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Afro-Cuban religious transformation: A comparative study of Lucumí religion and the tradition of spirit belief

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AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LUCUMÍ RELIGION AND THE TRADITION OF SPIRIT BELIEF

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION:
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by

Beatriz Morales

Adviser: Professor Jane Schneider

This dissertation explores religious transformations in Cuba and the United State, specifically through comparing and contrasting the Afro-Cuban religions of Lucumí and the tradition of spirit belief. The Introduction outlines the theoretical framework of the dissertation, discussing in some depth the various methodological questions posed by previous anthropological research of religion in the Caribbean. The Introduction also includes a review of sources on Afro-Cuban religion. Chapter Two introduces Lucumí and the tradition of spirit belief. Here the ritual aspects of the religions are described, as well as the initiation processes. Also discussed are the deities and divination processes. This chapter also contains information from several deity-specific case studies which further illustrate the meaning of religion in peoples' daily

lives and how it is used to empower and resist oppression. The discussion in Chapter Two should provide the reader with the necessary background information to apply to the subsequent examination of the historical development of these religions. Chapters Three through Seven discuss the history of Lucumí and the tradition of spirit belief both in Cuba, New York City, and New Orleans. Chapter Three contains extensive historical material about the early history of Africans in Cuba, underscoring the meaning of this period for the reemergence of the African religions in Cuba. Subsequent chapters explore further the inner workings of religious groups both in Cuba and the United States, and furthers the discussion of how religion is used to empower and aid in daily struggles against marginalization.

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PREFACE

If I look back far enough in search of the seed which motivated and influenced this research, I might begin with my childhood memories in Cuba, sitting on the porch of my house listening to my grandfather tell stories of the history of Blacks in Cuba. He especially liked to tell of the bravery and the courage of Afro-Cubans in the Cuban wars of independence. I remember him telling me that Cuba belonged to the Afro-Cuban, that Cuba would have never been free without the brave Afro-Cuban fighters. I also participated in this telling by relating to my grandfather the information in my social studies book about the cultural contact between the Indians and Africans. These were the initial seeds of knowledge I gained about the rich cultural history of Afro-Cubans.

My memories of Cuba were beginning to fade away as I lived among the Afro-Cuban community in New York. My aunt, Migdalia "Milli" Faba, played a key role in keeping me connected to the past. She was an Obatalá priestess who decided to remain in Cuba and be part of the social changes brought by the revolution. Milli sent me notebooks (libretas) as well as everything that was published in Cuba

after the revolution about Afro-Cuban history.

My mother, Rosa María Leyva, Changó Larami, contributed to the research by giving me a sense of the internal dynamic of the Lucumí religion. In particular she helped me to understand the changing role of women in Lucumí. She worked among women that had challenged the Ifá priesthood by becoming initiated by African Ifá priests. She was also á leader in the movement to obtain recognition for the religion and to end the persecution of House-temples by the police and the SPCA. My mother's political participation in the religion constantly shattered my romantic view of it and brought me back to the day-to-day realities and conflicts involved.

My interest in discovering the roots of our Afro-Cuban identity lead me to begin to reconstruct an ethnohistory of the House-temples in New York City which provided me with an understanding of the politics of cultural change.

The research was completed in three cycles. The first cycle involved a critique of syncretism. This was achieved in part by studying conflict among Afro-Cuban religious groups. One of the most difficult parts of this stage was making the distinction between Santería and Lucumí. Most anthropological studies of Afro-Cuban religions had not yet looked at them internally to explain the conflicts that emerged from these different religious understandings.

The second cycle was the study of elite groups among Afro-Cubans. My central focus here was the Ifá priesthood and the genealogical ideology of rama. In this cycle of the research, I had extensive discussions with Ifá priests in Cuba as well as in New Orleans and New York City. This eventually led to the third cycle where I focused on the question of power among these religious groups. This aspect of the religion had been previously neglected. In examining the question of power, I was forced to reexamine my previous interpretation of the relationship between religious ideas and actions. Instead of religious ideas directly influencing the actions of individual Afro-Cubans, I discovered from my data how an individual's position in society influenced their ideas and concepts of religion, and how these ideas varied with changing historical conditions. In some instances, I learned that Afro-Cuban religious traditions provided support to the dominant classes by further emphasizing class distinction and class conflict. This research suggests that religion may serve the interests of a small elite group, but at other historical periods, religious ideas can serve to unite a popular group with the elite. I later discovered that religion Afro-Cuban religious traditions are not a unified phenomenon, but rather that their meaning and interpretation are constantly transforming in response to internal and external historical

factors. Nor do these traditions transform uniformly as institutions. Rather, individuals and groups engage in struggles over meaning, influencing change in their religious environments during particular historical periods. This evidence suggested an approach must be taken which differed from the syncretic model currently being used in anthropological studies of religions in the Caribbean. This new framework has opened new ways of understanding religious transformation as well as pointing to further areas of study of Caribbean religions which have not been examined using such a framework.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The anthropological study of Afro-Cuban religious traditions has been dominated by a concern with syncretism between African elements and Christianity. African religion is compared to Christianity and, in the Afro-Cuban context, is assumed to be moving in a unilineal manner along a continuum whose final point of evolution is Western, Christian culture. Afro-Cuban religions occupy a midpoint on this continuum, an outcome of the clash and compromise between the "little" and "great" traditions. These religions, moreover, have generally been lumped together under the single label of Santería -- a label that emphasizes the blending of African deities with Catholic saints. In this dissertation, I present an analysis of two Afro-Cuban religious traditions, Lucumí and spirit belief, whose internal developments and interactions with each other have been obscured or overlooked in the syncretism approach. By placing these traditions and their inter-relationship in the context of the political and economic history of divergent groups of Afro-Cubans struggling for autonomy, I hope to address and overcome what I think are serious problems with an over-emphasis on syncretic process and forms.

Among the problems, three seem especially pervasive. First is the attempt to study cultural change without recognizing that politics is an integral aspect of the process. As a consequence, individuals and groups are treated as passive, swept along by an inevitable, evolutionary movement, rather than as historical actors. Considered as actors, such individuals and groups can be seen to shape the mood or orientation of a religion -- an aspect that cannot be reduced to a mere evolutionary stage. Second is the assumption, in the syncretism approach, that there are only two traditions to consider, each defined by the polar end of a single continuum. All culture change is located between these two points, the "little" and the "great," the traditional and the modern, the folk and the urban. And third, the approach makes light of the conflicts over meaning, the interpretation of symbols, that occur both within and between religions, with consequences for their development.

It should be noted that similar criticisms of the syncretism approach have been raised with respect to the anthropological study of African religion. Already in the 1970's, for example, Fernandez, Van Binsbergen and Werbner were writing about religious movements in relation to specific historical circumstances, and examining conflicts within them. (See Fernandez 1978). In more recent studies (e.g., Bond 1979, Comaroff 1985, Mullings 1984), the issue of syncretism is less central, the authors having taken for

granted the importance of a more dynamic, historically grounded orientation that links religion to other systems of thought, and to the social formation in which it is embedded. Studies such as these have moved us beyond the simple dichotomy of Western and non-Western, examining the dynamics within each system and developing a framework that accounts for social conflict and power play.

Nevertheless, for the Caribbean, the syncretism model prevails. According to this model, the most important cultural contact between Africans and Europeans in Cuba involved their respective religious institutions. Culture change resulted from traditional African religions coming into contact with Catholicism. The model fails to recognize that it was not two different religious institutions that came into contact with one another, but different individuals and groups of Africans with different groups of Europeans. A key factor which the model does not allow us to study, and which will be emphasized here, is how various groups of Afro-Cubans engaged in struggles over meaning as they attempted to secure their survival in a hostile environment of colonial, neo-colonial and racial domination. As we will see, both Lucumí and spirit belief held out guiding principles which Afro-Cubans used situationally in their interactions with each other and with whites -- principles that helped them assess their situation and negotiate through a range of possibilities. By taking individuals and groups into account, grounding them in

historical and ethnographic context, this study will show the role of conflict, resistance, and power plays in on-going religious change.

