated batá reveal Pouymiró at the nexus of an ongoing saga of theological craft, renewal, traditionality, and break in Regla de Ocha-Ifá since its inception in Cuba in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Stephen Palmié, in outlining the “confections” of, first, a purported “Yoruba” cultural and ethnic identity in late-19th-century West Africa and, second, of “Santería” as a recognizable and replicable ritual system in Cuba at the turn of the 20th, draws on John Peel’s notion of “Yoruba ethnogenesis” (Peel, 1989, 2000) to describe the “Yoruba ecclesiogenesis” of Santería during its origins in the same period (Palmié, 2013, 41. Mobilizing John Peel’s formulation of the “cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis”, which describes the (anachronistic) crafting of a politically-expedient “Yoruba” ethnic and cultural identity by 19th-century Christian luminary and historian Reverend Samuel Johnson (1846-1901)
Palmié elaborates a notion of “Yoruba ecclesiogenesis” to outline the inherently radical crafting and confection of Santería through novel forms of ritual lineage that broke from the traditional “Yoruba” kinship systems of West African orìṣà worship, thus engendering a novel and replicable religious system in Cuba (Palmié, 2013, 41). Pouymiró – and Orozco Rubio’s – project, then, marks yet another instantiation of “Yoruba ecclesiogenesis” - or even, “Yoruba ontogenesis” or “Yoruba theologenesis” - in the crafting and reconfiguration of the ontological and liturgical bases of the tambores de aña to suit contemporary circumstances, projects, and desires.

The First Ensayo de Fundamento de Mujeres: June, 2015

On June 22, 2015, Pouymiró realized her decades-long mission to play a consecrated set of tambores de aña, doing so through authorization from olubata and omo aña Orozco Rubio. At once a deeply emotional personal and spiritual triumph, the events surrounding the first ensayo de fundamento de mujeres and its immediate aftermath also underscore the ways in which the darker emotions of fear, anxiety, and dread flourished for Pouymiró and the other women in the face of unknown consequence and repercussion. The emotional toll of realizing what can be framed as an act of political “dissensus” in the sense put forward by Rancière, or a “reconfiguring [of] the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of the community”, “render[ing] visible what

114 The Reverend Samuel Johnson, as Palmié notes, elaborated in his writings “a sense of ‘Yoruba-ness’ that would eventually become a critical qualifier of ethnic allegiances in the formation of the Nigerian nation stated” (Palmié, 2013, 35).

115 “Yoruba”, here, again, as an anachronistic designation.
had not been” and “mak[ing] heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals” (Rancière, 2009/2004: 25), is registered here as a lingering sense of fear, apprehension, and dread. The patriarchal maneuvering of knowledge and ownership over the event, which was controlled – and, to a certain degree, suppressed – by Orozco Rubio in the event’s immediate aftermath (likely inspired by Orozco Rubio’s own feelings of doubt in the face of the unknown), also engendered feelings of frustration and resentment. As I outline below, male control and ownership over events rooted in a lifelong female struggle for egalitarian religious freedoms reflects and re-naturalizes the hierarchy of male-controlled knowledge and access, even within the ostensibly more open and “emancipatory” Nigerian-style Ifá.

When I first met Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró in 2015, she was in the process of rehearsing with female initiates in the Ṣẹgbé in preparation for that year’s Festival de Fuego, hosted by cultural research institute Casa de Caribe. Occurring annually at the beginning of July in the weeks immediately preceding Santiago de Cuba’s world-renowned carnival celebrations, the Festival’s academic conferences and workshops have long served as a stage for Pouymiró in voicing her arguments –theological, socialist egalitarian, and otherwise - in favor of female access to the consecrated batá in Regla de Ocha. The Festival also serves as a meeting ground for international academics, female percussionists, and santeras interested in the same goal of achieving female access to the batá or, even, the creation of female-controlled lineages of tambores de añá. In 2013, for example, Pouymiró assisted in organizing the “First Encounter of Women Batá Percussionists and Female Percussion” as part of the 33rd annual festival, a meeting that
included panels and performances by female percussionists and *bataleras*\(^\text{116}\) from Obiní Batá (Havana), Obiní Irawó (Santiago de Cuba), Obiní Aché (Cienfuegos), and Ojalá (United States), along with the participation of German percussionist Dorothy Marx (Pouymiró, 2015; .Radio Encyclopedia, 2013). Reflecting the global-local nexus of the politics of delimitation of Afrocuban religion as well as the self-constituting dynamics in which academic scholarship and religious praxis craft one another within “autopoietic pattern[s] of relationality” (Palmié, 2013, 29), Pouymiró intended to use the nationally- and internationally-focused academic and musical Festival de Fuego as the perfect stage for presenting the first *tambor de fundamento de mujeres* to the world and thereby publicly breaking the taboo and prohibition against women playing the *batá* or channeling Añá. However, despite having consulted Ifá and received confirmation from Orozco Rubio that playing the consecrated *batá* was in fact predestined for her,\(^\text{117}\) Pouymiró had not, as of yet, received authorization for this specific goal from Orozco Rubio.

On an otherwise ordinary Monday afternoon in late June, 2015, some two weeks before the inauguration of the Festival de Caribe, Orozco Rubio issued the authorization that Pouymiró had awaited several decades to receive: she, Ìyánífá Caridad Rubio Fonseca (Orozco Rubio’s mother) and Anais López Rubio (Orozco Rubio’s sister) would be the first three women authorized to play a set of *tambores de Añá* in Cuba – and they would do so that afternoon in the *Egbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi* using Orozco

\(^{116}\) Female *batá* players.

\(^{117}\) Personal communication with Ìyánífá Caridad Rubio of the *egbé*. On the *od dú* as archetypes for all that has been and all that will be, see Palmié (2013) and Holbraad (2012).
Rubio’s consecrated set. Undoubtedly, this authorization came on that particular day because I was planning to be at the Ẹgbé interviewing Pouymiró and Caridad Rubio with audio equipment and cameras. As an American academic, my presence served as an authenticatation of the event, and it was expected that I would bear witness to the event and photograph, videotape, and write about the events for dissemination abroad.\textsuperscript{118}

Notably, the first instance of women playing consecrated batá would not be a tambor – or ritual event – at all; rather, it would constitute an initial instance of access to the consecrated drums outside of the context of ritual by Pouymiró, Caridad Rubio, and Anais López Rubio with the intent of enabling the women to officiate ceremonies using the batá at a later date. Notably, as well, Orozco Rubio called to give the official blessing, saying that he would be unable to make it that afternoon but that the women were fully authorized and encouraged to approach the batá on their own, thus, curiously, authorizing the event yet refraining from overseeing it directly.

The Ẹgbé, located in the back of Caridad and Anais López Rubio’s home, serves as an open-air ritual space divided into several discrete spatial realms: a central and rounded, open-air patio, the Ìgbò Odù on the far left of the patio, the cuarto de Eggún (room for the ancestors, in which the batá are kept) to the right of the entranceway, and an altar to Èṣù, purposefully kept in the furthest corner of the patio away from the home. After Orozco Rubio’s call, Caridad Rubio went to the cuarto de Éggun to retrieve the consecrated drums, and, noting that it was too hot to rehearse in the late-June sun, carried the consecrated batá from the outdoor ẹgbẹ patio into the living room of her home for the

\textsuperscript{118} This dynamic has been a staple of charged attempts to publicize, authenticate, and bear witness to changes in Afrocuban religion for decades. See, for example, Palmié (2013) and Wirtz (2014).
first official “rehearsal” (ensayo). Nagybe – euphoric, tearful, and anxious all at once – clasped her hands together and smiled tearfully at the drums as Caridad carefully removed them from their black cases. Caridad wrapped Nagybe in a blue ceremonial cloth and we set up a practice stage for the first ensayo, arranged so that I would film with my audio equipment and camera from the back of the room, while the three women faced me, seated in a semi-circle of three chairs, in the front.

Figure 14 Ìyánífá Caridad Rubio Fonseca plays the consecrated iiótele on June 22, 2015.
Photo by author.

Self-consciously proclaiming the moments to come as an “historic event”, Pouymiró sat down to record a statement before initially approaching the drums. In it, she emphasizes that she, Caridad Rubio, and Anais López Rubio execute the tambores de aña within the tenets of the Traditional Yorùbá Religion, and that, as Iyanifá and female initiates, they have the liturgical foundations and spiritual formation to do so:
We are not going to violate – nor will we be violating – any natural law, or anything that is not normal. I don’t believe that if men come from the wombs of women, there can be any impediment against us executing the tambores de añá... Today, June 22, 2015, for the first time in Cuba and in the world, we women will play the fundamentos. I believe that this is something important that can revolutionize music [and] that will revolutionize the religion. All things are subject to change.

Caridad added to Pouymiró’s statement, saying that in addition to “breaking all of the molds” and “taboos” that had been created “against women” in Regla de Ocha,\(^\text{119}\) they would also leave “a legacy for others, so that other religious women can play their drums without issue”.

In honor of the Egbe’s titular orisha, Ogún, Pouymiró, Rubio, and Rubio began the ensayo with a liturgical sequence dedicated, first, to the Orisha Ogún, and second, to Òrùnmilá, with Pouymiró as lead drummer on the Iyá, Caridad on the mid-sized Itótele, and Anais López Rubio on the smallest Okónkolo. Pouymiró and Caridad Rubio alternated as akpwón lead singers, with all three women participating in the choruses. After a pause, the women set the three drums on a stand so that Pouymiró could play all three drums simultaneously – a technique popular in secular presentations of the batá but not in ritual ones – and initiated another sequence to Ogún and Òrùnmilá. After a short break, in which a few neighbors and relatives began to pass through or sit in, they followed these toques with a sequence of toques and cantos dedicated to Yemoja - Orozco Rubio’s titular deity - with Pouymiró, again, taking the lead as akpwón.

\(^\text{119}\) Pouymiró’s words.
In the songs to Ògún, Òrúnmilá, and Yemoja, the three women played *toques* taken directly from the Regla de Ocha *batá* corpus and combined them with vocals that mixed traditional Ocha songs and phrasings with new, Nigerian-style wordings and pronunciation. In the sequence to Ifá, however, the women discarded Cuban texts altogether in favor of praise songs taken directly from contemporary Yorùbáland:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ó dòwó èyin baba wa,</td>
<td>Your hands reach us, our father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iṣeṣe dòwó èyin baba wa</td>
<td>The tradition is guided by your hands, our father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>È má jé ó bàjé èsin iṣeṣẹ</td>
<td>It doesn’t allow [us] to lose the spirituality of our tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ó dòwó èyin baba wa [sic]</td>
<td>Your hands reach us, our father.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This praise song to Ifá was recorded in 2007 by well-known Nigerian Ìyánífá Asabioje Afenapa on her album, *Isese L’agba*. The album presents a series of praises and songs to various òrìṣà recorded over sacred Yorùbá instrumentation, including the *batá* and *dùndún* drums. Caridad Rubio’s recontextualization of Afenapa’s Nigerian praise songs discards the “microtonal inflections” and “nasalized” “tension” of Yorùbá vocal technique, juxtaposing the Yoruba text over the Cuban toque *obanlá*, played by Pouymiró.

In this case, fidelity to the Cuban-style *batá* rhythmic archetypes and technique in contrast with a preference for contemporary Nigerian praise songs indicates a selective Yorùbá-centrism within the realm of the aural. On the one hand, claims of fidelity to the pronunciation, tonality, and semantics of the contemporary Yorùbá language as a more

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120 My translation of the anonymously-authored Yorùbá-Spanish translation provided by Orozco Rubio. Original Spanish: “*Sus manos nos alcanzan, padre nuestro / La tradición es guiada por sus manos, padre nuestro / No lo permita echar a perder la espiritualidad de nuestra tradición / Sus manos nos alcanzan, padre nuestro.*”
potent and pure channel of communication with the òrìṣà than Afrocuban Lucumí, or the vestige, non-syntactic ritual lexicon used in Regla de Ocha-Ifá, indicate what Ana Maria Ochoa terms “epistemologies of purification” in the realm of the linguistic that look towards contemporary Yorùbáland as an acting model. On the other hand, this linguistic purification is not matched by parallel ideologies of purification in the realm of the instrumental, where the Cuban batá are maintained as a faithful vessel for Aña/Àyàn despite divergences in the rhythmic archetypes and techniques of its Nigerian counterpart.

Figure 15 From left to right, Anais López Rubio, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró, and Caridad Rubio Fonseca play the consecrated tambores de Añá of Babaláwo, Omo Añá, and Olú batá Enrique Orozco Rubio. June 22, 2015. Photo by author.

After finally achieving a decades-long goal to which she had dedicated much of her personal and professional life, Pouymiró’s euphoric tears, excitement, laughing, and
crying—shared by all three women and myself, but especially notable in Pouymiró—gradually gave way to the darker emotions of fear, anxiety, and dread. “I know the Cultural Yoruba Association will show up”, Pouymiró growled, apprehensively. “There will have to be police surrounding the whole building at the Festival de Caribe”, she worried. “I imagine that with the world’s Ocha religious community, there won’t be a safe place in the world for us!” she joked, darkly. Moments of pride and bravery emerged and faded from within a cloud of anxiety and apprehension, and, in a moment of determined strength and conviction, Pouymiró turned to the camera and clarified:

We take on the challenge of what comes from now onwards. We know that there will be many skeptics, but, well, living is a risk. In the end…we know where we’re headed, we know what we want, and we know why we’re doing it. We have been the first to do it so that, in the future, new generations of women percussionists of *tambores de fundamento* will arise, and in equal conditions [to men].

The tendencies of fear to swell and unfurl in the face of the obscurity of the unknown underscores here the emotional toll of enacting what can be framed as an act of political “dissensus” in the sense put forward by Rancière, or a re-configuration of the boundaries of collectively-held sense and perception which self-evidently delimit that which is held in common – in this case, the gendered, ecclesiastic, and acoustic boundaries of proper femininity in Regla de Ocha and the ontological bases of the oricha Añá – and that which is not (Rancière, 2009/2004). Furthermore, the ominous fear associated with a state-linked apparatus (the ACYC) underscores the degree to which the perceived towering of
the state within the Cuban imagination awakens monolithic notions of hidden powers and reach, including in the case of “Afrocuban religions” (Routon, 2010).

In the days following this first instance in which Pouymiró played the *tambores de fundamento*, negative energies and emotions continued to follow her. She, Rubio, and Rubio all claimed to have trouble falling asleep that evening and experienced *tembroles* (shaking) throughout the night, awaking agitated the next day. Pouymiró felt unable to eat and unable to sleep. The playing of the consecrated batá at the Festival de Caribe would perhaps have to wait until she was able to make further consultations with Ifá to determine if any steps needed to be taken for her to continue playing peacefully. She emphasized that, yes, women can and should play the *tambores de fundamento*, and the three of them had accomplished this. Their anxiety and physical agitation was likely a case of nerves, she explained: “when one knows that they have broken the rules, it produces a shock”. However, she added, “the drum is alive, and an energy emanates from it; a wave leaves it and invades and circles all of your being, all of your soul. And if you aren’t prepared for this, it can be…not harmful, but…it can create certain situations.”

The historic “breaking of the mold” had occurred, however, and even if Pouymiró no longer planned to perform the *tambores de fundamento* at the Festival, she did plan to demonstrate to the local – and global – Ocha community present that women had in fact penetrated the barriers of prohibition and were playing the consecrated *batá* in Cuba. In preparation for her academic paper at the Festival, tentatively entitled “Menstruation: Blessing or Curse’ by Enrique Orozco Rubio”, Pouymiró prepared a statement and a

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121 In Pouymiró’s case, of course, fear of intervention by the ACYC or reprimands in the form of physical violence are – in her experience at least – real rather than imagined.
video, using images, sound, and interviews taken from the day that she, Rubio, and Rubio first played the tambores de aña. These images would show that women could – and already had – played the consecrated batá and that, additionally, they had the liturgical and spiritual foundations to do so. The video would also incorporate the paper’s central thesis, which aimed to theologically discredit the prohibition against women playing batá based on their menstruation.

The day before the presentation, however, Pouymiró grew anxious, wanting to make sure that Orozco Rubio saw and authorized the use of the video before she presented it. After all, Orozco Rubio owned the consecrated batá set that was to be shown to the world, and the three women belonged to – and represented – his Ẹgbé. His own reputation as babaláwo could ultimately be at stake, she worried. Since I had helped Pouymiró edit the images and videos that she wanted to present, we went together to Orozco Rubio’s home to show him the video.

When I arrived at Orozco Rubio’s house, he and Pouymiró were seated in rocking chairs. I sat on the black couch across from them, and listened, silently, as Pouymiró read out loud what she had written for her presentation. Orozco Rubio allowed her to read the entire piece through without stopping her, and then spoke, slowly explaining that there were corrections to be made, including in her tone and aggressiveness. “You have to make love to these people!”, he joked, arguing that her language was too strong and combative. Pouymiró then proceeded, line by line and paragraph by paragraph, as Orozco orally re-wrote her paper piece-by-piece, taking out all direct and strong language (Pouymiró’s forte), including all references to nosotras las mujeres (“We women”) – too large a generalization, he maintained, as there will be many santeras who do not want to
play consecrated *batá*. Partly, Orozco Rubio’s edits involved Pouymiró’s theological arguments, which, as her religious superior, he offered as correctives to strengthen her thesis (i.e., Pouymiró’s continuous feminizing of the principal, lead drum – *Iyá* – based on its common translation as “mother” from Yorùbá). Most strongly, however, he vastly tempered or removed Nagybe’s most politically potent statements, rendering the presentation a relatively innocuous, toned-down version of itself. Following the paper edits, we showed Orozco Rubio the video that Nagybe had produced. Again, he watched it once through, without speaking, and then suggested that we pass the videos to his computer so that he could add in his own footage of the Ẹgbé to enhance the presentation. He would deliver the final copy to the presentation at the Festival the following day.