By over-emphasizing how Afro-Cuban religion, under the label of Santería, has adapted to Catholicism, the syncretic model masks the autonomous (non-Christian) religious development of Lucumí, a Yoruba-based religious tradition in Cuba, and its interaction with spirit belief, including a particular variant known as Palo Mayombe, centered on a cult of the dead. Belief in spirits also influenced Santería and two other traditions, only lightly touched on in this thesis: Espiritismo, linked to European Spiritualism, and the male secret society of Havana, Abakuá. Although the areas of overlap and mutual engagement among these several strands have been considerable, too often under the syncretism model we trivialize the differences.

There is a tendency, for example, to assume that belief in spirits and a preoccupation with the dead take the same form among all Afro-Cuban groups. As Cabrera (1979, 1983) has pointed out, however, each Afro-Cuban tradition varies in the way that members communicate with spirits or divinities, and in the way they perceive sacrifice and divination. Also misleading is the assumption that the label "Santería" adequately covers the religious tradition of Lucumí. As we will see, there are several fault lines in Lucumí, along which different groups defined by ethnicity, gender, and position in the priesthood, have engaged in

conflict. Over time, some of these groups have been more open to Catholicism than others, perhaps calling their accommodation "Santería." But such groups have also, often simultaneously, opened the door to spirit belief as well. In taking the latter step, they have provoked groups with a more traditional, "African" orientation to react, leading to the further development of Lucumí.

A telling example of over-simplification associated with the syncretism model is its assumption that African religious traditions will be most frequently associated with rural contexts in contrast to Christian ones, which will be urban. Processes of urbanization and of syncretism will thus go hand in hand. Underlying this assumption is the evolutionist idea that the Christian religion paved the way for the emergence of modern, urban, industrial society in Western Europe whereas African religion sustained folk communities based on agriculture. To the contrary, Afro-Cuban religions, both spirit belief and Lucumí, were strongly represented in cities. Historically, as we will see, Lucumí developed within the urban context of nineteenth century Havana. I will review this history and also trace the interaction between spirit belief, including its variant Palo Mayombe, and the Lucumí religion in New York City.

The history of a religion is much more than a collection of cultural traits and survivals; it is a process in which diverse human groups develop and struggle in interaction with one another. Yet the syncretism model

tends to dwell on survivals and their eventual melding into an integrated form. This perspective makes too little of the different meanings that people attach to religious symbols and rituals, often in accordance with the historical uses to which these symbols and rituals have been put. African gods are not simply proto-representations of Catholic Saints such that transforming a god into a saint is unproblematic. They have very different biographies, personalities, and interpretations which suggest different outlooks on struggle. Following the suggestion of Geertz (1965) that we pay attention to the historically conditioned moods associated with different religious traditions, I note how Lucumí and Catholicism point Afro-Cubans in strikingly different directions when it comes to political struggle. These are not differences that can be arranged on a continuum, one of them eventually giving way to the other. Rather they are born out of divergent backgrounds, in this case the divergent historical experience of Africans, Afro-Cubans and Europeans in Cuba. Historically, Lucumí provided Afro-Cubans with role models and ideas that encouraged standing up to political and economic oppression. Christianity on the whole did not.

In order to capture the overall mood or orientation of Afro-Cuban religion in Cuba and New York, the thesis begins with an initial chapter on the central deities and spirits of the Afro-Cuban Lucumí and spirit belief religions, as well as a basic description of the religious specialists

associated with each. In the following two chapters, I reconstruct the historical context of colonial Cuba, in which both of these variants emerged. This reconstruction brings out the close historical association between multi-ethnic maroon communities in eastern Cuba and the spirit belief tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a parallel association between rebellions against slavery and colonialism and the emergence of the Lucumí tradition in Havana. After outlining the main developments in both religions as they unfolded in the context of Cuba's struggle for independence and subsequent internal conflicts, I shift my focus to the ever-changing pattern of interactions between spirit belief, Lucumí, and Santería in New York City.

Both in the Cuban context, and later in New York City, Lucumí was characterized by a set of internal fault lines: between the theologically pure who denigrated spirit belief and those who sought or perpetuated an involvement with spirits; between men and women in the priesthood; and between the highest, Ifá priests and a less elevated level of priests called Ocha. The Ifá and Ocha priesthoods have contrasting perspectives, the former being elite and exclusively male, the latter more egalitarian and open to the female aspect of the religion. Sometimes these fault lines have coincided with the boundaries between groups whose historical experiences differed -- for example groups that had been enslaved in Cuba as opposed to groups of free

artisans or, in the twentieth century, groups representing different waves of migration out of Cuba. We shall examine the changing configurations of Lucumí in relation to a history of often conflictual inter-group relations. The remainder of this chapter sets the stage by introducing the sources for my reconstructions, as well as my fieldwork methods.

Review of Sources on Afro-Cuban Religion

As noted above, the anthropological study of Afro-Cuban religion has been characterized by an emphasis on syncretism. This is a concept that Melville Herskovits made popular during the 1930s and 1940s in his study of African-American groups. The concept has been used to explain the process by which African deities became identified with Catholic saints. According to Herskovits (1937), African slaves coped, psychologically, with their situation through acculturation. To measure this, he developed a scale of intensity. As acculturation proceeded, "pure" African retentions, carried from the homeland to the New World, were reduced to survivals. Through syncretism, survivals were melded with the dominant culture and, in a final step of reinterpretation, they largely faded out.

Herskovits' progression from retentions to survivals to syncretism to reinterpretation had many parallels with the folk-urban continuum, developed by Robert Redfield to account for the process of modernization. The scale of

intensity, like the modernization concept, views change as moving in a single, unilineal direction. Also common to both is the tendency to expect the most pronounced manifestations of traditional culture only in rural communities. Herskovits was attracted to Haiti and Trinidad because he thought they would prove his thesis that in isolated rural communities, African culture remained very much unchanged. For Haiti, he argued (1937) that the rural lifestyle showed strong links to the Dahomean culture of West Africa. Although he visited a rural community in Trinidad in search of pure African retentions, however, he discovered that the religious groups exhibiting the greatest number of African traits were located in the city (Herskovits 1946).

Notwithstanding this complication, and his overall early role in the development of African-American anthropology, Herskovits left a picture of African-Americans as essentially passive participants in the process of culture change. According to M. G. Smith (1971), he failed to provide an adequate institutional analysis and treated the black population during the colonial period as a homogeneous unit. Overlooked was the importance of the fact that under slavery, blacks occupied different positions in the colonial structure. They were not all equally enslaved. In a related criticism, Mintz notes that the focus on retentions and survivals prevented Herskovits from seeing how African-Americans responded to changing social

conditions (Mintz 1970). Herskovits disregarded the possibility that syncretism was the result of both individuals and groups strategizing and manipulating culture.

Beginning in 1950, Bascom, a student of Herskovits, attempted to move beyond the syncretism model. Focusing on the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, he shows that not only did it develop as an urban religion in Cuba; its background among the West African Yoruba was urban as well. Turning his attention to Yoruba beliefs and practices in North and South America, Bascom (1972) noted their diffusion particularly among urban Puerto Ricans and African-Americans in the United States. Citing New York and Miami as central cities for these religious activities, he predicted that New York, with its Changó Templo dedicated to the Yoruba deity Changó, would become the Mecca of North American Santería. In the cities of Detroit, Chicago and Savannah, Santería is also following urban traditions. According to Bascom (1972), Herskovits was wrong to send his students to rural areas in search of African survivals. The city, he suggests, offered more opportunities for the priest to market his services while being protected by the anonymity of a dense and heterogeneous population.

Bascom's research on Santería broke new ground in helping us understand the religion on its own terms. According to him, anthropologists imposed their own views when they treated the African elements of syncretic forms as

largely decorative, rather than the central focus of the belief system. An altar or shrine may appear dominated by the image of a Catholic saint, but the stones in which the African deities reside, and the blood and herbs of ritual offerings and sacrifice, are where the secret of the religious power lies (Bascom 1971). These are the key elements of Santería, and failure to acknowledge them is an outsider's view. In a 1952 article, Bascom outlined three Afro-Cuban divination systems found in Lucumí. The elite Ifá priesthood makes use of a system based on 16 nuts or a chain of eight seeds, and another system of casting coconut shells. The less elite Ocha priesthood divines by a system called dilogún, using 16 cowry shells. Bascom showed that as in Africa, divination in Cuba continued to be used for prediction and advice.

Appreciating African elements as the core of religious power in Santería, Bascom did not treat them as mere retentions or survivals. On the contrary, by pursuing his inquiry among Yoruba in West Africa he discovered that some of these elements were not of African provenance at all, but had been developed in the New World in response to the situation of cultural contact. For example, based on his Yoruba data, Bascom argues that there is no indication that stone, blood and herbs are basic to traditional African religion (1972). He also points out that the mythology and theology of the Yoruba gods play a more important role among Cuban Yorubas, the Lucumí group, than among the Yoruba of

Nigeria. Here, though, we see that in spite of his many contributions to an improved understanding of Afro-Cuban religion, Bascom did not entirely succeed in breaking free of the syncretism approach. His key research questions continued to be whether the different elements of Santería were African or Catholic and, if African, whether they were given the same importance there as in Cuba. His answers to these questions are couched in the assumptions of the survival/syncretism/reinterpretation process. Removed from history, they pay too little attention to the political and economic factors that affect Afro-Cuban groups as they engage in conflict and struggle.

A good example of this limitation in Bascom's analysis is his treatment of the emergence of literacy in Afro-Cuban religion. Whereas Africans had passed down their traditions orally, in Cuba it became the practice to write down religious rules and customs in notebooks. These notebooks, called libretas in Spanish, contain rituals, prayers, songs, divination techniques and the lexicon of the Yoruba language. Following in the steps of his teacher, Herskovits, Bascom treats this shift as a manifestation of a linear, evolutionary change in the direction of syncretism or modernization. An oral, "little" tradition took a step towards becoming, or towards melting into, a literate "great" tradition. But this interpretation fails to notice the political implications of the libretas (notebooks).

As this thesis will show, the notebooks were more than an example of the acculturation of blacks to Western ways. Rather, they had much to do with ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict among Afro-Cuban groups. For a certain period, both in Cuba and the United States, priests in the Santería religion had little power because direct descendants of the Lucumís controlled the notebooks. The Lucumí group maintained its position by carefully passing these texts only to those of Lucumí background.

Since Bascom's pioneering contribution, there have been three major anthropological studies of Afro-Cuban religious systems, those of Joseph Murphy, George Edward Brandon, and Steven Gregory, all in the 1980's. Murphy (1983, 1988) takes an historical approach, the most thorough departure to date from earlier concern with counting African cultural traits. Yet similar to the syncretism school, he compares Afro-Cuban religions only with Christianity, leaving out the interaction among Afro-Cuban religions themselves. Furthermore, although his account of the background of Santería is dynamic, Murphy does not carry this dynamism through to the present. Perhaps this is because his main focus has been to discover the meaning of the religion. Rather than recognize that all religious systems give rise to internal struggles over meaning, he characterizes Santería, in the context of the United States, as a static set of understandings, on a path of integration and equilibrium. The conflicts and power struggles among

devotees, as well as their position in the labor market, are passed by. Thus we do not see that Santería, like any other religious system, is in continuous transformation as individuals and groups vie for power and prestige, and as they try to find creative solutions to their everyday problems.

Brandon's dissertation (1983) is about Afro-Cuban Santería in New York, Newark, and Oyatunji Village, South Carolina. It too provides historical background. In addition, Brandon examines the internal social structure of the religion and how devotees use its beliefs and practices in the course of their everyday lives. Brandon, however, retains the earlier concern of the syncretism school with measuring African influence, and a corresponding lack of curiosity about the role of external political and economic forces in shaping and changing Santería. Steven Gregory's New York-focused dissertation of 1986 is different in this regard, analyzing Santería as a counter-hegemonic movement or cultural form of oppressed people, who use it in defending themselves against political and economic oppression. This is not to say that the religion corresponds to any particular class or ethnic group; on the contrary, Gregory sees it as binding people in ritual kinship that cuts across class and ethnic lines. Unfortunately, however, Gregory's appreciation for struggle does not extend to the hegemonic groups within Santería,

especially the way these groups apply symbols of gender so as to oppress women and homosexuals.

Notwithstanding the advances they make over the syncretism model of the past, the recent analyses of Afro-Cuban religion remain limited by the assumption that religions are integrated, stable systems, moving towards an internal coherence. Their anthropological framework lacks insight into internally generated conflict, including conflict over meaning, and change. While reconstructing the historical background of Afro-Cuban religions, they nevertheless make light of the fault lines inherited from this history -- lines of cleavage that emerge and re-emerge many times over as new problems and challenges are confronted. Such complexity and internal division are widely recognized in the so-called great traditions, for example Christianity, which Mart Bax, in a recent article (1987), likens to a regime. The problem is to recognize the same dynamic in other religions where cultural forms redesign themselves, constantly creating new variations. As Eric Wolf has said:

> ... every religion lends itself to interpretation, and differences in interpretation are one of the causes of religious growth and development. As old values fail and new values grip the imagination of people, new thoughts make for new religious formulations. The expressive forms used may remain the same, and yet express a wholly different spirit (1959:148).

In this work, I will examine religious systems as ones that contain conflicting ideas, relating these ideas to the

social relations that pertain among different individuals and groups of Afro-Cubans. These connections are identified relying not only on the anthropological sources just reviewed, but on a range of secondary works on Cuban religious history and folklore (e.g., Lachatañere 1942, Deschamps 1974, Franco 1973, Furé Martinez 1979, Pérez de la Riva 1973, and Barnet 1966). Of special value is the African perspective taken by the historian Ortiz and the folklorist, Lydia Cabrera, both of whom have been interested in spirit belief as well as Lucumí. Ortiz (1916 and 1947) predicted that the Lucumí tradition would eventually absorb spirit belief in Cuba -- a process that was as worthy of our attention than the interaction between Lucumí and Christianity. To Cabrera (1983), spirit belief was not disappearing into Lucumí; rather, it had re-entered the form of Lucumí known as Santería. The recent appearance of both spirit belief (including the Palo Mayombe variant) and Lucumí in North America proves that the dialogue between them has continued.

In reconstructing the historical development of both Lucumí and spirit belief, I emphasize the ways in which the African experience in Cuba was distinctive -- different from other African experiences in the New World. This means presenting data on Cuba's unusual presence of free blacks throughout the Colonial period, on the self-help or mutual aid societies called <u>cabildos</u> through which these free blacks were organized, and on Cuba's late, hence relatively

less totalizing, involvement with plantation slavery. I also stress the divergent African histories internal to Cuba itself, with the eastern part of the island being far more loosely organized, frontier-like, and ethnically intermixed than the western half, where the presence of Havana and the eventual spread of sugar estates presaged a different course. That spirit belief flourished in eastern Cuba, the Lucumí tradition in the west, will be treated as evidence in favor of my argument about the dynamism of interacting social groups.

Overall, I see both Lucumí and spirit belief as generating moods or orientations somewhat different from those of Christianity, in particular when it comes to the interpretation of, and responses to, injustice. Taking a lead from Geertz's (1965) definition of religion, in which he notes that "mood" or "template" is a significant dimension for comparison, I suggest a relationship between the elaboration of African religious forms in Cuba and the struggles of Afro-Cubans for independence -- first from slavery and subsequently from the neo-colonial domination of the United States. As will be seen, both Lucumí and spirit belief contributed far more to these struggles than mere sets of surviving African traits. Apart from the religious networks and institutions that facilitated mobilization for rebellion, they offered ideas about heroism and courage, warfare and dignity. This, it would seem, sustained people in difficult confrontations.

This same courageous, self-respectful aspect of Afro-Cuban religions is the outcome of a particular history, not a general evolutionary stage. It showed up frequently in my North American fieldwork, as devotees and religious specialists recounted feeling empowered to confront difficult challenges, including challenges brought on by oppression. Material from interviews with specialists and devotees is incorporated into Chapter Two, which presents an overview of the spirit belief and Lucumí traditions, and in Chapters Five through Seven, which are about these two religions in New York. I conclude this chapter with a description of how the fieldwork was conducted.

Summary of Fieldwork Methods

My field work for this research is divided in two phases: The first phase is from 1970 to 1978; the second phase is from 1978 to 1984.

The early phase began as a result of the African-American movement which influenced many young Afro-Cubans to search into our past. We felt a need to prove our connections with our early history which we had learned and heard from oral accounts at home. The need to show that we had a link to Africa led many of us to ask questions in our own families. One of the people we asked questions of was the Ifá priest whom many of us were taken to visit by our families regularly, especially during periods of ceremony. The particular Ifá priest with whom my family was connected

also was influenced by the African-American movement and encouraged us to ask him questions about our African identity.