On Monday, July 6, Pouymiró presented “*La menstruación: bendición o maldición* de Enrique Orozco Rubio” at the Festival de Caribe’s academic conferences, held at the grand Teatro Heredia theater in Santiago de Cuba. Pouymiró prefaced the presentation by saying that she would offer a statement and then, at the end of the presentation, illustrate with a video. The twenty-minute paper – though tempered in tone – did, in fact, briefly state that women had already played the consecrated batá within the liturgical foundations of African Traditionalism:

Today, this work aims to demonstrate that it is possible for those women motivated by and interested in practicing as percussionists of the *tambores de fundamento* [to do so]. It is completely possible. This serves, then, to help overthrow a myth [based on menstruation] lacking in solid argument. Therefore, I exhibit [here] the reasons by which a group of women, thanks to the liberties that the Traditionalist African Religion offers us, has already been able to access and practice the sacred *tambores de fundamento* consecrated to the deity Añá, without endangering the integrity of those traditional Omo Añá already in existence.
Following this statement, Pouymiró outlined her theological justifications, emphasizing that her *fundamento* (foundations) were based on “the literary corpus of the *caracol* [cowrie shell] as representative oracle of Santería and the analysis of the *Odun* of the corpus of *Ifá*”.  

When it came time to show the videos and photographs of Pouymiró, Caridad Rubio, and Anais López Rubio performing on the *tambores de aña* at the Ẹgbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi, however, Orozco Rubio announced to the technician running the event from his seat in the audience, “the images don’t come up”, shaking his head. An ambiguous wording that could mean either “the images are not working”, or, alternatively, “the images will not be shown”, the statement surprised Pouymiró, who had not been warned, and who had used her oral presentation as a segueway into the demonstration – aural and visual – of her participation in the first known case of women playing the consecrated *batá* in Cuba or internationally.

In the Q&A section following Pouymiró’s presentation, *santero* and academic Tomás Robaina Fernández, the first to respond, initially praised Pouymiró’s presentation as interesting and important within the contexts of female access to *unconsecrated* *batá*; however, he then flatly dismissed the principal thesis of the paper, proclaiming that, as an academic setting, this was not the space for a discussion of access to *consecrated* *batá*.

“This is a religious problem”, he emphasized, and the question of female access to consecrated *batá* truly falls to (male) “religious leaders”, “babalao”, and “great priests”. This flat repudiation of feminine theological argumentation within the spaces of the

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122 Although originally transmitted orally, the reference to the *odù* as a “literary corpus” is now rendered literal in Cuba through the increased publication of divination manuals – both formal and self-published, passed along in book or digital form (Palmié, 2013).

123 *No salen las imágenes.*
academic festival stood, the following day, in stark contrast to Robaina Fernández’ subsequent flowered praise for other male presenters, such as Orozco Rubio and babaláwo Enrique Machín Hernández (Pinar del Río), whose presentations - which also explicitly incorporated theological and spiritual argumentation based upon interpretations of the odù of Ifá – Robaina Fernández deemed as well-researched and “scientific”.

The multiple ways in which Pouymiró’s presentation of the first *ensayo de tambores de fundamento de mujeres* – which constituted, for her, a lifelong goal and achievement – were maneuvered, delimited, and received at the Festival de Caribe underscores the ways in which the boundaries of proper femininity in Regla de Ocha and Ifá are regulated and enforced in both academic and non-academic contexts. The patriarchal maneuvering of ownership and control over the details of the event by Orozco Rubio, in this case, demonstrates the ways in which male control over events rooted in lifelong female struggles for religious egalitarianism and personal freedoms re-naturalize the hierarchies of male-controlled knowledge and access, even within an ostensibly more open and “emancipatory” Nigerian-style Ifá. Additionally, this case reveals tensions between the discrete – if, at times, overlapping – intentions of the female and male participants in the first *ensayo de tambores de fundamento de mujeres*, including Pouymiró, Orozco Rubio, and Caridad and Anais López Rubio. Orozco Rubio, who openly authorized the event as part of an emancipatory African Traditionalist philosophy, also later aimed to suppress publicizing the details of the event in the face of the nascent potential of future repercussion or lost legitimacy. Pouymiró, on the other hand, felt that this story was her own and that it constituted the culmination of a life-long struggle to break the taboos surrounding female prohibition in Regla de Ocha. Her one crucial
sentence announcing the fact that she, and the other initiated women, had, in fact, already accessed the *tambores de aña* through the liturgical tenets of Traditional African-style *Ifá* did reach certain members of the audience, however. Following Robaina Fernández’ dismissive comments, a few Cuban and international *santeros/as* stood to praise and congratulate her efforts – as well as the efforts of her authorizing priest, Enrique Orozco Rubio.

**Conclusion**

On June 22, 2015, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró, Caridad Rubio, Anais López Rubio, and authorizing African Traditionalist babaláwo Baba Enrique Orozco Rubio enacted the first instance of an *ensayo de fundamento de mujeres* at the *Ẹgbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odogbemi* in Santiago de Cuba. Marking the first known instance in which three women were authorized to play the consecrated batá set in Cuba or internationally, this historic event underscored the novel theological, aural, and cosmic revolutions wrought in Cuban oricha/òrìṣà *worship* by the polemic and burgeoning African Traditionist Movement. In this case, the African Traditionist Movement in Cuba additionally served as the theological grounds for engendering novel and interstitial spaces for generative acts of reconfiguration in the aural and spiritual realms. In utilizing *Ifá* Nigeriano as an avenue for carving out novel forms of access to the consecrated batá in Cuba, for example, Pouymiró circumvented *criollo* prohibitions against women playing sacred batá and carved a path for a larger and explicitly generative project of refashioning the sacred *batá* within feminist-centered and feminine-conceived ritual contexts. In
recontextualizing the sacred instruments within Ifá Nigeriano, Pouymiró also re-conceptualized the epistemic and ontological bases of *batá* within Cuban “cults of affliction”.

The case of Pouymiró’s first *ensayo de fundamento de mujeres* additionally points to the limitations of projects of so-called female “emancipation” in Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá. Within the male lineages of Omo Añá, which control access to and ownership over the consecrated *batá*, Pouymiró and other women still remain spiritually disenfranchised from realizing larger goals of female-led and female-officiated *batá* ceremonies in which women own their own sets of consecrated *batá* and officiate ceremonies independently (a future goal for Pouymiró, for sure). The patriarchal maneuvering of knowledge and ownership over the first *ensayo de fundamento de mujeres* by Orozco Rubio - and the male-centered logics with which information about the *ensayo* was received within the ambiguously theological contexts of Cuba’s academic conferences - furthermore reflect the continued patriarchal delimitations and boundary-policing of proper femininity in Afrocuban religions. However, Pouymiró’s personal struggle outside of and within the African Traditionalist movement complicates facile theorizing of feminism in the Ìyánífá debates as located “outside” of Cuba (i.e., as an American imperialism, as outlined by Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a), and, instead, points to the need for a more nuanced look at the question of the place of feminism(s) – and, specifically, exactly what kind of feminism – in the female experience of women in Afrocuban religions and in Revolutionary Cuba more broadly.

Larger questions also remain: will the first *ensayo de fundamento de mujeres* engender further cases of women accessing the sacred *batá* within the tenets of African
Traditionalism or, even, within Regla de Ocha itself? And, within the African Traditionalist Movement, will the batá set be maintained as a means of communication with the òrìṣà – with its additional valence as national symbol of Cuban religious heritage and culture – or will it be replaced by contemporary Nigerian instruments, as in the case of African traditionalist babaláwo Ángel William Viera Bravo, who, in 2013, brought Nigerian Ifá praise drums (Ilú Ifá) directly from Oṣogbo, Nigeria to his Ṣgbé in Havana (Martinez-Betancourt, 2014)?

These questions point to how the refashioning and selective fusing of the cosmological tenets of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá by Pouymiró and Orozco Rubio reflect ongoing sagas of theological craft, renewal, traditionality, and break in Regla de Ocha-Ifá since its inception in Cuba in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These issues also reflect the stakes in the battle for global authority between these two contested domains of oricha/òrìṣà worship, particularly as they relate to gender and female ritual and epistemic access to Ifá and the tambores de aña. The centrality of the aural to the Ifá Nigeriano polemic furthermore points to the sonic as a defining locus of contested “ontologies and epistemologies of the acoustic” (Ochoa Guatier, 2014, 2) that mediate notions of divinized personhood, proper cosmological femininity, and juridico-theological belonging within contexts of state-linked and actively-monitored Cuban religiosity. Pouymiró’s project of a tambor de fundamento de mujeres, then, underlines the multiple ways in which listening, sound, the sensorial, and knowledge are inextricably linked in the crafting of the cosmological foundations and understandings of oricha/òrìṣà worship in Cuba.
CHAPTER FOUR

\textit{ÌYÁNÍFÁ: GENDERED POLARITY AND “SPEAKING IFÁ”}

In the Eastern Havana neighborhood of Alamar, the Ìyánífá Yamilka Gámez Oliva stood barefoot on the outdoor patio of the Aworeni Temple of Havana, facing the upright, iron \textit{osùn babaláwo}, or “diviner’s staff” of Ifá.\footnote{Also called \textit{opa osun Orunmila} (Drewal, 2016: 333). One of the babaláwo’s” most important possessions,” the \textit{osùn babaláwo} is stuck into the ground, standing straight up, during important Ifá gatherings and ceremonies. It is placed in front of a babaláwo’s house, marking the “residence of a diviner,” and is also always carried in the front of any public procession (ibid).} In her right hand, she rattled the wooden iroke continuously as she chanted and sang Yorùbá-language verses and praise songs to \textit{Osùn}, invoking the babaláwo's iron staff of àṣè, or authority (Abiodun, 2014).\footnote{During my fieldwork, the \textit{osùn babaláwo}, or iron staff of Ifá, was referred to as \textit{“Osùn”} and ritually fed along with other deities, such as Èshù and Ifá.} As Drewal notes, the \textit{osùn babaláwo}, “when used with incantations…acts as a weapon against death and other destructive forces” (Drewal, 2016: 333). Behind her, a semi-circle of babaláwos, Ìyánífá, and other members of the Temple of Havana helped her to invoke this power, animating her verses with calls of affirmation and repeating her intoned choruses in call-and-response. Her short-cropped hair, still growing out from the ritual shaving of her recent initiation, and the blue, beaded necklace with the intricately-sewn word “Ìyánífá” highlighted in white beads around her neck, announced her newfound authority as a high priestess of Ifá. As she paused to pour a series of substances over the small, iron bird perched on top of the staff (representing the “lone bird” (çeykàn) (ibid),\footnote{Abiodun states that the “lone bird” symbolically alludes “to Orunmila’s àṣè” (Abiodun, 2014). Bird (2009) translates \textit{osùn babaláwo} as the “Bird of Ifá staff” (69).} her husband, another babaláwo in the temple, called out a corresponding series
of odù verses and songs. The members of the Temple interjected the verses with a call, “Àṣẹ!” as Gámez Oliva proceeded to communicate directly with the deity via the obi (coconut) oracle. Posing a series of questions to Osùn in Yorùbá before dropping a series of small pieces of coconut to the earth, Gámez Oliva and other members of the temple gauged the deity’s response by reading the distribution of the shells – either face-up or face-down – on the ground.127

Throughout Cuba, an ever-increasing number of Ìyánífá are breaking the taboo against female participation in Ifá by “speaking Ifá” (hablar Ifá) in a variety of ritual, and informal, settings.128 As Hoolbraad notes, this common Cuban colloquialism traditionally refers to the "more-or-less informal manners of conversation” between Cuban-style babalapos in which these men "strive, often competitively…[to demonstrate] their command of the mythical knowledge of Ifá signos” (Hoolbraad, 2012). To "speak Ifá," then, is to both to command knowledge over Ifá's corpus and to be able to wield that knowledge in ritual settings and in everyday life. Beyond the informal associations of the phrase, the frequent assertion that Ìyánífá now “speak Ifá” additionally underscores the centrality and potency of the word – and the voice – in the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR). The Yorùbá language, when invoked with correct pronunciation, tonality, and intentionality, is seen as “reactivating” the conditions of the sacred odù verses, creating the conditions of possibility for transformations of fate (Interview, Enrique Orozco

127 The “obi-coco oracle,” or "the four shards of coconuts” served as a replacement in Cuba for the Yorùbá "kola nut system” given the absence of kola nuts on the island (Brown, 2004: 813). Many African Traditionalists egbés now use kola nuts, which have been re-introduced on the island, while others continue to use the Cuban obi oracle (or both).

128 This phrasing was repeated to me frequently by African traditionalists in relation to Ìyánífá, specifically.
Rubio, 2015). As the Ìyánífá Fatunmise explains, “the power of the word is the power to enter the astral plane… from this plane the power of “ofe se” is used to change the condition of life on earth” (Fatunmise, 2013: 11). That Ìyánífá in Cuba now "speak Ifá” underscores their newfound command and authority in Ifá divinatory practice as well as their novel access to the previously all-male priesthood.

In Cuba, however, controversies surrounding Ìyánífá and gendered participation in Ifá mark the most antagonizing point of difference between Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. The polemic surrounding Ìyánífá directly fuels repeated calls for the blacklisting of African Traditionalist babaláwos and Ìyánífá and their exclusion from the state-linked Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba (ACYC) (Águila de Ifá, 2015; Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a, 2015b; Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba, 2013 [2004]). Furthermore, critics of discourses of female “emancipation” in Nigerian-style Ifá point to the ways in which African Traditionalists re-inscribe gendered participation as “heteronationalist” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a), promoting female participation in a purportedly “African traditional” (and exclusively heterosexual) sense. Here, I turn towards the “Iyanifa debate” in Cuba (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a) and, particularly, to its relationship to aurality in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. Specifically, I examine the relationship between female participation and the voice in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, interrogating the ways in which African Traditionalists assert Ìyánífá as central to Yorùbá-rooted philosophies of community health and gendered polarity. Through an analysis of aurality in the annual Letra de Año ("Letter of the Year") divination ceremony in the Ègbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi of Santiago de Cuba, this chapter interrogates
the ways in which Ìyánífá “speak Ifá” as well as their centrality to Yorùbá-centric philosophies of gendered polarity and equilibrium.


In 1978, the Nigerian babaláwo, playwright, and Àràbà of Òṣogbo Ifáyémí Òlébuibọn spoke to the public in Miami in a conference organized by his Cuban-American godchild, the babalao José Miguel Gómez Barberas (Palmié, 2013: 278, See Chapter 2). Facing the Cuban-American community of babalaos in Miami, Òlébuibọn caused an uproar by explaining that, in Nigeria, women are initiated into the Ifá priesthood. This upsetting revelation threatened the highly-policed gendered and sexual boundaries of Cuban-style Ifá in Cuba and its "secondary” religious diasporas in the United States (Frigerio, 2004), where initiation into Ifá and access to Ifá's sacred corpus of odù is reserved exclusively for heterosexual men (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a). Òlébuibọn’s announcement caused such an uproar among the Cuban-American community in Miami that the event was covered in the Miami Herald in December of that year (Palmié, 2013: 278). Seven years later, in 1985, Òlébuibọn continued his pivotal role in the Yorubizing turn in the diaspora by overseeing the initiation of Dr. Patri D’Haif, a Jewish psychiatrist based out of New York, as the first documented Ìyánífá in the Americas (Padilla Pérez, 2006). Òlébuibọn’s gendered revelations and active role in Ìyánífá initiations in the United States set "in motion a highly contentious process” that would ultimately “split Havana's babalaos” into two factions: those aligned with Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and those aligned with Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà (Palmié, 2013: 278-279). From the first historical moments
marking the yorubizing turn in the Americas, controversies surrounding gender played a central role.  

The initiation of Ìyánífá is said to have first occurred in Cuba in the year 2000, the year in which the African Traditionalist pioneer and babaláwo Victor Betancourt Omolófaoló Estrada claims to have initiated two Cuban women, María Cuesta and Nidia Águila de León, as Ìyánífá in his Ifá Iranlówo temple in Havana (Machado Tineo, 2013). Done "quietly," this first instance of female initiation remained unsurfaced for several years until the "Iyanifa debate" erupted in Cuba in 2004 (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820). This debate followed a global controversy surrounding the American Ìyánífá Dr. Patri D’Haifá, who had circulated claims of seeing the òrìṣà Odù, the reproductive mechanism of Ifá that is forbidden for women to see or receive in both Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the principle, globalizing lineages of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) in Nigeria (Abimbola, 1997: 87; Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 818). Additionally, D’Haifá claimed to have directly initiated a male priest into Ifá, an impossibility without the forbidden òrìṣà Odù (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 200). The International Council for Ifá Religions (ICFIR),

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129 In the United States, the controversy surrounding the initiation of Ìyánífá in the 1980s and 1990s was also highly racialized, particularly among African American Yorùbá revivalists such as those associated with the Òyòtūnji Village in South Carolina. Clarke notes that the initiation of the white American woman “Olúfadékè the Ìyánífá” in 1990 caused a controversy among the members of the Òyòtūnji Village, who espoused Yorùbá revivalism as a form of black nationalist separatism in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s (Clarke, 2004: 18, 147). As Clarke notes, “because she was not only a woman but was also seen as racially Other, the politics of race and gender brought to the fore critical questions about what constitutes Yorùbá practice, who should be included" during the 1990s (18).

130 Villepastour informed me of an interlocutor who claims knowledge of marginal lineages in Nigeria where women are permitted to “see” Odù (in the Ìjebu area, specifically, dating back at least two generations), suggesting that the prohibition against women accessing Odù within the principle, globalizing lineages of Yorùbáland may not be absolute in Nigeria (Villepastour, pers. comm., 2017).
based in Ilé-Ifé, promptly "disputed D’Haifa’s claims and circulated an online press release revoking her title" (ibid). This global controversy underscored the policed boundaries of ọrìṣà worship in the diaspora and reached the ACYC and Cuba's babaláos, who perceived the initiation of women such as D’Haifa as the work of “profaners” who threatened to "tarnish" the religion (See Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba, 2013 [2004]). In 2004, the controversy became "a national Cuban issue" when it was revealed that a Venezuelan practitioner of Regla de Ocha, Alba Marina Portales, was traveling to the island to be initiated as Ịyánífá under the guidance of the Ifá Iranlówo lineage (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820). In response, the ACYC released a "worldwide proclamation to orisha practitioners condemning the practices of Ịyánífá" and blacklisting the associated babaláwos and Ịyánífá (ibid). As Beliso-De Jesús notes, the Cuban state “unofficially aligned itself against iyanífá ceremonies by hassling and policing” African Traditionalists in 2004 and 2005, “threatening some members of Ifá Iranlówo with fines for housing foreigners in their home without permission” and condoning "the call to blacklist African-style priests" (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 202).