Of everybody who used to visit the Ifá priest, I was the only one who was thinking about becoming an anthropologist. He particularly encouraged that, because he thought that there was a need for someone in the religious family to begin to write the history of the House-temple. He made an effort to share with me many of the old libretas that contained much of the history of the early priests in the religion. He also put me in contact with the Senior House-temple in Cuba where he had been initiated into the Ifá priesthood, so that whenever I was able to travel I also could see some of the old records and notebooks that were still part of the heritage of the House-temple.

The early fieldwork was not structured by any theoretical framework but rather by the African-American movement to write our own history. As I found out later in my fieldwork, such history writing was a way that many of the Afro-Cuban Houses that were involved in the Lucumí religion in New York had of ensuring that the religion would remain in their control. There was also a personal interest in using history for the benefit of these small Ifá priests.

Through my mother's connections, I was able to interview many priests who also had connections to Cuba, and they made an effort to put me in contact with their own godparents there. They made available to me many of their

notebooks where many of the secret rituals, information, and names were written.

In the second phase, from 1979 to 1984, the field work was more structured. It started as a project in a seminar in Afro-American anthropology conducted at the CUNY Graduate Center by Professor Eric Wolf. I was also helped in formulating my research problem by a course in religion at CUNY taught by Professor Jane Schneider. At that point I realized that although my early data was not structured by any theoretical framework, it was a personal history that, if I were to be trained seriously as an anthropologist, could provide something very interesting in terms of ethno-history and how people use their religions in their everyday lives. This phase of my field work consisted of collecting life histories from four major House-temples in New York City. I selected Houses that were directly linked to ramas, ritual lineages that trace their descent to a religious group in Cuba.

In 1978 and 1979 I made trips to Cuba and was able to talk directly with senior members of some of the Houses that I had been interviewing in New York. In Cuba, I interviewed priests from the Ademiya Rama (one of the oldest Ifá ramas). One of these priests had been initiated by Ademiya himself (an Ifá priest who had come from Africa, already initiated in Ifá). It had been he who, along with other Ifá priests, established the institution of Ifá in Cuba. I was also able to make contact with four priests from the Obadimeye

Rama. Obadimeye, a priest of Changó, established one of the oldest ramas in Havana.

I had direct access to the elders of both ramas who had come, originally, from the initial ramas of Ademiya and Obadimeye. From the descendants of these ramas, I was able to get a list of godchildren who had been initiated by the senior priests and who were now living in New York. In cross-checking, I discovered that many of these were priests I had already interviewed in my early period of research. I also used that list to contact priests who were from the rama of Changó Teddun and who were in New York. From each priest whom I then interviewed I got a list of at least five names of other priests in New York whom they considered to be knowledgeable and prestigious and who had been in constant contact with the senior House in Cuba. From that I determined my sample of the five Houses on which I concentrated, doing structured interviews and participant observation. In other words, in the second phase of fieldwork, I checked the bias of the first phase, which was basically concerned with tracing my own network. The second field work was not directly connected to this network, but more so to the priests and priestesses who had been identified, by the Cuban House as well as some of the priests in New York, as the most knowledgeable priests in the religion.

In the five Houses where I conducted interviews, I recorded lengthy tapes on the history of each priest and

priestess, classifying them according to topic. I also tape-recorded interviews with several devotees of Afro-Cuban religion, known to me as a participant-observer in the Afro-Cuban communities of New York and New Orleans. As will become apparent, the taped material reveals religious systems that are dynamic and in constant transformation, due to different interpretations by people and external as well as internal influences.

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF SPIRIT BELIEF AND LUCUMÍ

This chapter presents a schematic overview of two Afro-Cuban religious traditions, spirit belief and Lucumí. In the past, the key interest has been in comparing these traditions with Christianity, and showing their transformations as a consequence of cultural contact with Europeans. My hope is to consider them in their own right so that we might better understand why they have so often sustained individuals and groups of Afro-Cubans in struggles against political and economic oppression. The data for my overview have been taken from interviews with specialists and immigrants in two settings where I myself lived as a member of an Afro-Cuban community: New York City and New Orleans. An appendix to the chapter contains selected transcripts from these taped interviews in which respondents comment on the meanings which particular deities or orichas have had for them.

The Tradition of Spirit Belief

The tradition of spirit belief is founded on the idea that understanding spiritual forces gives a person more control over his life. Men and women are seen to be in

constant struggle for survival. The spirit world and the material world exist within a single universe. In contrast to Western religions in which the spiritual and material are clearly divided, traditions of spirit belief see spirits and humans sharing the same space.

According to the Afro-Cuban medium's world view, humans are born with their own personal power. Personal spiritual power can increase as individuals learn to relate with high spirits such as the ancestral spirits of the Congolese and Amerindians who lived in the colonial period. Everyone, though, has at birth the personal power that will allow him or her to reach the spiritual world. Once a personal pact has been made with an ancestral spirit, the individual can make his or her own personal power more potent. A person can reinforce his "spiritual field" (cuadro espiritual) by making contact with more powerful spirits.

An individual's personal power needs to be regenerated because it weakens in the daily struggle for survival. One way to make this personal power more potent is to establish a dyadic relationship with a powerful spirit. At the highest level, an individual is completely changed into a medium, in which case she or he can empower others. A medium can teach others how to bring power from above for self and community through possession. Once a person becomes open to the spiritual world, he or she can seek power by possession under the supervision of a senior medium.

In the tradition of spirit belief, the opportunity for possession is open to anyone, in contrast to the Lucumí religion, which requires the presence of a priest or priestess. The tradition of spirit belief also sees each person's spirit moving along a path of personal development at death. In contrast to Western religious thought, death is not perceived as a final stage for humans. Death is viewed as one among many steps that an individual must take in order to accomplish his purpose in life. The dead person's spirit strives to establish a close relationship with an individual who will help him return to the world of the living. Spirits and humans thus empower each other as a result of their relationship. They will give each other strength to struggle against daily problems.

Seeking to interact with humans, the spirits appear to favor women between the ages of fifteen and forty to serve as intermediaries. Not all women selected by the spirits become mediums. The vocation of medium requires the protection of powerful guides who are either of African or Amerindian origin. These spirits are passed down through family lines. They cannot be acquired through ritual or ceremony. An Afro-Cuban medium "pulls" the spirits down to earth in an effort to solve personal problems. The spirit empowers as it comes down to earth. Both spirit and medium become empowered in the process of possession. Individuals who seize the opportunity to take power, yet also open themselves up to power (i.e., become the focus for spiritual

power) become mediums. They make contact with the spirit world and bring the power from above to their community.

Mediums are able to keep some power for themselves. Clearly, while the medium achieves power in the spiritual world, she or he also achieves power in the social world of everyday life. Spiritual power is both inherent in the individual and can be acquired with the assistance of a medium. Inherent power is normally passed down from mother to daughter and aunt to niece. The spirits that are transmitted in the female line are usually the spirits that initiate the individual into the mediumic role. The process can be seen as a way that the dead medium continues to participate in the society of the living--by giving her spirits to a chosen younger female of her family. Under modern conditions, the women who tend to be selected to inherit the spirits are often undergoing emotional stress due to divorce or the death of a husband. Deceased relatives send spirits to younger women to give them support in their struggle with life's problems. During possessions, in fact, the spirit of a female relative tells relevant stories about her experiences in the world. Although most of the mediums are women, there are also male mediums. The gender of the medium or "horse," as she/he is called by the spirits, has no influence in determining who is selected.

The Ethnic Identity of Afro-Cuban Spirits

One of the most striking characteristics of the tradition of Afro-Cuban spirit belief is the ethnic identity of the spirits. Spirits are classified according to ethnic background in the spiritual hierarchy. The most powerful spirits are Congolese, followed by Amerindian spirits. Mediums also have middle-range spirits from Andalusia, and there are also some Chinese spirits that have been incorporated into the middle of the hierarchy. Mediums work mainly with Congolese spirits, although many persons have Lucumí spirits as well.

In other words, an important aspect of traditional spirit belief is its arrangement of spirits in hierarchial order. Mediums call this order the spiritual field. At the top of the hierarchy are ancestral spirits, who tend to be Congolese (for Cubans) and Amerindians (for Puerto Ricans). Historically, these ancestral spirits were often maroons (cimarrones); it is they who help protect the medium and work with her in caring for the community at large. Among the mediums I interviewed, most of the Cubans had Congolese spirits at the top of the hierarchy with Amerindians as secondary spirits. Puerto Rican mediums had an Amerindian at the top of the hierarchy.

Other ancestral spirits include Afro-Creoles, representing the curro or free Afro-Cuban tradition in colonial Cuba. These spirits are said to have lived in marginal neighborhoods in Cuba. The most controversial of them are called the eguns -- the ancestral spirits of the

Lucumí priests and priestesses who inhabited Cuba during the colonial period. At one time, these spirits were controlled by the highest Ifá priest of the Lucumí religion. Only he knew how to satisfy the eguns by performing the appropriate ritual, dances, and songs (Ortiz 1982:57). Indeed, Ifá priests argued that the Lucumí eguns were dead people of a particular rama of Lucumí priests and priestesses, in contrast to Congolese and Amerindian spirits, whom they considered to be non-ancestral. Nevertheless, in spite of this Ifá monopoly, mediums claimed also to know how to handle the eguns.

Language is one of the ways that Congolese people have expressed their cultural resistance. When Congo spirits begin to communicate with humans during spirit possession, they use a style of speech which combines Bantu with the Spanish language. This speech spoken by newly arrived slaves in Cuba is known as bozal. Don Juan, an Afro-Cuban religious specialist who operates the Ta Jose Spiritual Church in New Orleans, provides the best example of bozal speaking I have seen. When Don Juan is possessed by his Congolese spirit, Ta Jose, his language is incomprehensible. One of the House godchildren who carries the title of mayordomo (assistant Palo priest) acts as the official interpreter for this spirit. The degree of cultural assimilation into Western society varies among the Congolese spirits, however. Some tend to speak more in Bantu; others

combine words from Bantu and the Spanish language, and some speak in Spanish with a Bantu accent.

Envy and Class Conflict in the Spirit World

It would be an error to think of the Congolese spirits as a homogenous group. The variations that exist among them could be the focus of a dissertation in their own right. Powerful mediums, uniting to work jointly on a problem, like to retell stories of spiritual labor. Later, in the spiritual session, the mediums will reveal to one another the power of their respective spirits. When powerful mediums come together, competition may arise between them, and the ethnicity or class of the spirit becomes a personal issue. The conflict is never expressed in the open, but is obvious during the spiritual session.

For example, in one of the spiritual sessions I attended in New Orleans, a conflict emerged in the open between the spirits of two mediums. The two women appeared to have a friendly relationship until they became possessed with their respective spirits. One of the mediums had a male Congolese spirit that was classified as a bozal. Historically, this spirit was a very rebellious slave who had run away from his master several times. One popular story about him was that he had killed three overseers. He was also reputed to be very knowledgeable about the secrets

of plants and roots. In possession episodes, this spirit often recollected the time when he lived in the forest (monte) as a maroon, practicing the Afro-Congolese religion known as Palo Monte. His style of Palo Monte had often clashed with the different styles of Congolese religion that the other Congolese practiced. Having a very forceful personality, he had challenged the other spirits and now he was causing trouble for the second medium who was actually a head medium. The head medium's spirit was a free Afro-Creole mulatta, a descendant of a Congolese royal family who had been brought as slaves to Puerto Rico. She herself had come to Cuba to work as a domestic servant. She was also a Palo practitioner as well as a Catholic and Espiritista (i.e., medium in the European style of Kardec). During the session I observed this spirit of the free Afro-Creole mulatta was cleansing the group of negative spiritual vibrations with flowers and holy water. Suddenly, as the free spirit was starting to clean her, the woman with the bozal spirit became possessed. The result was a contest between the two spirits: The Afro-Creole spirit was pushed to the floor by the bozal spirit, who always descended as a very powerful form. Eventually, the assembled group gave the bozal spirit his cigar and his rum, and he began to disclose himself to them. The Afro-Creole spirit, meanwhile, continued to work on those who had not yet been spiritually cleansed (despojo). When the Afro-Creole spirit finished her work, she sat in the circle with the other

members. Then, the bozal and the Afro-Creole spirits began to tell us stories about who they were in their past lives. This is a brief part of their dialogue:

> Afro-Creole woman:
> Yo soy una negra fina. Yo si no andaba sin zapato. Me ponia las salla grandes lindas, mis trajes vordados y me llevaban a pasear en coches. A mi no me gustan los Negros solo me gustan los blancos. A mi me gusta pasar la mano por la cabeza y tocar el pelo «bueno.»
> [I am a sophisticated black woman. I was not one of those blacks who run the streets without shoes. I would wear long and wide skirts. My dresses were embroidered and white men would take me for rides in coaches. I don't like black men, I only like white men. I like to touch their "good hair."]
>
> bozal:
> Si yo se que tu eres una negra fina y que te gustan los blancos. Pero yo siendo un negro Congo que andaba sin zapatos con los pantalones remangados tenia a las negras detras de mi por que me decian que yo hablaba muy lindo. Y las sabia enamorar.
> [Yes, I know that you are a sophisticated black and that you like white men. But, although I am a Congolese who used to be without shoes and used to wear my pants rolled up, the black women would run after me because they said that I talked nice and that I knew how to make them fall in love with me.]

The Congolese Dolls:

Afro-Cuban mediums have dolls to represent their powerful Congolese spirits. Sometimes these dolls are found facing the house entrance. Or they may be in a low place near the spiritual shrine of the house. They sit in tauretes, rustic chairs made from wood and with seats made of goat skin. Informants attribute feelings to the dolls, saying that they smile when they have new, clean clothes. Many mediums have told me that the dolls like to be talked

to and that if the medium forgets to talk to them they put on an angry face. One of my informants told me that her dolls become very upset when she does not change her makeup everyday. By treating each doll as if she were a real representative of its Congolose spirit, the medium shows she has not forgotten the spirit. Although each doll represents a particular spirit, it seems also to develop a personality of its own. According to my observations, as a doll develops its own identity, it still remains connected to the major Congolese spirit that it represents. It is as if the doll merely takes on a different characteristic or aspect of that spirit.

Often, Congolese dolls are placed in the living room. Sitting in a rocking chair, they wear a long dress of yellow and white or blue and white (guinga). In the tradition of spirit belief, dolls are always black. From my fieldwork, I discovered that the mediums who were able to bring their Cuban dolls with them from Cuba to the United States were generally in the most prestigious House-temples. One among several explanations could be that very few people were able to bring these old dolls. Immigrants who got them past Cuba's immigration officials believed they were able to do so because their spirits were very powerful. In fact, only those mediums who were completely sure of their spirits' ability to protect them dared to bring their sacred dolls.

Lydia Gonzales, a medium, explains the spiritual power

of the older Cuban dolls in the tradition of spirit belief as follows:

> Some spiritualists are fakes. They have been able to learn how people act when they are possessed. When I lived in New York, the leader of the spiritual center that I attended told me that one of the mediums was being questioned by the other spiritualists. One day Pedro, the center's leader, went to make an observation of this woman's spiritual meeting at her house. When he arrived at the woman's house, she opened the door and closed it behind him. He noticed an Afro-Cuban doll sitting on a little chair behind the door. The doll was a traditional doll that the spiritualist had brought from Cuba. At once, when he saw the doll he wanted to leave, but he was unable to move. He felt paralyzed from his waist down. The doll was at the door as a representative of the woman's Congolese spiritual power. The force of the dead was keeping the centro's leader from leaving the house. Finally, the woman understood that her spirit had caught him trying to spy and had paralyzed him at the entrance of the door. The centro's leader was carried by two men and they sat him in the spiritual meeting that was going to take place. When the spirit that was represented by the doll took possession of [the] spiritualist, it gave the man a spiritual cleaning. The spirit warned everyone to be aware that she is always sitting as a doll in back of the front door to stop all enemies from entering the house. This man later told me that, had he seen the old Cuban doll, he would never have accused the woman of being a fake.

Congolese Palo spirits, nganga, which are powerful spirits of the dead, tend to have a pot that represents them, a particular way that they descend to earth, and a style of greeting that is different from other regular Congo spirits, represented as dolls..