Despite opposition from the ACYC, the initiation of Ịyánífá in Cuba gained momentum in the late 2000's, and initiations spread among other African Traditionalist lineages and ẹgbés. In 2006, the first Ịyánífá initiation in eastern Cuba occurred in Holguín when the Venezuelan babaláwo José Hidalgo Edibere Gamés initiated Félix Arsenio Fuentes Cáceres’ wife, Kirenia del Carmen Mejías, as the first Ịyánífá in an eastern Cuban province (Martínez Betancourt and Orozco Rubio, 2016; Interview, 131 In 2005, Portales helped to finance the initiation of three Cuban women as Ịyánífá in Matanzas (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820).
That same year, Victor Betancourt and the African Traditionalist babaláwo Enrique de la Torre initiated Anaís López Rubio (See Chapter 3) as the first Ìyánífá in Santiago de Cuba. In 2009, Victor Betancourt Estrada’s son, Víctor Yasmani Betancourt Águila, initiated the santera Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez (b. 1960) as Ìyánífá, along with four other women in the city of Holguín (ibid.). In 2012, María Rodríguez Sánchez founded the Egbè Fermina Gómez ati Echu-Dina [sic] in Holguín. Notably, María Rodríguez Sánchez is, to this day, the only female founder and rector of any African Traditionalist ẹgbé in Cuba, the other twenty-one of which are headed by male babaláwos (Martínez-Betancourt, pers. comm., 2016). Unlike the other African Traditionalist ẹgbéṣ in Cuba, María Rodríguez Sánchez’ Egbè Fermina Gómez ati Echu-Dina is headed by five Ìyánífá, including her daughter, Yadira Flamand Rodríguez.

Ìyánífá: “Heteronationalisms” and Gendered Philosophies of Polarity and Equilibrium

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133 Víctor Yasmani Betancourt Águila was initiated into Nigerian-style Ifá directly by the Nigerian babaláwo Ọṣọlágbadé Pópóólá in Havana in 2006 (Martínez Betancourt and Orozco Rubio, 2016).

134 Yadira Flamand Rodríguez, Lídice María Peña, Raquel Ávila de la Peña and Ilya María Trasóvares Infante (Martínez Betancourt and Orozco Rubio, 2016). At the time of her initiation into Ifá, Ìyánífá Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez was a respected santera in Holguín, having practiced Regla de Ocha (as a child of the oricha Yemayá) for thirty-five years, and she held a leadership position in the provincial branch of the ACYC as President of the Council of Elders (Consejo de Mayores) for the province of Holguín. Upon her initiation as Ìyánífá, María Rodríguez Sánchez was expelled from the ACYC and from her leadership position, also losing many of her ahijados, or godchildren, in Holguín (Interview, Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez, 2016).
Although significantly smaller in number than the initiation of African Traditionalist babaláwos, the initiation of Ìyánífá in Cuba has expanded significantly over the last decade. By 2016, for example, the African Traditionalist babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio had initiated fifty-four women as Ìyánífá, or slightly less than one-third the total number of babaláwos he has initiated into Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà (Martínez Betancourt and Orozco Rubio, 2016). In Cuba, the initiation of Ìyánífá has expanded along with African Traditionalism itself, with Ìyánífá practicing in the Cuban provinces of Havana, Matanzas, Ciego de Ávila, and Santiago de Cuba (Machado Tineo, 2013).

Within Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, African Traditionalist babaláwos and Ìyánífá alike frame the initiation of women into the Ifá priesthood as "the emancipation of women" and as a corrective to the "lacunas" evident in Regla de Ocha-Ifá, particularly as they relate to philosophies towards gender and female participation in Ifá (See Orozco Rubio, 2015). One such "lacuna," according to Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, is the interpretation accorded to references to the "wife or wives of Orunmila" (in Cuba, also known as “Orula”) in the divinatory Ifá corpus (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 821; Brown, 2003: 145-146; Machado Tineo, 2013). In Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, Cuban babaláos interpret the references to the "wife or wives of Orunmila" as, in practice, "wives of the Babaláwo or priest of Ifá” (Machado Tineo, 2013). Called the Apetebí Ayanfá in Cuba, this "highest" ritual ranking for women designates that a woman is "forever bound to the Babalao” while ascribing her "the position of server” within rituals and ceremonies (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820-821). As a ritual “server,” the Apetebí Ayanfá “is in charge of organizing all domestic ritual activities such as serving food for the feast tables as well
as cleaning, cooking, and plucking the hens from the sacrifice” (821). As Beliso-De Jesús notes, the ACYC defends this circumscribed role of women as *Apethé Ayanfà* “servers” as a "privileged" and "celebrated one" (ibid). In the ACYC's public declaration against Ìyànífá in 2004, for example, the ACYC stated:

> Orula granted woman with the role of server of Ifá́, and when we say server, we mean it in the best sense of the word, because we give women the utmost consideration and respect, not only within the religion but also as a worker, wife, mother, and principal educator of our children (ibid).

In Cuban-style Ifá, the highest consecration that a woman receives is as *Apethé Ayanfà*, a domestic server whose access to both the study of the sacred odù of Ifá and to Ifá’s instruments of divination is strictly forbidden.

In Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, references to the "wife or wives of Orunmila" in the Ifá corpus are interpreted as Ìyànífá, or “Ìyá Onífá,” the “mother of Ifá” (also termed *ìyalawo*, or “mother of secrets,” in other Yorùbá revivalist movements throughout the Americas) (Clarke, 2004; Machado Tineo, 2013; Murrell, 2010: 120, 122). Following

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135 Again, Oyèwùmí problematizes the gendered translations of *babaláwo* and Ìyànífá as “father of the secret” and “mother of secrets,” respectively, arguing that Ìyànífá “is an elision of *Ìyá nínú Ifá* meaning master of expert of Ifá, which is identical to the [nongendered] meaning of *babaláwo*” (Oyèwùmí, 2006: 24). Furthermore, she provocatively argues that the term Ìyànífá is of relatively recent coinage in Yorùbáland, emerging as “a necessary development in reaction to the increasing gendering of *babaláwo* as male.” She continues, “the trend to create gendered vocabulary in Yorùbá is an interesting one, and may be a practical solution to female marginalization as Yorùbá social categories are increasingly interpreted according to the-male-as-norm standards of the dominant colonial language – English” (ibid). Furthermore, she notes that “the term *ìyán ̀fà* is gaining currency in certain circles as the accepted mode for referring to female Ifá diviners but knowledge of the word is hardly widespread” (ibid). Oyèwùmí’s formulations and historicization of the term Ìyànífá points to a recent trend towards gendering Yorùbá language in Ifá in Yorùbálánd and to heterogeneity in approaches to female diviners and their terminological correlates.
the gender norms surrounding female initiation into Ifá in Yorùbáland, Ìyánífá in Cuba are initiated into Ifá and permitted to use Ifá's sacred instruments of divination, including the ọpẹlẹ (called ókuele in Cuba) (Holbraad, 2012: 149), a divining chain of "eight half seed shells" (Bascom, 1969: 3) (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 203). In certain ẹgbés, Ìyánífá are additionally permitted to use the sacred ikines, or palm nuts, which constitute the principal implements of Ifá divination. Additionally, Ìyánífá study the sacred odù of the Ifá corpus and are allowed to "sacrifice four-legged animals," both of which form "strict prohibitions" in Regla de Ocha-Ifá (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 203). As Machado Tineo notes, these discrepancies in the interpretation of references to the "wife" of Òrùnmilá/Orula in the Ifá corpus constitutes the "cornerstone" of the contentious Ìyánífá debate between Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. These discrepancies translate, in practical terms, into a “minimum power (as apetebí) or maximum (as Iyanifá)” regarding the usage of the divining implements of Ifá ritual and the oversight of divination ceremonies (Machado Tineo, 2013).

Despite the significant ritual, conceptual, and divinatory differences between the designations of Apetebí Ayanfá and Ìyánífá in Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Nigerian-style Ifá, African Traditionalist babaláwos continually emphasize that the category of Ìyánífá is not equivalent to that of a babaláwo. “Ìyánífá is not a woman babaláwo,” African

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136 As I discovered during fieldwork, approaches to Ìyánífá’s access to and use of Ifá's implements of divination, particularly the ọpẹlẹ and ikines, vary among Cuba's African Traditionalists ẹgbés. In Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez’ Ègbè Fermina Gómez ati Echu-Dina [sic] in Holguín and Erick Gómez Rodríguez’ Ilé Ijuba Olafemi Orímolade Aworeni [sic] temple in Havana, for example, Ìyánífá utilize both the ọpẹlẹ and ikines for Ifá rituals and divinations. In others, however, Ìyánífá’s access to the ọpẹlẹ and ikines is more restricted.

137 My translation.
traditionalist babaláwos often state (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015).

Significantly, Ìyánífá lack access to the òrìṣà Odù, the reproductive mechanism that allows babaláwos to initiate other babaláwos and to build descent-based ritual lineages (Abimbola, 1997: 87; Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 818). If an Ìyánífá, such as the female rector of the Egbè Fermina Gómez ati Echu-Dina in Holguín, Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez, wishes to initiate a babaláwo into her temple and build her own ritual lineage, she must call upon another African Traditionalist babaláwo to oversee the consecration and preside over the crucial òrìṣà Odù (which women are strictly prohibited from seeing) (Ìyánífá, 2016).

In justifying the exclusion of female access to the reproductive òrìṣà Odù, African Traditionalist babaláwos point to a Yorùbá philosophy of polarity that undergirds a gendered construction of equilibrium of opposites – male and female – as central to spiritual and community well-being. As Orozco Rubio outlines, in the initiation of a babaláwo or an Ìyánífá, the initiate reencounters their respective gender-opposite sensibility through a symbolic marriage to the female òrìṣà Odù (in the case of the male babaláwo) or to the male òrìṣà Òrúnmi/Ifá (in the case of the female Ìyánífá). In so doing, the consecration of a babaláwo or Ìyánífá reestablishes "spiritual equilibrium" through the symbolic marriage with the equivalent gender-opposite òrìṣà: Odù or Ifá/Òrúnmi (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). 138 Since women are already born

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138 Chief Fagbemileke Fatunmise elaborates on the interplay between feminine and masculine energy in the initiation of babaláwos (Fatunmise, 2013). As she outlines, during initiation, the babaláwo is presented with "female energy" via the "Odù Pot," in which the "Divine Feminine Energy" and "items representing the four cardinal points of the Universe" are housed (43). This reencounter allows the initiate to receive the òṣe necessary to "enhance his masculine energy to be elevated to a Babaláwo" (43). The òṣe is "passed down through the ‘Woman’", as “it is impossible for men to pass this energy
with the “capacity” to sexually reproduce and bear children, they are excluded from access to – or even seeing – the Òrìṣà Odù, while male babaláwos access the Òrìṣà Odù as a means to reproduce (through the “birth” of ritual children). Needless to say, the hetero- and cisnormative gendered pairing of babaláwo-Òrìṣà Odù and Ìyánifá-Ifá/Òrùnmilà presumes ontological, binary gender stability, wrought cosmologically as an unbreachable, (cis)gendered "stasis" whose latent male-female spiritual disequilibrium is ritualistically canceled through the act of initiation (Spencer, IV, 2015: xix). This heterosexual marriage between a babaláwo-Òrìṣà Odù and Ìyánifá-Ifá/Òrùnmilà as enacted through the act of initiation is additionally mobilized to justify the exclusion of homosexuals from the high spiritual ranks of Ìyánifá and babaláwo. African Traditionalists frame gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals as representing a "philosophical contradiction" with respect to this heterosexual spiritual marriage, negating their possibility for participation in the foundational rites of initiation (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015).

The symbolic marriage between babaláwo-Òrìṣà Odù and Ìyánifá-Ifá/Òrùnmilà represents but one one facet of the "law of polarity" informing Yorùbá religious philosophy (ibid). Within Ifá, the universe is conceived as encompassing a constant, dynamic "equilibrium between two opposing poles": for example, “the negative and the...”

139 For more on the language of “birth” in Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion, see Villepastour (2015a).
140 For more on the concept of polarity in Yorùbá religious philosophy, see Edwards and Mason (1998: 4) and Oladipo (2002: 158). All quotations in this paragraph taken from an interview with Enrique Orozco Rubio, Santiago de Cuba, 2015, unless otherwise noted.
positive”, “day and night”, “cold and heat”, "the world of the living and the world of the ancestors". Orozco Rubio frames this law of polarity as a “dynamic equilibrium” represented, for example, by the opposition between Olódúmarè and the órìṣà Èṣù. As he outlines, Olódúmarè, or the "Supreme Being" and "apex of the Yorùbá pantheon" (Abimbola, 2005: 51), represents the force of creation, while Èṣù, the neutral, policing "'trickster’ God” (ibid), represents the "principle of opposition” that “stands against” the force of creation (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). As Ábímbólá and Orozco Rubio note, Èṣù is a "neutral entity” (Abimbola, 2005: 58) that constitutes "the principle not of destruction or malignancy, but of opposition" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). As Ayegboyin and Jegede elaborate, the dynamic equilibrium between Olódúmarè and Èṣù that informs the law of polarity finds its correlate in the neutral Yorùbá conception of the dynamic interplay between ire (good) and ibi (evil), or “the two major forces that control the universe” (Ayegboyin and Jegede, 2009). In Yorùbá religious philosophy, ire and ibi are conceived as informing and constituting one another, as demonstrated in the phrase “ibi nini ire, ire ninu ibi” (“evil is in what is good and good is an evil”) (ibid). The centrality of Èṣù to oríṣà worship and Ifá in Yorùbáland and its diaspora (Falola, 2013) likely owes its prominence, in part, to the oríṣà's capacity to "open doors” and "spiritual pathways" by constituting "the energy that travels constantly between these two values”: "the negative and the positive" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). In Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá the "law of polarity" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015) as exemplified in the Yorùbá philosophical conception of ire (good) and ibi (evil) (Ayegboyin and Jegede, 2009) finds its correlate in the conception of iré ("positive energy") and osogbo ("negative energy"), which the santera Marta Moreno
Vega likens to the dual nature of the orichas and "elements of nature they represent" as both "life-giving" and "destructive" (Vega, 2000).

Within Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, the "law of polarity of the universe" as engendered specifically through gendered equilibrium between male and female – and masculine and feminine energy – constitutes a cornerstone of Ifá philosophy and ritual practice.¹⁴¹ For Orozco Rubio and other African Traditionalists, the restoration of the role of Ìyánífá in accordance with the gender norms of contemporary Yorùbáland marks the re-balancing of gendered equilibrium in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, an equilibrium ostensibly lost during the transformation of the Yorùbá religion in colonial- and early Republican-era Cuba. For African Traditionalists, the reinstatement of the "traditional" female gender roles of Ìyánífá as well as the study and worship of central òrìṣà of the Yorùbá pantheon ostensibly lost in Cuba (such as the òrìṣà and cult of Ìyámi Òṣòròngà)¹⁴² serves as a corrective to (dis)equilibrium in the gendered formulations of Regla de Ocha-Ifá. As Castro Figueroa notes (2012), Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá indeed favored the development of rituals and rites related to “protection and divination" during the cauldron and aftermath of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, de-emphasizing those related to rites of fertility and maternity (Castro Figueroa, 2012). As Orozco Rubio elaborates, in Yorùbáland "women are the center of equilibrium of the society", and, “unlike our society…the adoration of the principle of motherhood is vital" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). In a broad sense, the initiation of women into the Ifá priesthood is

¹⁴¹ For more on "The Concept of Male and Female Polarity" in Ifá, see Fatunmbi (1992/1993).
¹⁴² The òrìṣà encompassing “the dynamic force of Divine Feminine Energy” in Yorùbáland, See Fatumise, 2013)
framed as restoring community health and well-being by enhancing the dynamic interplay of male-female polarity and thus enriching gendered equilibrium. On an individual level, the introduction of Ìyánífá into the landscape of Cuban Ifá is framed as restoring women's “right to know and rectify their destiny” through Ifá practice and divination (Interview, Erick Gómez Rodríguez, 2016).

As Beliso-De Jesús notes, however, discourses of "feminine vindications" (Padilla Pérez, 2006: 1, in Beliso-De Jesús, 2015a: 820) and female "emancipation" (Orozco Rubio, 2015) in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà depict Nigerian-style Ifá as “seemingly more gender egalitarian” than Cuban style-Ifá but “not necessarily feminist” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 208). In the "Iyanífá debate" of 2004, for example, members of the Ifá Iranlówo lineage framed "feminist impulses" such as those represented by the American Ìyánífá Patri D’Haifa, who additionally claimed to have "initiated the first openly gay Babaláwo” (About Us, 2014; Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 204), as "imperialist feminisms” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 204). As she writes:

Perceived extensions of Western (read white American) imperialisms, feminist impulses have been diagnosed within African diaspora assemblages as co-opting and distorting diasporic traditionality… This invoking of a rhetoric against American exceptionalism orders (neo)liberal, modern, and democratic feminists and gays to the realm of the global imperialist Other – the United States (204, 209).

While certain African Traditionalists outside of the Ifá Iranlówo lineage with whom Beliso-De Jesús conducted her fieldwork do frame their gendered interventions in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà within the context of feminism (i.e., Nagybe Madariaga Pouymirò, See Chapter 3), the rhetoric surrounding Ìyánífá in Cuba overwhelmingly
values these women in a purportedly African "traditional" sense, i.e., emphasizing their capacity to bear children and to be good wives and mothers. Orozco Rubio, for example, likens the role of the babaláwo and the Ìyánífá within an ègbé to that of a “mother and father”, each with a specific, and non-interchangeable, role. As he states, “it is necessary that both [the babaláwo and Ìyánífá] are together in order to procreate, and it is necessary that they are together in order to constitute a family” (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). This metaphor of a heteronormative, cisgendered coupling of male and female as the basis for the biological family extends here to the babaláwo and Ìyánífá as the basis for the creation of religious family and community well-being. In so doing, Orozco Rubio's formulation depicts homosexual and transgender/genderqueer individuals as “philosophical contradiction[s]” located outside of the purview of the highest priesthood rankings of Ifá. Additionally, such formulations frame "imperialist feminisms", such as those represented by the American D’Haifa’s claim of female access to the reproductive òrìṣà Odù in the United States (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015b: 204) as disruptive of Yorùbá traditionality – and, specifically, as disruptive to the male-female polarity necessary for gendered equilibrium and community health.

The rhetoric of female “emancipation” in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà fuels a larger discourse surrounding Ifá's "universal" character (Interviews, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015: Erick Gómez Rodríguez, 2016; Otto William Sabina de León, 2016), one that belies the circumscribed gender roles accorded to exclusively heterosexual, cisgender men and women through the babaláwo and Ìyánífá priesthoods. On the one hand, tropes of universalism in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà serve to promote racial inclusivity, including ideologies of racial universalism that effectively divorce "true" Africanity (and African
traditionality) from phenotypic blackness in line with the multi-ethnic, multi-racial development of "African-inspired" religions in Cuba (Brown, 2003, 59; López, 2013: 104-105; Paravisini-Gebert, 2008: 152). On the other, tropes of Ifá’s universalism in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà serve to promote discourses of gendered egalitarianism that frame African traditionalism as the emancipatory antidote to Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, which, as African Traditionalism’s gendered antithesis, is framed as “machista and ignorant” (García Basulto, 2016). As the Oluwo of the Ilé Ijuba Olafemi Orímolade Aworeni Temple of Havana, Erick Gómez Rodríguez succinctly stated in 2016: "Ifá is for everyone" (Interview, Erick Gómez Rodríguez, 2016). Despite the ostensible universality of Ifá, however, Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà exhibits highly circumscribed gender roles

143 An alternate history of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) – asserted by some African traditionalists – frames YTR as the "inheritor" of the traditions of ancient, Pharaonic Egypt, offering an idiosyncratic approach to Ifá's universality. The Cuban-American exile and babaláwo Ifashade Odugbemi Ajabikin, for example, who defected from Cuba in the 1980s, initiated into Ifá in Nigeria in 1992, and founded the Odugbemi lineage of Ifá in Nigeria in 2004, advocates this position, (re-)historicizing the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of Nigeria as the "legitimate inheritor" of the “magic, gods, deities, medicine, secrets, and, in general, cosmology” of “Ancient Egypt” (Ajabikin, 2016). Ajabikin’s (re-)historicization of the contemporary Nigerian Yorùbá religion as the “natural and legitimate” inheritor and preserver of a universally human spiritual and magical legacy displaces the origins of Ifá from ancient Yorùbáland, (re-)locating them in the universalized human heritage of ancient, Pharaonic Egypt. As Samman notes, the historically-constituted universalization of the heritage of Ancient Egypt is intellectually indebted to the colonialist impulse to treat "the ancient civilizations of the colonized, like that of Egypt or Babylonia… as ‘universal’ in nature, not belonging to any ‘particular’ people but to humanity in its entirety" (Samman, 2016 [2011]: 140). Ajabikin’s assertion of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion’s indebtedness to Pharaonic Egypt mirrors the assertions of other African traditionalists and builds upon long-held scholarly and popular debates over the "cultural and linguistic ties" between Yorùbáland and Egypt, including the (often de-bunked) assertion that “the Yoruba are of Egyptian origin" (See, for example, Agai, 2014; Diop, 1974; Lucas, 1996 [1948]; Shavit, 2000: 89-90). This contested scholarly domain is matched by a similarly fraught scholarly debate over the question of “race” in ancient Pharaonic Egypt (ie., the “Black Pharaohs”, See Morkot, 2000; Redford, 2004).
predicated upon Yorùbá philosophical edicts of heterosexual, cisgender male-female polarity.

The role played by Ìyánífá in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà ritual ceremonies, as evidenced, for example, in the annual Letra del Año divination ceremony at the Egbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi in Santiago de Cuba, points to the centrality of philosophical constructs of male-female polarity and dynamic gendered equilibrium to Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. Here, I examine the relationship between Ìyánífá and ontological constructions of female personhood in Ifá through an analysis of aurality in the Letra del Año ceremony, examining how discourses and practices surrounding sound and listening posit specific aspects of the sonic as imbuing the fate-transformative practices of the Letra del Año ceremony with àṣẹ, or the necessary capacity to effect change, enhance community well-being, and "rectify destiny" (Interview, Erick Gómez Rodríguez, 2016). Specifically, I interrogate the importance accorded to the female voice – and to the incantation of the Yorùbá language by Ìyánífá, specifically – in the yearly Letra del Año ceremony as exemplary of the Yorùbá-inspired philosophical underpinnings of gendered polarity and equilibrium in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. As I argue here, the case of Ìyánífá in the annual Letra del Año ceremony offers but one example of the centrality of aurality (Moreno, 2016; Ochoa Gautier, 2014), both as an “audible configuration” or “historical mode of audibility” (Ochoa Gautier, 2014: 140, 149) and as an “inter-sensory, affective, cognitive, discursive, material, perceptual, and rhetorical network” (Moreno, 2016) to the constitution and assertion of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba.
On Saturday, June 27, 2015, the Ẹgbé Irán Átele Ilogbon Odugbemi held its annual Letra del Año divination ceremony in Santiago de Cuba, led by the temple's founder and leader, the African Traditionalist babaláwo Enrique Orozco Rubio. In line with the Yorùbá religious calendar, which holds the annual Yorùbá Letra del Año ceremony in the summer, members of Orozco Rubio's ẹgbẹ celebrated the ceremony in June rather than in January (as is the custom in Regla de Ocha-Ifá) to mark the beginning of Yorùbá calendar and new year. The annual Letra del Año ("Letter of the Year") ceremony forms a foundational yearly ritual that culminates in the prognostication – via the revelation of an odù, or sign, of the Ifá corpus – of the potential blessings and perils that may be faced by the community and its individual members over the course of the coming year. The day-long ceremony begins before 6 AM and lasts until slightly after 4 PM in the afternoon, encompassing a sequence of divination rituals (using the various implements of Ifá, including the opele divining chain and the ikines palm tree nuts), plant and animal sacrifices, and obras (“works”). The ceremony provides a set of forecasts and guidelines that "allow us to minimize the impact of [the] negative”, such as potential dangers and obstacles, and “maximize the positive” over the course of the coming year (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). On this hot, summer Saturday, approximately forty of Orozco Rubio's ahijados came from Santiago de Cuba as well as other surrounding Eastern provinces, including the city of Baracoa in the Guantánamo province, for the yearly ritual. The attendees included babaláwos, Ìyánífá, and lower-
ranked initiates dressed in Afrocentric, Yorùbá-inspired dress, all of whom brought their individual sets of sacred *ikines* to be ritually washed as part of the yearly Ifá ritual and festival.

The washing of the *ikines*, or divinatory palm nuts, in a ritual herbal bath known as *omi èrö* forms one of the central acts of the annual Letra del Año ceremony. The *omi èrö*, or "water of softening", consists of a bath of *ewé*, or herbs and plants, used within rituals and consecrations to placate "the malign influences that afflict" (Matory, 2005: 130) and to release "secret ingredients" that serve specific ends (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). As Matory notes, the term *omi èrö* makes evident a Yorùbá “logic of pacification” that, rather than viewing malignant forces as presences to be eliminated, aims for the neutralization of forces that will continue to "coexist" with an individual. As the The Nigerian babaláwo Wándé Abímbólá, explained to him in 1999: “No, you don't drive things off. They would just come back. You soften or placate them so you can coexist" (Matory, 2005: 130). This logic reflects the Yorùbá philosophy of a dynamic equilibrium between opposites – polarities – as the basis for "the processes of health and life in all of the universe" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). In the case of the *omi èrö*, a carefully selected assortment of herbs and plants, each of which holds "a determined spiritual power" (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015), is carefully prepared throughout the ceremony. The preparation of the *omi èrö* culminates when it is joined with animal sacrificial blood, which charges it with its potency as "cool, or cooling water" (Brandon, 1983: 295).
The preparation of the *omi èrò* begins before the ceremony, when the sixteen herbs and plants to be used in the ritual bath are laid on a mat in the patio of the temple. Each *ewé Ifá*, or "herb of Ifá" is carefully selected and carries a spiritual potency of specific utilization to the bath of the sacred *ikines*. The rinrin plant, for example ("renren" in Nigeria, *Peperomia pellucida*, “shiny bush” plant, known as the *corazón del hombre*, or the "heart of man" in Cuba), is a plant with "great mystic powers" used to “assuage the

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144 The number, and type, of herbs and plants used for the *omi èrò* varies widely and depends upon the *òrìṣà*, consecrations, or bath in question. Orozco Rubio uses sixteen specific herbs and plants for the *omi èrò* for Ifá (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015).
fire of the negative things we have in our destiny” (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015; Wiart, 2006: 43). The Pèrègún plant (*Dracaena fragrans*, or cornstalk dracaena), on the other hand, confers the “spiritual powers to fight” and to face “difficult” situations in life (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015). After the *mojuba*, or an introductory prayer of “homage” to the òrìṣàs and ancestors (Ológundúdú, 2009), the ceremony begins as the male babaláwos ritually prepare the plants and herbs, consecrating them with rum and mystical substances before placing them in a large, clay bowl filled with water. As the babaláwos place the sixteen plants in the bowl, they rip them open, releasing and "spilling" the "secret ingredients" of the *ewé* into the water while singing a Yorùbá prayer: “*Bí mo dúró, bí mo wúre / Ire tèmi kà yàì gba,*” [sic] “If I pray while standing, my oration will be accepted (by Olódùmarè)”; “*Bí mo jòkó, bí mo wúre / Ire tèmi kà yàì gba*” [sic], “If I pray while seated, my oration will be accepted (by Olódùmarè)” (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015).145 This prayer culminates in an invocation: “when I am lying down, and I no longer have strength, may what I ask and invoke have the capacity to manifest” (ibid).

The link between the voice, the Yorùbá language, sound, and fate-changing efficacy during the preparation of the *omi èrò* points to the centrality of aurality to the

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145 The (purportedly) Yorùbá text and Spanish translation of this song were passed to me in a series of anonymously-authored digital text documents by Orozco Rubio, who received these translations through interactions with other African Traditionalist babaláwos in Cuba as well as visiting babaláwos from Nigeria. The discrepancies in language and diacritics from Modern Yorùbá and the amateur, Spanish-language authorship and translation of this text reflects the phenomenon of *décalage*” (Edwards, 2003) inherent to the travel of information, texts, songs, and ritual instructions between Yorùbáland, the Americas, and Cuba (See Chapter 1). The texts and translations for the other Yorùbá songs referenced in this chapter, including “Èrùn Èrùn” were also received in this fashion.
Letra del Año ceremony and to Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà more broadly. As Orozco Rubio notes, the recitation of the sacred verses of the odù and the contractions of the verses that constitute Ifá's repertoire of songs are so crucial to Ifá that "without the word and invocation, there can be no ritual" (ibid). As he states, even with “the most refined soperas [tureens] in the world, the best stones, the best snails [caracoles]…the biggest and most beautiful animals”, if participants were to "cover their mouths”, the fate-transforming capacity of the ritual would be negated. The voice in Ifá ritual animates the natural elements used in ceremonies (i.e., water, plants, and other natural elements) with àṣẹ, or the generative force” and “potential” of transformation (Drewal, 1992: 27). This link between voice, action, and materiality predicates the fate-changing efficacy of natural elements and material objects upon incantation, which communicates to the rituals’ listeners – the òrìṣà – the actions and aims of participants throughout the ritual.

As the babaláwos "spill out" the ingredients of the ewé for the omi èrò bath during the Letra del Año, babaláwos and Ìyánífá animate their actions with song, "extolling the power of the leaves” and "projecting, through the incantations, the spiritual power of the leaves in order to use them in [their] favor." This simultaneity of word and action imbues the material with fate-transforming capacity and communicates intentionality to the òrìṣà listeners.

While crouched around the clay bowl of the omi èrò, the babaláwos crush and wring the plants and herbs in the water as Orozco Rubio leads the egbé in a call and response, uniting action, incantation, and intentionality:

Êrún, êrún
(O, êrún)  Squeeze, wring
(Oh, press out)
Érún j’ogbó
(O, érún)
Wringing will bring us good health
(Oh, wring)

Érún j’atö
(O, érún)
Wringing will bring us a long life
(Oh, wring)

Érún y’âyeyóri
(O, érún)
Wringing will bring us a world of success
(Oh, wring)

Érún n’iré gbogbo [sic]
Wringing will bring us all of the iré

Orozco Rubio and other African Traditionalists discursively frame the incantation of the verses and songs of Ifá in the contemporary Yorùbá language as the only means of “pure” communication with the òrìṣà (Interview, Yunieski González Ramírez, 2016). This notion of the purity of the Yorùbá language draws from a Yorùbá philosophical conception of the relation between the tonality of the Yorùbá language and the sonority of nature. As Orozco Rubio elaborates, “the Yorùbá language emerges, according to these models of belief, from the onomatopoeic sounds produced by the different elements of nature” (Interview, Orozco Rubio, 2015). As such, “it is said that this sacred language, already perfected as a language, is the mother language [la lengua matriz] that allows man to communicate directly with nature through sounds and intentionality” (ibid). This emphasis on “pure” communication with the elements of nature speaks to the direct relationship between the òrìṣà and nature in Yorùbá philosophical thought (Karade, 1994; Vega, 2001 [2000]). Described by McKenzie as a “nature religion” (McKenzie, 1997: 556), the Yorùbá Traditional Religion and its correlates in the diaspora frame the òrìṣà/oricha alternatively as "aspect[s] of nature's energy" or as representations of "the infinite elements in nature: water, earth, wind, fire, trees, flowers and animals” (Vega, 2001 [2000]: page). This ontological slippage between òrìṣà as a manifestation of nature itself (i.e., the ocean, thunder, or a tsunami), as "an aspect of nature’s energy" (ibid), or as a "natural law" governing the manifestation of nature (Interview, Orozco Rubio, 2015)
conveys, in multitudinous ways, the centrality of “the study of nature” to Yorùbá philosophy.
word as the babaláwos animate the wringing of the plants and herbs with sung
description: "Mo yìn ewé mo saa rawó / Ewé lò ya omí" [sic], "I cut the leaves and rub
them with both hands / I tear the leaves up in the water". As members of the ẹgbé
follow Orozco Rubio’s call-and-response, Orozco Rubio speeds up his singing,
transitioning quickly between over a dozen distinct verses and choruses dedicated to
Ọsanyin, testing the ẹgbé members' dominion and agility in transitioning between the
Yorùbá songs. "Ewé, ewé ọrìṣà, ewé o dára, Ọsanyin ewé” [sic], he calls out, “The
leaves, the leaves of the ọrìṣà, the leaves are good, the leaves of Ọsanyin.” Bridging the
entrance into the next song with an accelerating pickup note at the ending of the previous
chorus, Orozco Rubio speeds into the next verse: "Ọsanyin a wá ni ilé o, Ọsánýìn a wá ni
ilé o / Gbogbo ewé iré nbò wá” [sic], “Ọsányìn, come to my house / all of the blessings of
the herbs are also coming."

Once Orozco Rubio and members of the ẹgbé cycle through the cantos to
Ọsanyin, the Ìyánífá of the Temple, including Caridad Rubio Fonseca and Noerlinda
Burgal Hechavarría, replace the babaláwos at the clay pot, rubbing and crushing the herbs
and plants together in the water with their hands. At this point in the ceremony, the
venerated batá player Buenaventura Bell Morales and other percussionists that Orozco
Rubio has hired for the ceremony begin accompanying the singing with tumbadoras and

were singing" or "know what they were saying" in rituals (Interview, Victor Betancourt
Omolófaoló Estrada, 2016). This linguistic premise for the turn to Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà
was echoed by numerous babaláwos throughout Cuba’s provinces. Betancourt worked in
collaboration with a French professor of Yorùbá who traveled to Cuba and, additionally,
with books, texts, dictionaries and other materials in order to "fill the empty spaces" of
the Regla de Ocha-Ifá tradition (ibid).

148 My translation of Orozco Rubio’s anonymously-authored, digital Spanish-language
translation of the original, “Yorùbá” text.
chékere, using rhythms inspired by the ritual toques of the güiro ensemble. As the Ìyánífá take over the wringing of the herbs and plants, Orozco Rubio intones a two-bar, asymmetric clave common in ritual toques to the oricha in Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá on the güataca, or a “metal hoe blade,” guiding the other percussionists and singers as he begins a call-and-response. In it, he references the presence of the Ìyánífá in this moment of preparation of the omi èrò: “Tobinrin lèrò / Ba wa gbo / Tobinrin lèrò / ki o ba wa gbo” [sic]. Orozco Rubio offers the meaning of this chorus as follows: "There can be many men in this place, but if there isn't a single woman, èrò won't manifest..." Érô (of omi èrò), or "the spirit of maternal consolation," "water that gives life," or, alternatively, "water that encloses the mysteries of maternity," holds the power to convert mundane objects into sacred ones within ritual ceremonies through their “impregnation” with “vitality and life”. This re-vitalization or conversion of the mundane into the sacred through the “impregnation” of vitality via the feminine, “maternal” power of the omi èrò forms the first crucial step in preparing an object (in this case, the ikines of Ifá) for the moment of animal sacrifice. "Women are the ones who have the power of Èrô in an

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149 The Santiago de Cuba percussionist and batá player Félix Escobar Griñan pointed out the connection between the rhythms played on the tumbadoras and chékere at the Letra del Año ceremony and the güiro ensemble (Interview, Félix Escobar Griñan, 2016). As Kenneth Schweitzer notes, “Lucumí” rituals dedicated to the orìṣà "can be supported by one of a variety of percussion ensembles” in Cuba, including – beyond the "most prestigious" batá tambores de Aña ensemble, “aberikulá, bembé, guiro, cajón, and iyesá” (Schweitzer, 2013: 23). As he describes, the güiro ensemble “consists of two or three beaded gourds (known as either güiros or chekerés, a single conga drum, and a güataca.

150 Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2015. In an alternate translation that Orozco Rubio provided via a digital, anonymous, Spanish-language text, the translation is rendered as follows: "If there are one thousand men in this place but no women, this place isn't complete. In the moment that women join this place, this place will change because women will bring Èrô.” All quotations in this paragraph taken from this interview, with my translations from Spanish to English.
innate, natural way," Orozco Rubio explains, pointing to the necessity of their presence in and closing of the preparation of the *omi èrò*.