The Dress of the Spirit

Mediums who are the horses of powerful Congolese spirits dress themselves in a particular style during possession. For example, mediums who are possessed by

Congolese male spirits wear pants rolled up to their knees and demand that their shoes and socks come off. A Congolese spirit must be barefoot because he must touch the ground. According to one of my informants, the Congolese spirits come from the wildness (monte), where they don't wear shoes, and must present themselves as they were when they lived on earth. Female spirits sometimes also request that their socks and shoes be taken off, but not as often as the male Congolese spirits. Many spirits request a scarf around their shoulders or their waist while they are possessing a medium. Others seek to place such scarves on their lap covering their knees. The color of the scarf tends to be red for many of the male spirits and white, yellow, or blue for females. A few of my informants have told me that the colors represent the colors of the Lucumí divinities, but others say that the colors of the scarves are simply the colors that their Congolese spirits like to wear.

The Tradition of Lucumí

The Lucumí religion is a system of ideas, rituals, ceremonies, prayers, songs, music and dances that are devoted to the worship of a highly complex and hierarchial pantheon of African powers called orichas. The orichas are potent, vibrant and mysterious powers each representing a single major deity with many different variants. The pantheon of orichas is one way to understand the devotee's conception of the world and their way of life. In this

section I will examine the Lucumí pantheon as the central focus of empowerment for Lucumí devotees. The historical analysis of the formation of the Lucumí priesthood in Chapters Three and Four will show the role of this pantheon in Afro-Cuban political struggle for democratic rights and the right to maintain an identity autonomous of white power.

Oricha Power: Aché and Eledá

For many Lucumí priests and priestesses, the concept of oricha expresses vitality, strength and the aché that derives from the universe. Antonio, a priest who is a craftsman in a New Orleans antique furniture store, told me I needed to learn as much as possible about the orichas to understand how they provide aché to their "children." The orichas are felt by the Lucumí devotees to be part of their extended family. The priesthood perceives the orichas to be their universal parents. Moreover, the African powers are expressed in the Lucumí religion as part of the identity of the person -- a divine force that exists inside our mind. The eledá, which is the personal manifestation of this force, is believed to motivate and influence the goals, ideas, and actions of individuals and groups. The eledá is the force that drives humans into action and shapes change in their society. This life force, existing within all humans, is governed by the supreme power of Olofí.

Olofí: The Supreme God

The supreme God Olofí, the universal power, controls all forces in the universe. Olofí has created all present forms of life. As Louis, a senior priest in the Pimienta Rama explained, "Olofí is too powerful for us to encounter directly. He represents all the different spiritual forces that control the laws of the universe." Another priest in the same lineage said, "El es la ley del universo" [He is the law of the universe]. Olofí is too great to descend to solve the problems of man. In his transplantation from Africa to Cuba, he became a supreme god and decided to give each of his children a dimension of his own universal power. Olofí has orichas which express his universal power -- a power that also that exists within all of us. We call this power by praying to the eledá, which is the Olofí power inside of us.

According to one patakí (proverb) Olofí's supreme power was redistributed among the other orichas, assigning each deity a specialized aspect of the universe. According to Manolo Rodriguez (see Appendix, Interview 1), Olofí did not give up his power willingly. The orichas had planned a rebellion against him in order to re-distribute Olofí's power among themselves.

> God was too old and tired to be troubled with mundane problems. The orichas complained that Olofí was sleeping on the job and that he did not answer their prayers. The orichas began to plot against Olofí to take control of the universe from him. Obatalá was the only oricha that knew the path to Olofí, and he went to warn Olofí that the orichas were planning a rebellion. When Obatalá arrived in heaven, he found Olofí sleeping and he

> advised Olofí to distribute his Power among the orichas. Olofí gave each of the orichas their individual Powers, but he told them that he did not want to be disturbed, except only foı final decisions. Otherwise, the orichas must respond to Obatalá, as his representative on earth. Olofí made Obatalá the head of all the orichas and responsible for the consciences of all humans.

This patakí reflects the Lucumí value that power not be centralized in the hands of one individual. The data from historical accounts demonstrate that the early priests and priestesses in colonial Cuba organized the religion in a very centralized way that made the Ifá priest responsible for all rituals in the Lucumí religion. This idea of centralized control was often challenged. For example, some Ocha priests and priestesses began operating their temples without the Ifá priests (See discussion of Ocha in New York, Part III). These tensions between the Ifá and Ocha priesthoods contributed to the emergence of Santería. As an Oriaté, Manolo Rodrique is one of the individuals who provides services to Ocha temples that do not use Ifá priests. He discusses a ritual where the orichas challenge the Supreme God and how this reflects challenge to the Ifá priests.

The Eledá: A Power That Lives in the Head

Among the followers of the Lucumí religion it is extremely important that their children become aware that the power of the eledá is in the head. The child will learn that personal identity is closely linked with an oricha.

The "I" of the child is shaped very early by what he learns is the personality of his eledá. A child soon knows that his eledá has a special color that he must at times wear to make his this force happy. The child is trained to protect his head because that is where the eledá lives. Many children whose parents are followers of the Lucumí religion have problems in school when classmates touch their head. The child is constantly being taught that should the center of the head be touched, it is an attack on his or her person. The eledá is a divinity that represents the destiny of the person for the Lucumí.

Most Lucumí priests consider the eledá an oricha. Victor, a ritual specialist in priesthood initiations, told me that the oricha-cum-eledá "is the will of the person." According to him, it is very important to visit an Ifá priest as soon as a child is born to find out the oricha identity of the child's eledá. Among different groups the time frame may vary. The eledá is the protector and advisor that will guide the child through life. The official oricha name of a person's eledá is verified by consulting the Ifá oracle. In many cases the identity of a child may also be established by the orichas themselves. When orichas descend from the sky to interact with humans in a religious festival, they claim the heads of their children. During these festivals an oricha will take possession of its medium or "horse" and, through the medium, tell the mother or father of a particular child that its head belongs to the

oricha. A mother may also learn the name of the oricha that owns the head of her expectant child. From that moment on, the child will be closely watched for signs of the personality of the oricha. The identity of the child and the identity of the oricha are bonded together from the moment they become aware of each other.

The oricha becomes a second image of self and can serve as a role model to emulate. The stories of the orichas are very exciting and the children learn about them as folk heroes. As mentioned before, a child raised in the Lucumí religious tradition learns the identity of his oricha from an early age. Most children will only have to honor the oricha that "rules their head" by making periodic offerings of fruit and by dressing in the color of their particular oricha on ceremonial occasions. The child will also learn much about the personality of the oricha by listening to relatives and friends during these ritual ceremonies. Learning about their orichas, children make this identity part of themselves.

Obatalá

Obatalá is the father of all the orichas. He has been designated to be the representative of Olofí among them. Olofí has passed his power to Obatalá, who is the "owner of all the heads." His responsibilities are very important, because it is through the head that the oricha enters the

priest's or priestess's body during initiation. Obatalá has great intellectual powers that come from Olofí himself.

Obatalá, according to a senior priest of Ifá, is the most rational of all the orichas. He is the intellectual. He is said to be the oricha concerned with the maintenance of traditional values and how orichas and humans should behave. As the owner of all the heads, he has set the standardized rules by which everyone must act. Obatalá has the right to impose sanctions on those orichas or humans who break the rules of the religion. Obatalá stands for the rules of behavior that maintain the Lucumí traditional moral order. The priests of Obatalá must dress all in white and the Obatalá shrine must also be white. The color white of Obatalá is the color used to convey intellectual power and feeling of peace and order.

In her discussion of Obatalá, Gladiz Lopez, an Obatalá priestess, reveals the Lucumí religion's concern with discipline and control of actions (see Appendix, Interview 2). In particular, Obatalá priests and priestesses are encouraged to follow a lifestyle that rejects many of the things enjoyed by most Cubans such as parties and drinking. They are also encouraged to strive to attain personal virtue, using Obatalá as a role model.

> For me, Obatalá is the oricha that represents Olofí, and his words are the law for me. My life changed because Obatalá did not like my big weekend parties. He did not want people drinking in his house and making loud noises. I had to do with just one job because Obatalá wanted me to spend more time at home with him. Obatalá forced

> me to change to a more simple and peaceful lifestyle. He told me that he wanted me to stop working to pay for fancy house, clothes and parties. He did not like disorder in his house [ile]. My life began to change because of Obatalá. As a result, my daughter came to live with me. Obatalá demanded peace and silence and not the wild party life that I had led. My daughter's father had felt good about my change of lifestyle, and permitted my daughter to come live with me. As a priestess of Obatalá, I had the peace of mind and the right atmosphere for her to grow up in.