Figure 17 Ìyánífá prepare to wring and crush the herbs and plants of the *omi èrò*, Annual Letra de Año Ceremony, Ėgbé Irán Ìtele Ilogbon Odugbemi, Santiago de Cuba, June, 2015. Photo by author.

With the *omi èrò* sufficiently prepared – in balance – through the wringing and crushing of the herbs and plants by both male babaláwos and female Ìyánífá, the washing of the *ikines* of each individual Ìgbé member begins. Orozco Rubio calls out:

*Bàbá ‘Petu mà nwè*
*Sùsù o Aládé mà mí wè, sùsù o*
*Bàbá Èjì Ogbè, òba Ìfà*

Bàbá is taking his bath
Sùsù o, the King is taking his bath,
Bàbá Èjì Ogbè, King among the Odù of Ìfà
After one run-through, Orozco Rubio again intones the *clave* on the *güataca* as the chékere and tumbadora players fall into rhythm and the ẹgbé follows his verses with the response “Sùsù o, the King is taking his bath, Sùsù o.” Two Ị́yánífá sit before two divided pots containing the *omi érò* as two babaláwos slowly pass each of them a small *jicara*, or gourd bowl, filled with the sacred *ikines* of an individual member. Giving the *ikines* their “bath”, the Ị́yánífá dip the *jícaras* in the *omi érò* one by one, bathing the *ikines* with their fingers in the sacred, herb-filled water before returning each gourd bowl to the attending babaláwo. As they do so, Orozco Rubio cycles through the verses and choruses, individually naming the Ojú Odù Měrindínológún, or sixteen méjì, or principal odù, of the Ifá corpus: “Bábá Èjì Ogbè, King among the Odù of Ifá,” “Bábá Oyeku Meji, King among the Odù of Ifá,” Bábá Iwori Meji, King among the Odù of Ifá.151” The babaláwos and Ị́yánífá respond, “Sùsù o, the King is taking his bath, Sùsù o.” Through the dual forces of action and incantation, the Ị́yánífá animate the *omi érò* and re-vitalize the sacred *ikines* during the course of their ritual bath.

The washing of the *ikines* by the Ị́yánífá in the annual Letra del Año ceremony reflects their status as the "wives of Orunmila" and, therefore, as the best-suited to give the *ikines*, also termed “Ifá”, their baths. Reflecting the hetero- and cisnormative gendered and sexual logics underpinning Nigerian-style Ifá-ôrìṣà, Ị́yánífá are habitually framed as the best-suited to "touch" the male ọrìṣà Ifá. As Ị́yánífá Yamilka Gámez Oliva explains:

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Our elders say that the person who can best attend to a man is a woman. A man doesn't like to be touched a lot. So, it's better that a woman attends to Ifá. ‘My Ifá is attended to by my wife.’ The Ifá of any babaláwo is going to be attended to by his wife [mujer, literally, woman], including [in] sacrifice... Ifá is a man; [he] is the voice of Òrúnmilà. So the most appropriate [indicada, indicated] person to attend to Òrúnmilà is an Ìyánífá. Because, also, this woman is consecrated [to Òrúnmilà] (Interview, Yamilka Gámez Oliva, 2016).

Here, Ifá, as a man, "doesn't like to be touched" – particularly by other men – making a babaláwo's wife, or, even better, an Ìyánífá, the most appropriate person to touch, bathe, and handle the sacred ikines. This gendered and (hetero)sexual logic is reinforced by a latent homophobia – a latent fear of and disinclination towards men touching and bathing male òrìṣà – that is ritualistically enforced in the ceremony by the emphasis on Ìyánífá both as innately possessing èrò, or the life-giving “mysteries of maternity”, crucial to the preparation of the omi èrò itself and, additionally, as the most appropriate to wash the male ikines in the omi èrò’s sacred bath. This heterosexual ritualistic pairing of Ìyánífá-babaláwo and Ìyánífá-Òrúnmilà extends to the justification of Ìyánífá’s exclusion from the female òrìṣà Odù during their, and other babaláwos’, initiations. As Gámez Oliva continues, “This is why [an Ìyánífá] cannot initiate anyone, because she can't sleep with a woman [i.e., òrìṣà Odù] because [their union does not enable] procreation" (ibid).

Conclusion

A year after I attended the Letra del Año ceremony at the Ògbe Irán Átele Ilogbón Odugbemi in 2015, I returned to Santiago de Cuba to conduct follow-up research and interviews with members of the Ògbe and with the percussionists who'd played at this, and other, African Traditionalist ceremonies. One such percussionist was an Olú batá,
son of Changó, and oriaté, or "leading head" of the "Ocha-centric’ ritual field” of Regla de Ocha in Santiago de Cuba (Brown, 2003: 152). Although not a practitioner of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà himself, the percussionist had been hired on occasion as an akpwón to sing cantos to Eggún, or the dead, at African Traditionalist Egúngún ceremonies in Orozco Rubio’s ègbé (See Chapter 5). After reviewing several videos of Egúngún ceremonies with him, I pulled up videos of the Letra de Año ceremony in order to clarify a few questions I had concerning percussion, including one of the Ìyánífá washing the sacred ikines in the omi èrò. Immediately, he asked his wife, who he had invited to sit in on the interview with us, to leave the room. After she left, he turned to me and politely explained that, although his wife is initiated in Regla de Ocha as hija de Yemayá, or a child of the oricha Yemayá, he did not want her to witness the images of the Ìyánífá participating in the Letra del Año ceremony or handling the sacred ikines – both of which are strictly prohibited in Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá. The immediacy and force of his censoring of his wife's access to images and information concerning the role of Ìyánífá in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà underscores the contentious divide separating these two domains of òrìṣà/oricha and Ifá worship in Cuba, and, additionally, to the centrality of gender to this divide.

In Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, the initiation of women into Ifá as Ìyánífá and their participation in African Traditionalist ritual is often framed as the “emancipation” of Cuban women from the machismo and ignorance of the Regla de Ocha-Ifá tradition. Despite such discourses of liberation, however, the role of Ìyánífá within Nigerian-style ritual reflects highly gendered philosophies of male-female polarity and balanced gendered equilibrium that locate "imperialist feminisms”, including radical, absolute
gendered equality (or, even, gendered dissolution) (Specner IV, 2015) and (homo-
sexualities as falling outside of African traditionality – namely, within the United States
(Beliso De-Jesús, 2015a, 2015b). Nonetheless, Iyanífá now “speak Ifá,” wielding
command over Ifá's corpus and dominion over its implements of divination. As
evidenced in the annual Letra del Año ceremony, the voice and the aural serve as central
domains for assertions of Yorùbá-rooted philosophies of gendered polarity and
equilibrium as they relate to Ìyánífá. As such, Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà offers Ìyánífá, at
once, vastly increased access to and dominion over the practice of Ifá in relation to
Cuban-style Ifá while, simultaneously, circumscribing these womens’ roles within highly
hetero- and cisgnormative philosophies and practices. As such, Ìyánífá are valued, above
all else, as mothers and wives, as beings holding the “mysteries of maternity” and the
innate “capacity” for (human) reproduction, and as (essential) gendered counterparts to
male babaláwos.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTRODUCTION OF EGÚNGÚN IN CUBA: ANCESTOR WORSHIP, NOVEL ÒRÌṢÀ LINEAGES, AND REGIONALISM

On May 27, 2016, I huddled against the concrete wall in a small, packed foyer in the Eastern Cuban city of Baracoa. Shoulder-to-shoulder with members of the Êgbë Êran Àtelé Ilògbôn Baracoa and the Êgbë’s visiting parent temple from Santiago de Cuba, we waited in eager anticipation for the appearance of the city’s first Egúngün masquerade. The room vibrated with an air of expectancy and suspense as Enrique Orozco Rubio, the parent temple’s Oluwo, entered the room from an adjoining hallway and warned the crowd that the two masqueraders who would momentarily manifest in the temple were not to be touched. Several charged minutes followed, the relative silence of the thirty-five standing participants punctuated by sporadic hushed voices and low murmurs. Suddenly, Orozco Rubio re-entered the foyer and broke into song, calling out in Yorùbá: “Fe lé egùn Ojá re, fe lé egùn” [sic] (“We want the spirits to appear, to cover themselves with Ojá, and to be friendly”). As the awaiting crowd echoed the call, Orozco Rubio played a clave pattern characteristic of Cuban Bembé drumming on the metal güataca (hoe). Behind him, two tumbadora players seated in the far corner of the room began elaborating a polyrhythmic toque also drawn from the drumming traditions of Eastern Cuban Bembés, with a third percussionist punctuating the polyrhythms with

152 The Êgbë Êran Àtelé Ilògbôn Odugbemi. See Chapter 3 and 4.
153 My translation of Orozco Rubio’s provided Yorùbá-Spanish translation.
154 See Warden (2006). The clave rhythm played by Orozco Rubio on the güataca is identical to that played on the agogo in Warden’s transcription of Havana percussionist Regino Jiménez’s teachings of the bembé rhythm (Warden, 2006: Figure 4, 57).
the high-pitched, distinctive sounds of the chékere. Orozco Rubio and the other
participants continued alternating the Yorùbá verse in a call-and-response, building
momentum in anticipation of the emergence of the Egúngún masqueraders.

As the call and the drumming strengthened in volume and energy, two masked
figures, covered head-to-toe in brightly-colored masquerading suits, emerged from the
hallway, dancing in stylized gestures and whirling the vibrant yellows, reds, greens,
purples, and golds of their hand-tailored, satin-and-sequined suits through the space of
the foyer. The faces of the masqueraders were obscured as to be rendered unidentifiable,
in one case with a white-and black mesh netting and, in the other, with a series of dark-
red, gold-inlaid cloths. In addition to their faces, all other potentially identifying human
features were covered, including the skin of the arms, legs, and feet. As the two Egúngún
danced in the center of the room, at first with measured gestures and then with
increasingly wild and frenetic movements, several babaláwos separated the masqueraders
from the crowd by wielding brightly-colored, wound pàsán egúngún, or Egúngún
“whipping-canes” (Boscolo, 2009: 204), preventing onlookers from accidentally touching
the Egúngún. As the drumming intensified and the singing grew louder, the Egúngún
began emitting low, guttural noises as they flailed in stylized movements throughout the
room, holding palm fronds that swished through the air in sweeping motions. The

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The term “Bembé,” in this context, refers to a "religious party" in which participants
pay homage to the orichas through drumming and dance (Interview, Rosendo Romero
Suárez, 2016). Ambiguity in the usage of the term within specifically Eastern Cuban
spiritual contexts, and its potential link to Espiritismo cruzado in addition to toques de
santo, will be elaborated below. Additionally, bembé is used in Cuba to refer to
"relatively rare double-headed cylindrical drums used in Lucumi rituals, or to the ritual
itself” (ibid).
peculiar, guttural sounds emitting through the mouths of the Egúngún transferred an other-worldly, nonhuman quality to the dancing figures, an aural strangeness that augmented the nonhuman quality of the "amorphous" masks and suits (Drewal, 2003: 124).

The dancing of the Egúngún masqueraders in the Ẹgbẹ Ìran Ìtelé Ilògbọn Baracoa marked the first appearance of the novel Yorùbá lineage of Egúngún, or the "secret society" dedicated to ancestor worship in Yorùbáland (Clark, 2007: 85), in the Eastern city of Baracoa in Guantánamo province. In Yorùbáland, the Egúngún masked figures manifest the “reappearance” of an individual ancestor "among the living" in a nonfigurative (i.e., non-representative) way (Asante, 2009: 231; Drewal, 2003:124). As
González-Wippler notes, Egúngún masqueraders are "believed to be the materialized spirit, not just a person possessed by the dead" (González-Wippler, 1994: 83). Additionally, an Egúngún figure may manifest "the entire spirit of the Egungun,” or the collective spirit of the ancestors, in the realm of the living (Asante, 2009: 231). Indeed, the line between individual and collective ancestral manifestation is blurred in Yorùbá thought, as the “Yoruba teach that, in the traditional African religion, we are not individuals, but parts of a coherent, collective legacy that ties all the spirits together in one massive community” (233). The Egúngún masquerader, as "an autonomous, yet collective, entity" (Boscolo, 2009: 194), exemplifies this bridging of the individual and the collective, demonstrating the Yorùbá philosophical conception that life “contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn,” all of which “are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life” (Soyinka, 1976: 144, in Boscolo, 2009: 194). In Yorùbáland, the all-male Egúngún society masquerades in public spaces with intricately-constructed costumes that inspire fascination, awe, and fear in the community, making explicit the intimate connection between the living and the dead. As Boscolo notes, the “varied, richly imaginative” Egúngún masks “convey…[the] presence and power [of the ancestors] in the life of the living” (Boscolo, 2009: 196). He states:

In Yoruba thought, death is not the end of life; when somebody dies, it is only the body, the ‘temporal mask’, that perishes. The departed become ará ọrun (denizens of the other world) and possess ‘limitless potentialities which […] they] can exploit for the benefit or detriment up those who still live on earth.’ Making use of these potentialities, the ará ọrun at times materialize as masquerade: they are egúngún, the sacred mask of the ancestors. They invest the performer – wearing the mask – with their particular powers (Boscolo, 2009: 192).156

156 Here, Boscolo quotes Idowu (1962: 192).
The Egúngún masqueraders manifest the connection between the living and the dead in Yorùbá philosophy, their appearance underscoring the ways in which “ọrun (the other world)...comes to bear tangibly on ayé (this world)” (196).

The particularities and idiosyncrasies of the ways in which the first Egúngún masquerade manifested in the small, Eastern Cuban city of Baracoa underscores the heterogeneity and regionalism attendant to the spread of African Traditionalism in Cuba. The intimate ties between the novel, Yorùbá-inspired Egúngún ritual lineage and localized spiritual traditions in Guantánamo province, including Bembé and Espiritismo, points to the contextually-specific adaptation of contemporary Yorùbá Òrìṣà traditions to novel, and idiosyncratic, Cuban environments. This heterogeneity and regionalism manifests as particularly salient in the realm of the aural, where the sonic presents itself as intimately bound with locally-specific manifestations of the Egúngún. In this chapter, I compare two instances of Egúngún masquerades in Cuba as evidence of this heterogeneity and regionalism: one in the Eastern Cuban city of Baracoa and the other in the Western capital of Havana. Through a comparison of two Eastern and Western Egúngún masquerades, this chapter draws attention to larger questions surrounding the African Traditionalist movement in Cuba. How, for example, do African Traditionalist men and women selectively incorporate elements of the contemporary Yorùbá Traditional Religion of Nigeria to suit specific contextual environments and needs? Additionally, how are gendered norms imported or re-adapted from contemporary Yorùbálánd to suit locally-specific logics and desires? Through an analysis of Egúngún masquerades in Eastern and Western Cuba, this chapter draws attention to the
idiosyncrasies of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba, presenting the movement as variable not only among distinct lineages but among Cuba's discrete provinces and regions.

**The Egúngún Masquerade: Aural Empowerment and Aural Strangeness in Masked Manifestations**

In Yorùbáland, the Egúngún secret society and its masquerades underscore the Yorùbá philosophical belief that death is not merely the end of life but rather a transition and "journey" to another realm: “the world of the ancestors" (Asante, 2009: 231). In this world, the ancestors continue to intervene and "take an active interest” in the lives of the living (Eades, 1980: 123). As Asante notes, the “ancestral spirits…can assist the community in carrying out its daily activities” and offer guidance to community members “in their ordinary lives" (Asante, 2009: 231). In this way, when a person dies, the deceased becomes “an òrìṣà to his own family” (Abimbola, 1973: 75; Eades, 1980: 123), reflecting the Yorùbá proverb “A kú tán làá dère,” “to die is to become deified” (Afolayan and Pemberton III, 1996: 25, in Boscolo 2009: 191). The ancestors actively communicate with the living through dreams, spirit possession, divination, or the masquerading secret society of the Egúngún (Asante, 2009; Clark, 2007: 84). The ancestors also depend upon the living and must be "ritually remembered" in order to continue to "watch over the society" (Asante, 2009: 231). As Richards notes, this

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157 The full proverb states ““A kú tán làá dère, ènìyàn ọ suwòn làáyè,” “to die is to become deified; no one venerates a living person” (Afolayan and Pemberton III, 1996: 25, in Boscolo 2009: 191).
"remembrance of the ancestors is vital to the success of human endeavors" and “to ignore them will result in witchcraft, plagues and social dissolution” (Richards, 1994: 7). The Egúngún masquerade offers a central form of ritual remembrance through what Boscolo describes as “a fireworks display of colours, dance, music, and poetry” that “materializes" the past and connects "òrun and ayé” (Boscolo 2009: 203). As Drewal notes, the Yorùbá words for "visual representation" (awòràn’), spectator (awòran), and spectacle (iran) derive etymologically from the “verb radical ran,” itself linked to memory and repetition (Drewal, 2003: 121). The Egúngún masquerade, as visual spectacle, both conjures the memory of individual and collective ancestors through performative ritual remembrance and manifests the presence of the ancestors in the lives of the living.

Beyond its potent visuality, the Egúngún masquerade depends upon the aural – and aurality – as a central aspect of both the Egúngún's journey between Òrun and Ayé and in maintaining the ontology of Egúngún as the manifestation – and not the figurative representation – of the ancestors. As Boscolo notes, “the ancestors journey is an arduous one; the distance between the two worlds is great. Egúngún needs to be empowered and encouraged…it is the devotee’s attention and care that play the crucial role in empowering the orisha” (Boscolo 2009: 208). Barber echoes Boscolo’s assertion, stating, “the power of egungun depends on human action to maintain and restore it. After being kept in store…the egungun has become limp and feeble; its powers have to be deliberately restored by human action” (Barber, 1991: 77, in Boscolo 2009: 208-209).