This aspect of Obatalá must have been very important during the period of slavery in Cuba as well as after independence when the conditions forced many persons to loose their self-dignity. In a similar manner, Obatalá priests play a key role among migrants in the United States, helping them survive at the bottom of a highly stratified society.

Yemayá

In the Lucumí religious tradition, Yemayá is the power that gave birth to all the orichas in the pantheon. As the mother of most of the powers, she has influence over all the orichas. In addition, she represents the idea of "coolness." This idea of coolness is of such major concern in the Lucumí religion that most of the rituals call for the sprinkling of water "to cool" the atmosphere. The environment and the heads of individuals are constantly being cooled down by offerings of fruit or by animal sacrifice. Yemayá controls all the seawater; her

personality is characterized by the coolness of the sea. As a parent of the orichas, Yemayá, like Obatalá, is responsible for the maintenance of the traditional order. Another important concern of Yemayá is to encourage her children to contribute to coolness in the world by offering sacrifices to Olofí. Finally, Yemayá has as her purpose or aché to "cool" the world by reducing conflicts between individuals and groups. She is a strict disciplinarian who demands uncritical obedience from her children. Yemayá obtained her aché because she has always respected Olofí, and he acts very generously towards her in return.

Maritza Roble's case study (see Appendix, Interview 3) describes the role of Yemayá in "cooling" conflict that takes place among neighbors during a time of economic insecurity. It shows that religion contributes to social solidarity as well as social conflict. At the time of the field work, the New Orleans Hispanic community was very affected, as was the entire city, by the oil crisis. Many men were forced to migrate to other cities in search of work. This created a tremendous amount of distrust among neighbors, and competition developed between those who had economic security, such as Maritza, and those whose economic stability was less secure. Conflict also developed among the women in the community, because so many men had left. Many of the older women were distrustful of the younger ones, thinking that they would take the remaining men in the community. The old network of reciprocity which existed

between households fell away. Religion was used as a weapon in these conflicts, justifying one over another.

> Three years ago my daughter was accused by the wife of my husband's friend of dating her husband. The woman waited for my daughter in front of her high school and insulted her in front of all her friends. The woman's husband came to excuse his wife saying that she was under a lot of pressure. He told us that the woman's father and mother had left Cuba to go to Panama and she was having trouble bringing them to the United States. He promised us that his wife was not going to bother my daughter any more. However, one morning we opened the front door and someone had spread a pack of black beans in our steps. This woman had hired a Palero (Palo Mayombe priest), according to an Espiritista, to destroy my daughter. The Espiritista told me that my daughter was protected by Yemayá, and she sent me to a priestess of Yemayá to help us. This priestess was also initiated in Palo Mayombe and understood the dangers that we were facing. The Yemayá priestess told us that Yemayá was very angry with my daughter because she had not made offerings in her honor. The priestess ordered us to bring the money to offer Yemayá fruit, and to sacrifice a duck in her honor. Yemayá is a very good mother with her children and she stands by her children all the time. Yemayá was pacified with the fruit and the duck. After that ritual, we did not have to worry any more about the beans that in front of our house every morning. Finally, the woman got tired of "throwing witchcraft" because it did not have any effect on us. We heard that the Palero told her that he could no longer work for her because Yemayá was protecting us. Every month we paid our respect to Yemayá. My daughter buys fruit and takes it to the Yemayá shrine. Yemayá says that she does not want to claim my daughter's head. But she wants for us to honor and respect her as the queen of all the Lucumís.

Maritza's account of Yemayá demonstrates, like Obatalá, the Lucumí emphasis on supporting a social order which maintains reciprocity. Yemayá rejected the unjust social orders of slavery and capitalism which destroy the traditional way of life. As in the past, Yemayá can provide

order for those individuals that experience rapid cultural change, and can preserve a certain degree of internal and external order by engaging in a social exchange. Today, Afro-Cuban migrants in the United States depend on the priesthood of Yemayá as an oricha that can play a role in bringing order and harmony to families.

In the case study of Carmen Alfonso (see Appendix, Interview 4), Yemayá is an important force in supporting women to have control in the domestic sphere. This oricha helped Carmen control her husband's gambling, and therefore gain control over the household resources. In this case study Carmen describes a story that I heard her repeat often whenever her husband wanted to go out with the boys. She reminds him that he must save money for religious activities to honor Yemayá because the oricha saved his life. The Lucumí religion empowers women by placing importance on the state of the home and financial gifts to the orichas. Women use these aspects of the orichas to increase their control and security in a society which attempts to deny them power.

> Yemayá's money was secretly kept in a small altar that I had for the Virgin of Regla [the Catholic saint with whom Yemayá has been identified in Cuba]. But one day I realized that the money was gone. My husband told me that he had been told by a Brazilian spiritualist that he was going to win in the dog race in Miami. We went to Florida and he went to the races every day, except one, when his brother-in-law convinced him to go fishing with him. One day my husband left early one morning to go fishing with his brother-in-law. While fishing in the boat my husband fell in the water; and once in the water, Yemayá took him to the bottom of the sea. By the time he was pulled out of the water he was almost

> dead. My mother-in-law and I ran to the hospital with the babalao. There he performed a ritual to try to save his life, but Yemayá responded that she was going to take him. The babalao tried to offer Yemayá a sacrifice in return for my husband's life. When my son arrived from New York, he told me that his father had taken Yemayá's money for my son's wedding. I knew that this was a serious offense to Yemayá and I called the babalao and explained to him that my husband had angered Yemayá by taking the money that was for her house...
>
> ...The priestess told me that I had no time to waste and that I needed to go to New York to buy Yemayá her house in order to save my husband's life. She gave Yemayá a little house as symbolic gesture but Yemayá needed to see that our intentions were real. The next day I left my husband in intensive care and returned to New York to buy the house for Yemayá. Finally, after many months of praying to her new shrine at the house I bought, my husband's life was spared.

Ogún (See Appendix, Interviews 5 and 6)

Ogún is perceived by his devotees as one of the most powerful and fearful of the gods in the Lucumí pantheon. He has such power because he controls the forest (monte) which is the main source of aché for the orichas as well as man. Dependent on the monte for their empowerment, the orichas cannot collect their aché from forest vegetation unless Ogún allows them access.

Iron is the second resource that Ogún controls, giving him an even more strategic position in the pantheon. Obviously, the monte can be destroyed by the machinery and iron tools of modernization, but Ogún uses his control over iron to make sure that this does not happen. Ogún has been identified as the owner of all the tools of industrialized

production. Urbanization projects that tend to destroy the forest must wary of his concerns. He protects the forest and mountains where the orichas and humans extract their aché. The establishment of railroads has helped to spread the power of Ogún in Cuba, where he is held to be the owner of all railroads. In Lucumí belief, railroads cannot be planned without considering the forest, because the power of Ogún would have to be dealt with.

The penetration of capitalism into the rural areas of Cuba destroyed many of the rural black communities. These communities had been developed during the Colonial period by runaway slaves known as cimarrones. After the abolition of slavery, the Afro-Cuban inhabitants remained in these communities and continued a way of life reminiscent of African villages. American investors, designers of agricultural capitalism in Cuba, used Cubans to act as rural guards to force people out of these communities. The land of the community, and with it the livelihood, was seized, and the Afro-Cuban inhabitants were forced to take jobs as wage laborers on nearby plantations or in the cities. The Lucumí priests played a role in encouraging people to preserve the community and not move onto plantations or into the urban centers.

Victor Castillo (see Appendix, Interview 5) discusses how Lucumí religious ideas prevented the destruction of his home town. Castillo's community was threatened with destruction by modernization. The people of the community

were going to be displaced by the rural guards. Victor tells about an Ogún priest who became the leader against this threat. In this case study, we can see how class interests were expressed by the Ogún priest, showing that religion can play a role in making people aware of their exploitation.