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158 As she notes, “Yoruba use this root [ran] for the verb ‘to remember’ (ranti [ran eti]) and ‘to recite Ifá verses’ (ranfá [ran Ifá]) as well as ‘to send a message by way of a messenger’ (ranse [ran ise]). In the latter case, the message delivered is the messenger's interpretation of the original. Each repetition is a revision of the initial material” (Drewal, 2003: 121).
Drumming and incantation are crucial in empowering and drawing out the Egúngún in their "arduous" journey between ọrun and ayé (Bascolo, 2009: 208). In Yorùbáland, bátá and dundún drummers are an "indispensable requisite of egúngún display" (218) and crucial to the revitalization of the Egúngún. During the Ọdun Egúngún, or Egúngún festival, in Yorùbáland, for example, bátá drumming "announces the imminent arrival" of the Egúngún as they emerge from the interior of homes and into public space, the masqueraders manifesting only once the bátá drumming reaches a sufficiently powerful level of volume, momentum, and "crescendo" (208). In Cuba, Orozco Rubio echoes this assertion by noting that the tambores are used to "attract" the Egúngún, who, once they have emerged, danced, and “enjoyed themselves” to the accompaniment of the tambores, walk around and converse with members of the community as the tambores stop playing (Interview, Enrique Orozco Rubio, 2016). "When they are at peace, everything stops”, he says, “that's key” (ibid).

In addition to the centrality of bátá drumming in revitalizing the Egúngún in their journey between ọrun and ayé, the invocation of oríkì through both vocalization and drummed speech surrogacy forms a crucial aspect of the empowerment and manifestation of the Egúngún. As Boscolo states, “whether interpreted by womens’ voices or by bátá drummers, the performance of oríkì is an essential part of the process of empowerment.” Barber elaborates:

It is not the oríkì by themselves but the process of attributing them, the action of uttering them and directing them at the subject that is effectual. The longer you will go on, the more effectual it will be… Oríkì performance […] is not just a

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159 Ọdun Egúngún is one example of an Egúngún festival, and it takes place between May and July for a period of seventeen days (Bascolo, 2009: 203).
matter of piling up prestigious and reputation-enhancing encomia. It actually affects changes of state… The spiritual world is translated into the human world, brought in and localized… [enacting] an intensification of the powers of the spiritual beings. It is by being invoked, called upon that the òrìṣà or egúngún attains its most concentrated beings (Barber, 1991: 78, in Boscolo 2009: 209).

Notably, in Yorùbáland women are centrally responsible for the “empowerment” of the Egúngún as they emerge into the world of the living, and they chant oríkì that praise the ancestors and recount "salient moments in the history of the family" as the Egúngún emerge from the interior spaces of homes (Boscolo 2009: 208). The central role of women in empowering the Egúngún through invocation of the oríkì defies the ostensible male exclusivity of the Egúngún secret society (ibid), which “like [the] Oro [cult], emphasises the separation between men and women” and prohibits women from wearing or even touching the Egúngún masks (Eades, 1980:123). In addition to female invocation of the oríkì through vocalization, male drummers additionally empower the Egúngún by “speaking” the oríkì through drummed speech surrogacy on the bàtá and dùndún. In so doing, they echo the Yorùbá proverb that “onílú ẹni abọwọgbẹde bí ọfe (it is one's drummer whose hand can render the most fluent praise about one)” (Boscolo, 2009: 208).

In addition to its prominence as a site for the empowerment of the Egúngún in their journey between the world of the ancestors and the world of the living, the aural serves as a central domain for enacting a sense of aural strangeness that maintains the ontology of the Egúngún as the physical, nonfigurative manifestation of the ancestors. This sense of the strange maintains the underlying “secret” of the human wearer of the Egúngún mask during the masquerade (Boscolo, 2009: 196). The secrecy of the human wearer of the mask forms one of the most central and guarded elements of Egúngún performance. As Drewal notes, the “nonhuman qualities” of the Egúngún are
communicated through the visuality of the masks, the bodily gestures of the Egúngún’s
dance, and the fear associated with touching the manifested ancestors, among other
factors. The Egúngún, she states, “wear amorphous cloth forms conceived and sewn in
ways to obscure or to alter human features, carry dangerous medicines on their person
that prohibit outsiders and the uninitiated from touching them out of fear of sickness or
death, and perform highly stylized dances" that communicate a separation of the status of
the masked ancestor from that of the living (ibid). In addition to the other-worldly
visuality of the Egúngún mask, the Egúngún masquerader emits a “low," "grumbling,"
“hoarse,” or guttural voice that obscures the identity of the human wearer (Asante, 2009:
231; Clark, 2007: 84). The guttural utterances give the Egúngún a "strange and unknown"
quality that underscores the fact that the Egúngún, "as an ancestral relative[,] does not
have the voice of someone living in the village" (Asante, 2009: 231). "When an Egungun
speaks,” Clark notes, “it is believed to be the voice of the dead ancestor that listeners
hear” (Clark, 2007: 84-5). Through aural strangeness and estrangement, the Egúngún
masquerader maintains its ontology as a nonfigurative ancestor manifested in the world
of the living, one with communicative capacities and the ability to intervene in the life of
the community.

The Egúngún Masquerade in the Eastern Cuban City of Baracoa, Guantánamo:
Regionalism and Aurality in Masked Manifestations

As the Egúngún masquerade in Guantánamo province intensified, the two masked
figures whirled throughout the room with increasing speed, swishing the palm fronds
they held in their covered, gloved hands throughout the air as a surrounding circle of babaláwos enclosed them with brightly-colored, cloth-wrapped pàsán egúngún whipping canes, attempting to shield the crowd from the masqueraders. Provoking and animating the Egúngún dancers with intensifying volume and speed, the two tumbadora percussionists elaborated a single and ongoing Bembé rhythm drawn from local "religious parties” in 12/8 time. Together, the drummers constructed the repeated rhythmic figure by weaving a polyrhythmic texture on the deeper-pitched tumbador and the mid-register seis-por-ocho, building momentum and energy in tune with the dancers’ movements by alternately punctuating the ostinato with extended and consecutive eighth-note runs. As the momentum and volume of the rhythm built in line with the increasingly frenetic movements of the whirling figures, Orozco Rubio alternated the called choruses of Yorùbá-language songs in rapid succession, offering vocalized praise to the manifested ancestors. Discursively linking the palm fronds (màrìwò) to the Egúngún’s capacity to "carry away" those "troublesome" elements that may "disturb the peace of the community” (Asante, 2009: 231), Orozco Rubio invoked the power of both the Egúngún agò (the Egúngún dress, mask, or "costume") and the màrìwò to “bring good things and ward off the bad.” He calls out, “Màrìwò re rè eee” [sic], “the palm fronds

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160 The tumbadoras, or “conga drum[s]” (Sublette, 2004: 266) used in Cuban rumba (as well as varied religious ritual contexts, i.e., as Regla de Ocha-Ifã, Bembé, and Palo) include three drums of "different diameters, echoing the mula, caja, and cachimbo of the Congo baile yuka” (Schweitzer, 2013; Sublette, 2004: 266). These include the deepest-pitched tumbador (also called conga, hembra, or salidor), the mid-register segundo (also called macho, seis-por-ocho, or tres-dos), and the highest-pitched quinto (Daniel, 1995: 80). Fiestas religiosas (Interview, Rosendo Romero Suárez, 2016).

161 Asante defines such elements as “troublesome” or "disgruntled people" (Asante, 2009: 231).

thrash about to bring good things and ward off the bad,” approximating the microtonal shifts of the Yorùbá call through glissando on the final vowels of the phrase. The chorus responds, “agò n re rè” [sic], the agò thrashes about to attract good things and ward off the bad.”¹⁶³ The invocation links voice, word, and action, manifesting the power of the whirling, thrashing movements of the agò egúngún and the màrìwò to bring good and ward off bad fortune as the Egúngún masqueraders dance and toss around with increasingly rapid movements in the center of the foyer. Meanwhile, the call-and-response continues: “Màrìwò tu yà ri yà ri yà” [sic], “the palm fronds come undone and open the path.” Orozco Rubio calls alternates the call with “Agò n tu yà ri yà ri yà” [sic], “the cloths of the Egúngún dress come undone and open the path.”

¹⁶³ My translation of Orozco Rubio’s provided Yorùbá-Spanish translation. I’ve translated the verb sacudirse as “thrash about,” although it could alternately be translated as “to shake off,” “to throw off,” “to jerk,” or to “toss about.”
After several minutes the Egúngún figures gradually recede towards the back of the room, making their way to the adjoining hallway before disappearing from view. As they leave, the drumming and singing continue at a fever pitch, showing no signs of slowing down. Suddenly, a young doctor in his mid-twenties who is known as a spirit medium of Espiritismo in Baracoa falls into trance. His eyes close and his lips puff outwards as he draws his arms in front of his face, crossing them as he stumbles backwards and forwards in jerked, erratic motions. Shortly after, another young man, also well-known as a local Espiritismo medium, falls into trance behind him, exhibiting the “puffed out cheeks,” “pursed lips,” and other "unusual and exaggerated facial expressions [that] are distinctive markers of possession trance” (Wirtz, 2014: 57). The fitful motions
and exaggerated expressions of the two Espiritismo mediums echo a similar sense of estrangement from the status of the living that the Egúngún earlier exhibited, though with gestures, movements, and vocalizations characteristic of specifically Cuban religious modalities of spirit possession (such as those exhibited in Regla de Ocha or espiritismo cruzado).  

With their faces and arms exposed, the Espiritismo mediums exhibit a sense of the nonhuman through gestures and motions that draw attention to the ways "in which the spirits of the dead… must operate human bodies they are alien to" (ibid). After several minutes, the two mediums are carefully led outside of the space of the foyer and into the back rooms of the home, directed on by the gentle guidance of several members of the crowd. As the drumming and singing stop, the participants burst into cheers and applause, lauding the resounding success of the first Egúngún masquerade.

In witnessing the first Egúngún masquerade in Cuba's easternmost city of Baracoa, I am struck by the ways in which members of the Êgbë Ìran Àtelé Ilôgbôn Baracoa and the surrounding community incorporate key elements of the visuality and aurality of Yorùbá Egúngún masquerade while adapting the manifestation of the Egúngún ancestors to specifically Eastern Cuban modalities of ancestor worship, including those of Bembé, muerterismo, and Espiritismo cruzado (See Bodenheimer, 2015; Dodson, 2008; Millet, 1999; Warden, 2006). Hailed as the “tierra de muertéras” (“the land of the dead ones”) (Dodson, 2008: 128), Eastern Cuba, or “Oriente”, holds a

164 Wirtz notes that these gestures are more typical of “muertos, or spirits of the dead” than they are of oricha spirit possession in Regla de Ocha-Ifá, though they “can sometimes be seen in possessions by the orichas of Santería as well” (Wirtz, 2014: 58). In various cajón de muerto ceremonies that I witnessed in Havana between 2013-2014 (which are associated with Espiritismo cruzado, See Warden, 2006), individuals possessed by the dead exhibited similar gestures as those exhibited above.
rich history of spiritual traditions rooted in cultivating the active relationship between the living and the dead. As the Santiago de Cuba researcher José Millet emphasizes, “muerterismo”, or “sacred rituals honoring dead ancestors” (Bodenheimer, 2015) encompassed the most widely-practiced spiritual practice in eastern Cuba before the arrival of Santería and Palo from Western Cuba in the early-20th century (Millet, 2000: 110-11, in Bodenheimer, 2015). In colonial Oriente, large celebratory events known as Bembés were held that “invoked ancestral and other spirits to visit the world of the gathered descendants" using Bembé drums inspired by “Kongoese construction” (Dodson, 2008: 86).\(^{165}\)

In the 19th century, the Espiritismo religious movement also gained wide traction in Oriente (Bodenheimer, 2015; Dodson, 2008). As Bodenheimer describes, Espiritismo constitutes “a religious movement stemming from traditional Christianity… [that] is practiced widely not only in Cuba but also in other parts of the Spanish Caribbean.” As she notes, Espiritismo “is based on the idea of communicating with the souls/spirits of the dead through a medium, similar to what we might call, in American popular culture, a séance” (Bodenheimer, 2015). Espiritismo first emerged in Oriente before traveling westward to Havana and other parts of Western Cuba (ibid). Now, multiple variants of Espiritismo, including Espiritismo cruzado, Espiritismo de cordón, Espiritismo de mesa, and Espiritismo de Caridad are practiced throughout Cuba, though with notable regional variations (Dodson, 2008: 126-7). The practice of Espiritismo in Cuba is so widespread that some scholars and Cubans alike claim Espiritismo to be "the most widely practiced

\(^{165}\) For more on the ties between Congolese ancestor worship and Palo in Western Cuba, or “the society of the dead,” see Ochoa, 2010.
religion on the island” (Bodenheimer, 2015; citing Warden, 2006: 25-5). Espiritismo cruzado, or “crossed” or “mixed” Espiritismo, forms one of the most popular variants in Cuba and combines elements from Palo, Regla de Ocha, and “Cuban folk Catholicism” (Dodson, 2008: 127), including “African-derived songs or drumming” (Bodenheimer, 2015). In cajón de muerto ceremonies in Havana and Matanzas, for example, which form one of the most popular expressions of Espiritismo cruzado in Western Cuba, the ceremonies incorporate Palo rhythms, rhythmic sensibilities, and songs. These ceremonies proceed from Spanish-language “Catholic plegarias” to songs “sung in bozal, an Africanized form of Spanish associated with slaves and mixed with Bantu words” (ibid).

In Baracoa, specifically, Espiritismo cruzado and Espiritismo de cordon form two of the most central religious practices of the small Eastern city (Interview, Rosendo Romero Suárez, 2016), reflecting but one facet of the rich historical importance of ancestor worship in Guantánamo province and the larger Eastern region. The recent arrival of Egúngún masquerade in Baracoa, then, marks only the most recent manifestation of ancestor worship within a rich and variegated history of spiritual practices aimed at cultivating the relationship with the dead. Notably, the Egúngún masquerade was held in the home of Francisco “Pancho” Reyes Sollet, the rector of the newly-formed Êgbë Ìran Àtelé Ilógbôn Baracoa and the son of one of Baracoa’s most prominent espiritistas, or mediums. The Egúngún masquerade culminated a three-day

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166 As Baracoan Art Historian and Alágbàá Egúngún (priest of Egúngún) Rosendo Romero Suárez notes, the widespread popularity of Espiritismo cruzado and Espiritismo de cordon as the two most popular forms of Baracoan religiosity has recently been challenged by the spread of Protestant Christianity, which is gaining notable traction in the small city (Interview, Rosendo Romero Suárez, 2016).
ceremony marking the foundation of the Êgbé Ìràn ÌteIlógbón Baracoa, or the first African Traditionalist ëgbé in Baracoa, and the initiation of five babaláwos, including Reyes Sollet. As the culminating event in the foundation of the African Traditionalist temple, the masquerade inaugurated the official arrival of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and its specific forms of ancestor worship in the small eastern city.

Baracoa, which means the "existence of the sea" in Arawak, is both Cuba's easternmost city and its first colonial establishment (Scarpaci, 2006: 84). Columbus is believed to have landed in Baracoa when he first traveled to Cuba, and the island’s first governor, Velázquez de Cuéllar, made the “large Indian town” the island’s first capital in 1511 (Corzo, 2003: 35; Humboldt, 2011). Between 1511 and 1521, eastern Cuba became the "springboard" for the conquest of Mexico and also a center for the Native American slave trade, "first [with slaves] from the Lucayas (the Bahamas) and parts of Florida" (Zeuske, 2007: 122). Between 1518 and 1530, the African slave trade began in Cuba, with the first slaves imported “directly from the Cape Verde islands, São Tomé, or from the Kongo region to Santiago de Cuba [and] Baracoa” along with other sites and central and western Cuba (ibid). In subsequent years, Baracoa declined steeply in prominence, remaining relatively isolated from the rest of the island. It wasn't until 1964 that a paved highway (La Farola) was built linking the small city to Santiago de Cuba and the rest of the country (Scarpaci, 2006: 84). For centuries, maritime (and, subsequently, air) travel were the principal means of arriving at the relatively isolated "corner of the island" (ibid). Now a "tourist pole”, the city of some 100,000 residents "serves as a springboard to pristine forests and beaches…[and its] mountain slopes form part of the UNESCO biosphere that house unique flora and fauna” (ibid).
For members of the Égbë Ìran Ìtelé Ilògbôn Baracoa and its Egúngún society, Baracoa's unique history – including its strong precolonial indigenous populations, its status as the first site of European conquest, and its early history of indigenous and African slaving – makes the city a particularly rich site for ancestral worship. “Baracoa has great spiritual potency,” the ëgbé’s rector, Francisco “Pancho” Reyes Sollet, repeatedly told me. “When you come to Baracoa,” the Alágbàá Egúngún (priest of Egúngún) Rosendo Romero Suárez echoed, “you feel an energy that vibrates and that is distinct; you don't feel it in any other place in Cuba.” The Alágbàá Egúngún Ricardo “Buzzy” Pérez, elaborated, stating, “Baracoa is very rich in the tradition of the ancestors. Baracoa was one of the first settlements of our Taíno ancestors, the original natives of this area. It was the first settlement discovered by Columbus; it was the first founded villa, the first Spanish settlement on the island. It was the capital for almost three years” (Interview, Ricardo “Buzzy” Pérez, 2016). When people die, he notes, “this ancestral legacy gets rooted…[and] washed down into the earth.” Within the widespread practice of Espiritismo in Baracoa, Romero Suárez adds that “it is rare to find anyone in Baracoa who doesn't have an indigenous person [of Baracoan origin] in his cordón espiritual [“spiritual cord” or “spiritual lineage”].” Pérez inserts that, with the establishment of the African Traditionalist temple and the Egúngún society in Baraoca, "our African ancestors [now] come to take part [here], in Baracoa.”

The use of tumbadoras and rhythmic toques drawn from local Espiritismo cruzado and Bembé traditions marked the adaptation of the first Egúngún masquerade to specifically Baracoan modalities of ancestor worship, exhibiting a flexibility towards the incorporation of novel, Yorùbá-inspired lineages and òrîṣà societies to Eastern Cuban
religious environments. During my fieldwork, numerous Baracoan practitioners described the single, repetitive rhythmic *toque* played on the *tumbadoras* during the duration of the Egúngún masquerade as that used in local “*Bembés*”, while also directly associating the rhythm – and the use of the term *Bembé* – with *Espiritismo cruzado* (Interviews, Rosendo Romero Suárez and Francisco “Pancho” Reyes Sollet, 2016). Initially, the use of the term *Bembé* in relation to *Espiritismo cruzado* perplexed me, as the term is often synonymous with “*toque de santo*” or “*tambor*” in Regla de Ocha, in other words, with “any ritual drumming ceremony for the orisha” (Schweitzer, 2013: 209). Additionally, the Baracoan Alágbáá Egúngún Rosendo Romero Suárez described the *Bembé* rhythm used during the Egúngún masquerade as one drawn from local religious parties paying “homage” to the oricha (Interview, Rosendo Romero Suárez, 2016). As Bodenheimer ventures, however, the *cajón de muerto*, a seemingly Western Cuban expression of Espiritismo cruzado (or, as she notes, “at least” a Western Cuban term for the ceremony) may find its Eastern equivalent in the “bembé de sao” ceremonies of Oriente – a terminological nod towards the use of “*bembé*” in reference to Espiritismo in Eastern Cuba (Bodenheimer, 2015).

Dodson additionally notes ambiguity in the use of the term “*bembé*” with reference to Espiritismo in Eastern Cuba, with her informants linking “*bembé*” to “muertéra”, an “alleged variety of espiritismo”, as well as “bembé de Sao” (Dodson, 2008: 128). In reviewing the research of investigators at the Casa del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba, Dodson also notes that the term “*bembé*” is used to refer to celebrations and parties

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167 Notably, however, Dodson and her team of researchers were ultimately skeptical about the relationship between Muertéra bembé de Sao and Espiritismo (despite the use of the term “espiritistas” to describe its practitioners), ultimately claiming that “we do not believe the tradition is a variety of espiritismo” (Dodson, 2008: 128).
during the colonial era in Eastern Cuba that were specifically aimed at invoking the ancestors “to visit” the world of the living (Dodson, 2008: 86).

During the Egúngún masquerade, the clave pattern played by Orozco Rubio was indeed the same as that played in Western Cuban Bembés for the oricha (See Warden, 2006: Figure 4, 57). However, the tumbadora percussionists were local players from Baracoa who brought their own rhythmic sensibilities to the performance. Indeed, the interlocking rhythm on the tumbadoras and the repetitiveness of a single toque over the entirety of the Egúngún masquerade suggested the "highly repetitive nature” of Palo drumming, which, as Bodenheimer notes, is also characteristic of the cajón de muerto ceremonies associated with Espiritismo cruzado in Havana (Bodenheimer, 2015). Ultimately, as both Bodenheimer and Dodson note, further ethnographic research on spiritual traditions in Eastern Cuba is necessary to parse out the sonic and terminological variations of “Bembé” and “Espiritismo” variants in Oriente, where Afrocuban traditions have received far less academic attention than in Western Cuba (Bodenheimer, 2015; Dodson, 2008). Whether or not the rhythm pertains more directly to oricha traditions in Baracoa, as suggested by the term “Bembé” in its generalized (Western) Cuban usage, to Espiritismo Cruzado, or to both is as yet unresolved without further ethnographic research. However, the closing of the Egúngún masquerade – in which two well-known Baracoan practitioners of Espiritismo cruzado fell into spirit possession following the departure of the masked figures – points to the "crossing” of Espiritismo Cruzado with Egúngún masquerade. “The party for Egúngún was totally mestizo, totally crossed [cruzado]”, the Alágbáá Egúngún and Espiritista Romero Suárez said, affectionately,
following the ceremony. “Because Baracoa is that way, and no other” (Interview, Rosendo Romero Suárez, 2016).

Ilé Tun Tun and Egúngún Masquerade in Western Cuba

The use of the tumbadoras rather than the batá drums for the Egúngún masquerade in Baracoa also marks a notable difference from Egúngún performance in both Yorùbáland and Western Cuba. In Yorùbáland, the batá are directly associated with Egúngún, in addition to their well-known association with the Òrìṣà Ọ̀ṣàngó (Euba, 1990). As noted above, the talking batá set serves a crucial function in drawing out the Egúngún in their travels between the world of the ancestors and the world of the living (Boscolo, 2009). Additionally, the batá “talking drums” prompt, provoke, and reprimand the masquerading Egúngún during performances (ibid). Likewise, the dùndún, as a pan-Yorùbá instrument increasingly prominent within contexts of Òrìṣà worship (See Chapter 2), are associated with Egúngún masquerade in Yorùbáland and also used to provoke, reprimand, or draw out the "personality" of the Egúngún (Euba, 1994:166). 168 Euba states,

> every egúngún has his own individual personality, be it aggressive, comical, fearsome, or whatever. It is the drummer who helps him realize that personality. Although considered the egúngún helper, the drummer is not above taunting and provoking the egúngún. On occasion when an egúngún meets an opponent, the iyáàlú drummer’s musical patterns can either help to avert a confrontation or

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168 In Yorùbáland, the individual Egúngún demonstrate a wide variety of names, types, and functions that vary from town to town and city to city (Boscolo, 2009: 194). Types of Egúngún may include egúngún aláré (“egúngún entertainers”) (194), Olóúgun (“herbalists”), Láyèwú / Òdè (“hunters”) (195), or Jénjù (“the egúngún believed to execute witches to the power of Àgan” in Ọ̀yọ, called Gbajẹ́rọ in Ede) (194), among others.
actually provoke one. The drummer’s discretion on such occasions is crucial. Assuming that, after provocation, a fight does develop between two opposing egúngún, there follows a display of magical powers by them to show who is superior. Each of the egúngún must then rely on his drummer to inspire him to a great performance. (Euba, 1994:166, in Boscolo, 2009: 218).

The direct association and crucial role of the bàtá and the dundún within Egúngún masquerade points to the significant influence of Òyó in the development of the "lineage-based Egúngún Society and in its diffusion, in tandem with the "expansion of Òyó’s sphere of influence,” throughout Yorùbáland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Boscolo, 2009: 201). Notably, this expansion and the resultant "hegemony" of Òyó in Yorùbáland precipitated the prominence of the batá drums in Cuba, which, as Miguel Ramos notes, "illustrate[s] the vitality of Òyó cultural hegemony” in contemporary Regla de Ocha practice (Ramos, 2000: viii).

In the Ilé Tun Tun African Traditionalist temple in Havana, Egúngún masquerade reflects this Òyó hegemony both in the prominence of the batá drums within oríṣà ceremonies and in their usage to draw out and animate Egúngún masquerade. The African Traditionalist babaláwo Frank Cabrera Suárez, who was likely the first Cuban babaláwo to receive a fundamento (or consecrated emblem) of Egúngún from Nigeria in the late 1990s (Martínez Betancourt, 2016), masquerades the five Nigerian-consecrated

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169 For more on the development of the Egúngún Society in Òyó, it's "social, political, edifying, and entertaining character,” and its relationship to the Aláàfin (king), see Boscolo (2009: 199-201) and Babayemi (1980).

170 Martínez Betancourt has traced a genealogy of the revival of Egúngún in Cuba, via African Traditionalist, between 1998 and 2016 (Martínez Betancourt, 2016). As he notes, Frank Cabrera Suárez received the fundamento (emblem) of Egúngún in 1998. In 2003, Victor Betancourt Estrada held a public display of Egúngún masks in conjunction with the Casa de la Amistad Cuba-Angola in Havana. In 2009, the Cuban expat Frank Alberto Hernández Reyes was initiated into the priesthood by José Manuel Rodríguez Camejo.
In his possession to the sounding of the Cuban batá, mirroring the link between the batá and Egúngún in Yorùbáland. The five Egúngún masks that Cabrera Suárez owns were elaborated in Nigeria and sent to Cuba by means of Cabrera Suárez’ connections with Wándé Abímbólá during the years that I conducted fieldwork in Cuba (Interview, Frank Cabrera Suárez, 2016). In 2012, Cabrera Suárez received the first three masks, each dedicated to an important babalao in Cuba’s history and in Cabrera Suárez’ own rama of Ifá, including “Remigio Herrera Adechina (1811-1905), Eulogio Rodríguez Tata Gaitán (1861-1945) and Martín Cabrera Escudero (1919-1966)” (Martínez Betancourt, 2016). In 2014, Cabrera Suárez received an additional two masks dedicated to “Miguel Febles Padrón (1910-1986) and Pablo Sevilla (1930-2002)” (ibid). In order to honor and “work with” these five ancestors as well as the collectivity of ancestors that the Egúngún represent, Cabrera Suárez holds regular Egúngún masquerades in conjunction with numerous African Traditionalist ceremonies in Ilé Tun Tun, including itàdógún, the annual Ifá Festival, and in toques dedicated to specific ancestors.

The first time that I witnessed the Egúngún masquerade in Cuba was during the annual Ifá Festival hosted by Ilé Tun Tun in June, 2015. Held in conjunction with other neighboring African Traditionalists ẹgbés in and around Havana, the seventeenth annual "Yoruba Calendar Festival," as it was called, lasted from June 4th-10th with events and ceremonies held daily in various African Traditionalist temples and homes throughout the

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agò egúngún in his possession to the sounding of the Cuban batá, mirroring the link between the batá and Egúngún in Yorùbáland. The five Egúngún masks that Cabrera Suárez owns were elaborated in Nigeria and sent to Cuba by means of Cabrera Suárez’ connections with Wándé Abímbólá during the years that I conducted fieldwork in Cuba (Interview, Frank Cabrera Suárez, 2016). In 2012, Cabrera Suárez received the first three masks, each dedicated to an important babalao in Cuba’s history and in Cabrera Suárez’ own rama of Ifá, including “Remigio Herrera Adechina (1811-1905), Eulogio Rodríguez Tata Gaitán (1861-1945) and Martín Cabrera Escudero (1919-1966)” (Martínez Betancourt, 2016). In 2014, Cabrera Suárez received an additional two masks dedicated to “Miguel Febles Padrón (1910-1986) and Pablo Sevilla (1930-2002)” (ibid). In order to honor and “work with” these five ancestors as well as the collectivity of ancestors that the Egúngún represent, Cabrera Suárez holds regular Egúngún masquerades in conjunction with numerous African Traditionalist ceremonies in Ilé Tun Tun, including itàdógún, the annual Ifá Festival, and in toques dedicated to specific ancestors.

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171 Martín Cabrera Escudero (1919-1966) was Cabrera Suárez’ father.

172 An Ifá ceremony, of recent arrival in Cuba, that is "observed once every 17 days" (Avorgbedor, 2003: 57).
city and surrounding area. On this particular day, the Ṣẹgbẹ̀ Ijá Oloodu, headed by African Traditionalist babaláwo Yunieski González Ramírez (b. Havana, 1977), hosted the masquerade of Cabrera Suárez’ five agò egúngún at the Finca Tirabeque, a rural property in the adjacent city of Santiago de las Vegas. As soon as the truck arrived at the property carrying the five masked Egúngún, the batá players, and the members of Ilé Tun Tun, the Egúngún inspired a sense of fascination and awe among those gathered, including myself. The Nigerian-crafted agò featured impressive headdresses with multicolored, loosely hanging lappets descending over the varied, multi-patterned cloths of the underlying suits, and the faces of the masks, with their covered white-and-black mesh netting, offered an intimidating obstruction of the faces of the wearers. The masks were, quite simply, unlike any attire I had witnessed within Cuban religious ceremonies. Unlike the agò egúngún that I would later witness in Baracoa, with their bright colors and satin cloths, these masks were darker and of Nigerian construction, using cloths and materials typical of Yorùbáland.
Figure 20 Frank Cabrera Suárez’ Nigerian-made Egúngún masks, dedicated to the Cuban babalao Pablo Sevilla (front) (1930-2002) and Martin Cabrera (back) (1919-1966). Santiago de las Vegas, 2015. *Photo by author.*
The three batá players set up on the back patio of the property’s house and began playing the Cuban toque iyakotá. As they did, a standing akpwón called out a Yorùbá song whose lyrics were passed to Cabrera Suárez by the Nigerian babaláwo Táiwò Abímbólá. This song celebrates the arrival of the Egúngún Festival (Ọdun Egúngún) in Yorùbáland:

\[\text{Lyrics of the song:} \]

\[\text{(Yorùbá) Translated:} \]

\[\text{[Song lyrics in Yorùbá]} \]

\[\text{[Translation of the song lyrics]} \]

\[\text{[Contextual explanation]} \]

\[\text{[Cultural significance]} \]

\[\text{[Additional notes on the song]} \]

\[\text{[Audio recording by Cabrera Suárez]} \]

173 Cabrera Suárez also received audio from Táiwò Abímbólá in which the Nigerian babaláwo sings the song, demonstrating its melody (pers. comm., Frank Cabrera Suárez, 2016).
The Egúngún Festival has arrived
The Egúngún Festival has arrived
We celebrate it with *olele* and *akara*\(^{174}\)
We celebrate it with *akara* and *olele*
We celebrate it in the grove with *olele* and *akara*
The Egúngún Festival has arrived\(^{175}\)

The percussionists and the *akpwón* continued to overlay the Cuban *toque* with the Yorùbá lyrics in call-and-response as the five Egúngún began to shuffle, dance, and spin on the space of the back patio. As the momentum of the song built, the masked Egúngún whirled the multicolored lappets of their elaborate cloth suits in increasingly fast motions, echoing the words of the Egúngún verse I would later hear in Baracoa: “*Agò n tu yà ri yà ri yà*” [sic], “the cloths of the Egúngún dress come undone and open the path.” The

\(^{174}\) *Îlèle* and *àkàrà* are Yorùbá foods associated with the òrìṣà. Akinyemi describes *îlèle* as a “cooked pudding made from black-eyed pea paste wrapped in leaves” and *àkàrà* as “fried bean cake” (Akinyemi, 2015).

\(^{175}\) My translation of the Yorùbá-Spanish translation of this song provided to Cabrera Suárez by Táiwọ Abímbólá.
dancing gained momentum as the drummers switched to the toque Olokun, transitioning to a second song in praise of Egúngún also passed to Abímbólá to Cabrera Suárez:

![Egúngún song passed to Frank Cabrera Suárez by Táiwò Abímbólá. Photo by author.](image)

Egúngún exists
Ôrìṣà exists
We adore them as they were adored in that era
You don't adore them as they were adored in that era

As Vaughan notes, the toque iyakotá is a "shared" toque, meaning that, unlike other batá rhythms linked exclusively to specific oricha, iyakotá can be used as an underlying rhythm to sing for “many” deities in the in Regla de Ocha tradition (Vaughan: 2012, 122, 128). Likewise, the toque Olokun can be used while singing for multiple orichas, including Elegguá and Yemayá, as well as for eggún, or the ancestors (Interview, José Reinaldo Ilin Montano, 2016).

The lead Iyá player of the batá ensemble, José

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176 My translation.
177 Also referred to as “generic” toques (See Schweitzer, 2013).
178 Worship of the ancestors and the dead, called Eggún in Cuba, also forms a foundational aspect of Regla de Ocha-Ifá. Lydia Cabrera famously foregrounded the centrality of the dead to Afrocuban religion in El Monte, inscribing the proverbs “Antes de saludar a los santos se saluda a los muertos” (“before saluting the saints one must salute the dead”) and “Ikú lo bí Ocha…si no hay muerto, no hay Ocha” (if there is no dead person, there is no Ocha) (Cabrera, 2016: 63, my translation). As Martínez Betancourt notes, in Cuba “Egún is invoked at the beginning of every ceremony of ôrìṣà
Reinaldo Ilin Montano, related to me that he chose these rhythms to accompany the Egúngún songs, in light of a lack of provided Yorùbá rhythms, precisely because of this flexibility. Additionally, he chose these *toques* because of the pre-established relationship between rhythms such as *Olokun* and *eggún* (ancestors) in the Cuban *batá* corpus of Regla de Ocha.

A year later, in March 2016, I witnessed another Egúngún masquerade at *Ilé Tun Tun*, in this case as a culmination of a *toque* in homage to the late Cuban *babalao* Filiberto O’Farrill. The three *batá* percussionists initiated the homage by playing a Cuban *toque a Eggún*, or a *tambor* for the ancestors, using rhythmic sequences characteristic of Regla de Ocha. Towards the end of the *tambor*, José Reinaldo Ilin Montano switched to the *Olokun* toque, calling out the lyrics to “Egungun nbe.” From the back of the house, the Egúngún emerged, traveling through the small foyer in which the *batá* players and other members of *Ilé Tun Tun* gathered and moving outside and into the streets. Without dropping the *toque*, the *batá* players took turns strapping the instruments to their bodies (Ikú lobi ocha) and *Ifá* [in Regla de Ocha-Ifá]" (Martínez Betancourt, 2016). Although the Egúngún society appears to have existed in Cuba and even experienced "a revival… during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century”, the society “died out” on the island in the first half of the twentieth century (Clark, 2007: 85). Nonetheless, Clark notes that “among the objects typically found on the [Santería] shrines is a stick known as *Opa Egun* or Staff of the Ancestors decorated with ribbons and bells reminiscent of the costumes of the Egungun masquerades” (87). This staff appears to derive directly from the “*Òpá Ikú,*” or consecrated emblem of Egúngún in Yorùbáland (See *Ifábíyìí, 2014*). Although the Egúngún society disappeared in Cuba and "there is no annual festival in honor of the eggun [such as the Odùn Egúngún]… the santeros do observe November 2 as the Day of the Dead, as does the Catholic Church” (González-Wippler, 1994: 83).

This disconnect between the arrival in Cuba of Yorùbá lyrics and songs via Nigerian babaláwos from corresponding information and instruction regarding Yorùbá *batá* and dundún rhythms and playing styles is a salient – and for percussionists such as Ilin Montano, lamentable – aspect of African Traditionalism in Cuba (Interview, José Reinaldo Ilin Montano, 2016).
so that they could stand and follow the masquerading Egúngún by foot. Two other percussionists joined the procession, playing interlocking rhythms on two imported, Nigerian *agogo Ifá* as the drummers, the Egúngún, and other members of *Ilé Tun Tun* followed. In this procession, the outdoor Egúngún masquerade in this relatively isolated Havana neighborhood more closely mirrored the public dynamics of Egúngún masquerade in Yorùbáland, where Egúngún masquerades take place in the streets as family members follow the Egúngún in public procession (Boscolo, 2009; Euba 1990). In so doing, the participants violated Cuban law regarding freedom of public assembly (See Chapter 2), though in a neighborhood relatively removed from the center of the city. This outdoor procession contrasted with the indoor masquerade in Baracoa where, although members of the *Égbë Ìran Àtelé Ilògbôn Baracoa* openly debated the risks of holding the masquerade outdoors, ultimately decided against the potential legal repercussions due to the proximity of the egbé to within blocks of Baracoa’s city’s center.

**Conclusion**

Throughout Cuba, the Egúngún lineage and secret society is gaining traction as a Yorùbá-inspired means of worshiping and "working with" the dead in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. In Eastern Cuba, the adaptation of the visuality and aurality of Yorùbá Egúngún masquerade to local contexts and practices of ancestor worship, including *Bembé* and *Espiritismo cruzado*, reflects the grounding of novel Yorùbá traditions within localized logics and practices of working with and relating to the dead. The incorporation of Yorùbá practices of aural estrangement that maintain the ontology of the Egúngún as
nonhuman, manifested ancestors and the use of Yorùbá-language Egúngún praise songs to invoke and empower the dead points to the centrality of a specifically Yorùbá-inspired aurality to the transplantation of Egúngún in Cuba. At the same time, the use of instruments, rhythms, and rhythmic sensibilities drawn from Eastern Cuban practices of ancestor worship, including Bembé and Espiritismo cruzado, give a decidedly Eastern bent to the sound of Egúngún masquerade, enabling the Egúngún to ceremonially “cross” with the rich, deep-rooted historical traditions of the “tierra de muertéras” (“the land of the dead ones”) in Oriente (Dodson, 2008: 128). In the Egúngún masquerades I witnessed in Western Cuba, on the other hand, where the Egúngún masquerade first (re-)gained prominence, African Traditionalists ẹgbés hold Egúngún masquerades squarely within the context of Yorùbá ọrìṣà worship, integrating the Egúngún into celebrations and homages that mark both novel, Yorùbá-inspired ceremonies of recent import (i.e., the Yorùbá Ifá Festival and itàdógún) as well as into toques to eggún (ancestors) characteristic of Regla de Ocha. Furthermore, the Egúngún masquerades I witnessed in Ilé Tun Tun utilized the batá to draw out and animate the Egúngún, mirroring the historical and contemporary link between the bàtá and Egúngún in Yorùbáland. In this way, African Traditionalist Egúngún masquerades in Western Cuba continue to sound the “hegemony” of Ọyọ in contemporary Yorùbáland and in the historical manifestations of Regla de Ocha-Ifá in Cuba. In Western Cuba, like Eastern Cuba, the Yorùbá songs were also adapted to localized and regionally-prominent rhythms associated with ancestor and ọrìṣà worship. The rich and contextually-rooted adoption of Egúngún masquerade in Havana (Western Cuba) and Baracoa (Oriente) underscores the dynamic interplay of heterogeneity and regionalism within Nigerian-style Ifá-ọrìṣà in Cuba.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:
THE “LEOPARDS” OF NIGERIAN-STYLE IFÁ-ÒRÌṢÀ

In the small city of Morón, in the central province of Ciego de Ávila, the African traditionalist babaláwo Otto William Sabina de León sat in a wooden chair on his back patio explaining how Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà arrived to him in this relatively secluded area of Cuba. Far from the central hubs of Regla de Ocha-Ifá in the urban poles of Western and Eastern Cuba, the city of Morón didn’t have babalaoos when Sabina de León was a teenager. As a young boy, his aunt worked in the tourist beach resorts of the nearby Cayo Coco islands off of the northern coast, and, there, she befriended a babalao from Havana who invited Sabina de León to the capital to be initiated in 2000. Shortly after, one of Sabina de León’s ahijados began to bring him books on the Yorùbá Traditional Religion from Spain, including American anthropologist and Yorùbá scholar William Bascom’s seminal Ifá Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa (1969). For Sabina de León, this book offered his first glimpse at the Yorùbá Traditional Religion of contemporary Nigeria. After reading about the use of “tan” and “green” beads for the left-wrist ide bracelet in Yorùbáland rather than the yellow and green beads used in Cuban Ifá (Bascom, 1969: 84), Sabina de León replaced his yellow-and-green ide, which he considered to be "something Afrocuban," with a brown-and-green one. This marked his "first step” towards Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. Shortly after, when the ACYC issued its vitriolic, nation-wide proclamation blacklisting Victor Betancourt’s Ifá Iranlówo and all African Traditionalists involved with Ìyànífá initiations in 2004, the proclamation had the opposite-of-intended effect on him. Fascinated, he traveled to
Havana to actively seek out African Traditionalism’s most prominent babaláwos, including Frank Cabrera Suárez and Victor Betancourt. Hitting it off particularly well with Victor Betancourt, Sabina de León spent days, and then weeks, every month traveling to Havana and learning about African Traditionalism in Betancourt Estrada’s home. Ultimately, Sabina de León became a “disciple” of Betancourt Estrada’s, carrying the Ifá Iranlówo lineage to Morón and establishing a subsidiary, African Traditionalist ẹgbẹ there (Interview, Otto William Sabina de León, 2016).

Sabina de León’s trajectory towards African Traditionalism reveals the multitudinous means by which women and men arrive at Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà throughout Cuba’s regional provinces. Predicated upon several key historical antecedents, including the opening of Cuba’s economy to tourism and foreign travel as well as heightened access to Cuba’s “secondary diasporas” abroad, Sabina de León’s journey additionally hinges upon the national arbitration of Afrocuban religion by Cuba’s state-linked ACYC. In his case, the Association’s national (and international) diatribes against Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and attempts to delegitimize and ostracize its practitioners created an opposite-of-intended effect, ultimately heightening his – and his wife’s – awareness of the gendered and theological upheavals occurring within the African Traditionalist movement.180

During our conversation, Sabina de León criticized the underlying mission of the ACYC to organizationally unite and police the boundaries of òrìṣà/oricha worship in Cuba by evoking a provocative symbol of authority and self-sufficiency in Ifá: the

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180 Notably, Sabina de León’s wife initiating as an Ìyánífá in 2006, only two years after Sabina de León met Victor Betancourt Estrada in Havana following the ACYC’s 2004 proclamation (Interview, Otto William Sabina de León, 2016).
leopard (ekùn). According to Sabina de León, African traditionalism has flourished throughout Cuba's provinces, despite the opposition of the ACYC, precisely because babaláwos and Ìyánífá are ultimately “leopards,” not “sheep.” Solitary and territorial, leopards live in relative isolation from one another, he noted, associating in small packs [manadas], primarily with their offspring.\(^{181}\) This evocative metaphor of independence and self-sufficiency among the relatively small and marginalized African Traditionalist religious lineages and ēgbés in Cuba draws upon the centrality of the leopard in West and Central African indigenous societies as symbols of “royals,” “political power,” “social power,” and "power elites” (Blier, 2015: 326; Miller, 2009: 54). In Yorùbáland, the Qòni (king) of Ìlè-Ifè is "held as the ‘leopard’” (Blier, 2015: 326, citing Euba, 1985: 13), and his death is marked by the phrase "The Tiger [leopard] has parted" (Blier, 2015: 326). As related to me by Cuban babaláwos, when a woman or man initiates as Ìyánífá or babaláwo, they are also believed to "convert into a leopard" (Interview, Humberto Torres Hurtado, 2016).\(^{182}\) During initiations, the woman or man is ritually painted with spots using red osùn, “blood-colored camwood” and ēfun, “white chalk” (Matory, 2005 [1994]192), invoking the bravery, fearlessness, and confidence of the leopard (Interview, Humberto Torres Hurtado, 2016). In both Cuban-style and Nigerian-style Ifá, the Lucumi

\(^{181}\) Indeed, leopards, the “most solitary and secretive of Africa’s big cats,” (McIntyre, 2015: 509), live in relative isolation from one another, associating primarily during mating season, the weaning of offspring, and, occasionally, in the adult lives of offspring (Estes, 1991; Kingdon, J, et. al., 2013; Nowak, 1999).

\(^{182}\) Brown (2003) notes that Brandon (1983) also "speculates that the act of painting [during initiations in Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá], fin fin okàn osú, ‘empowers the yawo with the attributes of the leopard [ekùn in Yoruba, ekùn in Lucumi] and brings about an identification of the [i]yawo with the leopard, a traditional representative of kingship (Lucas 1948, 156-57)” (Brown, 2003: 355). Despite this, Brown notes that “it is hardly clear that all Lucumi religious practitioners interpret the spotted designs in this way,” and, indeed, heterogeneous interpretations exist (201).

As Sabina de León’s metaphor implies, the symbol of the leopard evokes the heterogeneous and relatively independent nature of the development of African Traditionalism – and African Traditionalist ègbés – throughout Cuba's provinces. In 2015, there was a notable attempt by African Traditionalists and foreign babaláwos affiliated with the Yorùbá Traditional Religion abroad to unite the various ègbés in Cuba through a formal meeting (the Primer Encuentro Hispanoparlante de la Tradición Ifá-Órìṣà, or “First Hispanophone Encounter of the Ifá-Órìṣà Tradition,” organized by Victor Betancourt Estrada and Eli Torres Gongora). Aside from this effort, however, the development and proliferation of Cuba's discrete African Traditionalist lineages has overwhelmingly been marked by dynamics of autonomy, heterogeneity, and idiosyncrasy. The variegated means by which information about the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) has arrived in the hands of practitioners throughout Cuba's provinces and the marginalization of these religious communities on the fringes of the boundaries of Regla de Ocha-Ifá as dictated by the ACYC has allowed a great deal of autonomy in individual approaches to Ifá-órìṣà worship. As I outline throughout this project, the positionality of African Traditionalists between these two broad, competing domains of órìṣà/oricha worship – Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) – has allowed practitioners to harness the interstitial potentiality of this
in-betweenness – and its adherent acts of translation and adaptation – in the service of discrete objectives and needs. The autonomy that has characterized the development of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba has enabled African Traditionalist women and men to creatively adapt and refashion the tenets of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) in the service of the realization of specific projects and desires.

Notably, various forms of engagement with sound and listening have constituted central practices of assertion for practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. As I examine throughout this project, African Traditionalist women and men craft sound and listening in order to reformulate fate-altering ritual and gendered prohibitions in Cuban òrìṣà/oricha worship. In the realm of gender, which constitutes the most polemical break between Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and Cuban Regla de Ocha-Ifá, this dynamic is particularly salient. Women break the gendered boundaries and taboos against female participation in Ifá by "speaking Ifá" (hablar Ifá), a literal and metaphorical nod towards priestesses’ newfound capacity to both command knowledge over the sacred odù of Ifá and to wield that knowledge in ritual settings and in everyday life (Chapter 4).

Additionally, through the mobilization of the sacred Yorùbá language and the potency of the spoken word, African Traditionalists assert Ìyánífá as central to Yorùbá-rooted philosophies of community health and gendered polarity (Chapter 4). In a particularly idiosyncratic case of gendered reformulation, Ìyánífá and female initiates in Santiago de Cuba crafted the first authorized grupo de fundamento de mujeres, or group of women authorized to play the previously-prohibited tambores de aña of the Regla de Ocha tradition. Marking the first known instance in which three women were authorized to play
the Cuban consecrated batá set on the island or internationally, this historic event was authorized and overseen within Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà by African traditionalist babaláwo and omo aña Enrique Orozco Rubio. In utilizing Ifá Nigeriano as an avenue for carving out novel forms of access to the consecrated batá in Cuba, these women re-contextualized sacred batá performance within Ifá Nigeriano, also carving a path for a larger and explicitly generative project of refashioning the ritual uses of the sacred batá in Cuba (Chapter 3).

The aural in the Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà polemic additionally serves as a site for asserting novel institutions and religious lineages predicated upon Yorùbá-inspired edicts of masculinity, including the all-male Egúngún secret society and all-male councils of titled “Chiefs”. In the Ilé-Ifẹ-rooted Aworeni lineage in Havana, the “Àrabà of Cuba” and other babaláwos of the Aworeni lineage mobilize the newly-imported dùndún "talking drums" of Nigeria as a means to “re-Yorubize” Cuban Ifá and to promote the spread of Nigerian-rooted institutions in Cuba. Through the sounding of the dùndún in public processions, the Aworeni lineage mobilize the dùndún as aural and visual emblems of Yorùbáland, announcing the foundation of temples, the crafting of novel geographical constituencies, and the authority of newly-established, hierarchical councils of Chiefs (Chapter 2). In Baracoa and Havana, all-male Egúngún masquerade is additionally gaining prominence as a Yorùbá-inspired means of worshiping and "working with" the dead in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà. Through techniques of aural estrangement that maintain the ontology of the masquerading dead as manifested ancestors, Egúngún masqueraders draw upon the sonic practices and aural logics of contemporary Yorùbáland. At the same time, however, the incorporation of instruments, rhythms, and modalities of spirit
possession drawn from Bembé and Espiritismo cruzado in Eastern Cuba and Regla de Ocha in Western Cuba point to the locally-informed and contextually-rooted grounding of Egúngún masquerade. The adaptation of Yorùbá-language songs to regionally-prominent rhythms associated with ancestor and òrìṣà worship in Baracoa (Oriente) and Havana (Western Cuba) furthermore points to the dynamic interplay of heterogeneity and regionalism in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà (Chapter 5).

The “Leopards” of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà and the ACYC: Potential Futures

Arguably, the marginalization of African Traditionalists from the ACYC has facilitated the autonomy necessary for the multitudinous manifestations and interventions of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà in Cuba. Given this, the ACYC appears to be reevaluating its position in light of the growing influence of African Traditionalism on the island. In 2016, the new president of the ACYC, the babalao José Manuel “Manolo” Pérez Andino,183 made a series of symbolic, though contradictory, gestures towards the “inclusion” of African Traditionalists in the Association. In January, Pérez Andino facilitated the unification of the two opposing Letra del Año (“Letter of the Year”) commissions in Havana, incorporating the members of the ACYC’s competing Organizing Commission of the Letter of the Year (Comisión Organizadora de la Letra del Año Miguel Febles Padrón) into the official Letra del Año held by the ACYC’s

183 Elected in 2014 following the death of the ACYC’s previous president, Antonio Castañeda Márquez (1946-2014).
Counsel of High Priests of Ifá (Consejo de Sacerdotes Mayores de Ifá). This unification was significant because of the protagonizing role played by African Traditionalist pioneer Victor Betancourt Estrada in the Organizing Commission of the Letter of the Year (See Brown, 2003: 342; Hearn, 2008: 49-51). Several months later, Pérez Andino additionally made Betancourt Estrada an official member of the ACYC, giving him a formal position as the advisor of the Association’s Supervising Council of Eastern Provinces (Interviews, Victor Betancourt Estrada and José Manuel “Manolo” Pérez Andino, 2016). However, the inclusion of Betancourt Estrada as the first African Traditionalist babaláwo allowed official membership to the ACYC since the Ìyánífá Debate of 2004 was predicated upon Betancourt Estrada’s agreement that he would desist from initiating further women as Ìyánífá (a condition to which, surprisingly, he agreed). When I sat down with Pérez Andino later that summer, he stated,

My policy as a babalao is to unify, to bring all of the religions that have to do with Africa [together] as one. There were wars between the Africanists and the others, and after entering [as president of the ACYC], I was able to unify the two Letras del Año that existed… Today, I am giving Africanists access [to the ACYC]…under the concept that they cannot initiate women into Ifá… [Women] can't “make Ifá” because they are women. There is no woman pope. That is the destiny of the religion, of life… it has been signaled that way over the course of centuries (Interview, José Manuel “Manolo” Pérez Andino, 2016, my translation).

Pérez Andino’s rhetoric of unification frames the unity of African Traditionalists and Regla de Ocha-Ifá practitioners as largely (or, even, already) achieved, with himself in

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184 For more on the history of the competing Letra del Año ceremonies in Havana, see Brown (2003: 342), Castro Figueroa (2012), and Hearn (2008: 49-51).
185 Hacer Ifá, i.e., become Ifá initiates.
the protagonist’s role. He refers, first, to the successful unification of the two Letras del Año and, second, to the entrance of Betancourt Estrada into the Association under his tenure. Furthermore, the new “welcoming” of African Traditionalists into the ACYC is predicated upon the termination of the initiation of women by babaláwos and, additionally, by the caveat that Ìyánífá who have already been initiated in Cuba relinquish their newly-achieved status, “defer[ring] and dedicat[ing] themselves to being Apetebí de Orúla [i.e., domestic servers]” (ibid). Pérez Andino’s statement naturalizes the exclusion of women from the Ifá priesthood by comparing the status of babalao to that of the pope, drawing upon the historical precedent of centuries of patriarchal exclusion of women in the Catholic Church and other worldwide organizations. Within this rhetoric of “unification,” it seems that Pérez Andino’s friendship and professional ties with Betancourt Estrada stand in for the purported “unity” of all African traditionalists and Regla de Ocha-Ifá practitioners under the institutional umbrella of the ACYC.

Clearly, this posturing belies the continued exclusion of the vast majority of African Traditionalists, and particularly Ìyánífá, from the ACYC. As Ìyánífá and rector of the Egbè Fermina Gómez ati Echu-Dina in Holguín, Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez expressed shortly after Betancourt Estrada was appointed as advisor to the Eastern provinces, “We will never negate the consecration of Ìyánífá. To the contrary, we are going to stick around, studying [Ifá], and we will combat all that wants to eliminate us” (Interview, Dulce María Rodríguez Sánchez, 2016). Nonetheless, Pérez Andino’s rhetoric of unification, though contradictory, points to the growing strength of the African Traditionalist movement in Cuba and to the increasingly unavoidable implications of this heightened influence for the Association. The "leopards" of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà, with
their aural, gendered, ritual, and institutional interventions, are clearly leaving a broader mark on the circumscribed boundaries of òrìṣà/oricha worship in Cuba. The ACYC president’s changes in rhetoric, if not in policy, additionally indicate the potential for future re-evaluations of the state-linked organization’s official stance towards African Traditionalism (and Òyànífà, in particular). In the meantime, as the African Traditionalist movement continues to grow in strength, female and male practitioners of Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣà will undoubtedly continue to reshape and reformulate òrìṣà/oricha worship on the island, acting, in idiosyncratic and heterogeneous ways, as "leopards" of Ifá.
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