> My father, who had a godchild that was a chauffeur for the mayor of the town, discovered that the railroad was going to pass through the middle of our community. This meant that many people would have to move their farms so the railroad could pass. One of the people who tried to talk to the government and to the American was Manuel, a son of Ogún. He was very much respected in the town for his sense of justice. Whenever there was a problem in the community about land or money, Manuel was the mediator...He had a piece of iron that represented his Ogún. He had inherited it from his Lucumí father, who was a son of Lucumí slaves...
>
> ...The chief of the regional rural guards was also a son of Ogún, and when Manuel felt it necessary he called upon him for help. The chief responded not so much for Manuel, but for Ogún. The chief of the rural guards called the American and told him that he should look for another space for his mill...
>
> ...The American continued to push the government for the development of the railroad line, although it was going to cut through the middle of the community. He paid enough money to individuals in the government so we were ordered to move our house to the worse section in the area, where the soil was very bad. Manuel had gone to the <u>monte</u> for weeks and was not aware that we were being forced to move by the rural guards. However, it was difficult to reach Manuel in the forest...Only a son of Ogún could penetrate the forest and come out alive...
>
> ...I was a son of Ogún since birth and our friends told my father to send me to look for Manuel. My father told me not to be afraid, that a son of Ogún should never be afraid. Ogún, he told me, was going to be next to me and I was going to have the courage necessary to come out victorious. My mother made Ogún's herbal medicine to protect me from all harm. My father took me to

an Ogún priest in a nearby town, and he taught me the ritual which I needed to perform before entering the forest. He told me that as a son of Ogún, I had to sacrifice a goat before entering the forest...I received a knife, and was also taught the ritual songs to sing while I was sacrificing the goat. I told my father that I was not going to be able to do it because I was a small and skinny guy. The priest told me how the goat was going to behave when I sang the sacrificial song, and I must do it the same way that he had taught me. The Ogún priest told my father that I would need to be initiated after I came out of the forest.

Everything went as we had planned. The goat just stood still as I cut her head and placed it outside the community at the entrance of the forest. When I located Manuel, he was not surprised to see me. It was as if he was waiting for someone to find him to bring him out...He did not seem concerned that the rural guards were in the community. I thought that we had lost our battle with the American. I expected to find everyone in the town dead. Most of the men and women were ready to confront the rural guards with stones and sticks; they were not going to leave their land.

When we arrived, the first news we heard was that the American's private plane had crashed in one of the mountains in the eastern part of the island. It was at that moment that I realized that the orichas were very powerful and not to be ignored. The American's wife had decided to abandon the sugar mill, and the project of developing of the railroad had been stopped completely by the chief of police. We had no more problems from the developers and the rural guards never bothered us again...I must tell you that the community still looks very much like some African villages and there are many old people who can still speak Lucumí. The revolution was concerned with changing the economic conditions of the blacks in Cuba, but I think they have been very careful not to disturb the dead that are buried in people's yards. Manuel's spirits still guard the area and protect the people in the community. The Lucumí are more powerful after they are dead and every Cuban person knows that.

In another Ogún case study, we have further insights into the role that Lucumí religion plays in class

consciousness (see Appendix, Interview 6). Enrique Octavio uses religion to organize workers. His role as an Ogún priest serves as an encouragement for his union work and the struggle against racism and discrimination on the job. Enrique related that since the time of slavery, the sons of Ogún faced death with courage. He said that as a son of Ogún he would lose his aché by not standing up for what is correct and right. As a son of Ogún he said that he encouraged people to fight for their rights:

> I tell my godchildren to meet fire with fire and force with force because Ogún will only accompany those that don't even fear death. Ogún is the oricha that fights for justice for those who are being denied an opportunity.

The Warriors

Ogún is said to live between the city and rural areas and to be a Warrior. A person who receives Ogún as part of the Warrior Shrine will also receive Elegguá and Ochosi. All three are believed to be united in ritual kinship. One Ifá priest informed me that Ifá priests control the Warriors because they are divine.

The Warrior Elegguá is the oricha that best represents action and change in the Lucumí religious tradition. Elegguá controls paths and roads. He also is considered one who disrupts the order established by Olofí. Indeed, he causes confusion in the traditional order that Obatalá is responsible for maintaining. Ochosi represents the hunter and is very close to Ogún. Like Ogún, he is aggressive and

combative with regard to other humans. The goal of both Ogún and Ochosi is to not be won over by their enemies. Both also live between the forest and the city and feel more comfortable in the bush where they specialize in war medicine. Indeed, all of the orichas were initiated in Ifá and, as Ifá priests, were the doctors.

One Ifá priest in New York informed me that in the Lucumí religious tradition, the Warrior's Shrine is the first shrine to be placed in a new House-temple. The Warriors are the most basic symbol that a person interested in entering in contact with the orichas should have. The Ifá priest gives an individual the Warriors so the person can learn to fight human battles and win them. The Warriors also serve to guide each person's endeavors. "We give the Warriors to help the individual break down his old way of life and reconstruct a new one," he said. "The Warriors are given to raise the potency of the individual and to give an injection of power into the person's life. It is the most direct way for the person to get close to the African powers and to learn how to interact with these powers."

Celia Almedia (see Appendix, Interview 7) shows how a single mother uses religion to deal with daily problems. She explains that receiving the Warriors from her Ifá priest provided her with a method for finding practical solutions to the dilemma of meeting daily needs. It also helped her form ties with an Ocha temple that provided a network of people that she could use as resources in crisis situations.

This case study demonstrates the Lucumí religion is oriented to solving the problems of marginalized groups.

This case provides further evidence of the role that Ocha priests and priestesses play in the life of individuals in crisis. In particular, women who find themselves alone depend on the orichas to maximize their own powers of defense.

> My life was so difficult trying to make it alone with my son. A friend from the club suggested that I go with him to visit his godfather in the Bronx who was an Ifá priest. I went for a divination with the Ifá and I was told to receive my Warriors in order to be able to confront the wars that I was about to face as a single mother...
>
> ...I had a hard time raising my son alone in the Bronx. But with the help of my Warriors I found the strength to force my son to take the proper way of life. When I could not keep him from the streets, I forced him to join the Air Force. After his four years were up, he came back and he registered in City College to study business. Every time that he had a battle to face he came to me and told me, "vieja [old lady], tell Elegguá that I need to win a battle against this person who is putting an obstacle in my way." I would go to my shrine to begin to tell my Warriors that they had to help my son. He also came home to the Elegguá shrine and blew tobacco and rum in his face and placed the name of the person in the Warrior Shrines. After he left the house, he was ready for a fight because he knew that the Warriors were right there fighting with him.

In the migration context, the Lucumí ritual kinship replaces the biological family that has been left back home. In the case of Kati Alfonso (see Appendix, Interview 8), her family was in the United States, but was unable to adapt their family structure to the North American context. As a result, Katy felt disconnected from her family. She

attempted to form ties with her peers by following the street lifestyle in order to be accepted. It was Kati's madrina (godmother) who was able to help her transcend this lifestyle she had adopted. Moreover, this case study also brings out the problems faced by the Lucumí religion as it becomes decentralized and its Ifá priests operate as individuals

> For months my madrina [godmother] tried to take me to see the Ifá priest, but she was unable to get an appointment. Madrina had been told by other Ocha priestesses to go to another Ifá priest because the one she went to was losing his aché. My madrina told me that people were saying that this famous man had begun to commercialize the making of Warriors...
>
> ...As we entered the basement of his house I was alarmed at what I saw on the floor. There were about thirty Elegguás all lined up along the hall. There was no variation. They all looked like the one in the botánica. My godmother did not say a word; however, she did not take her eyes off that mass production of Elegguás all lined up on the floor ready to be sold like a pair of shoes. The Ifá priest's wife rapidly took us into the basement to see him. My godmother was very serious during my divination. He even asked her what was wrong with her, but she responded that everything was all right...I asked madrina about the long lines of Elegguás on the floor. She responded that apparently he had been producing them for the Puerto Ricans who did not know that there were twenty-one different Elegguás. Madrina was very sad because she loved the Puerto Ricans very much and hated the thought that the Ifá priest was exploiting their lack of knowledge about the Lucumí religion...
>
> ...Madrina told me that she now understood why many of the Lucumí priestesses called the Ifá priest's house the Elegguá factory. She had been told by other priestesses that he had been breaking away from other Ifá priests. He operates basically alone because other elders of Ifá in New York don't want to support him. According to madrina, priestesses were saying that the Ifá priest's new fame has made him forget the

> responsibility of the Ifá priest to the community...
> ...My madrina told me that was the reason why I had been having all those problems -- the Ifá priest was breaking the rules of the tradition. He had lost his aché and he gave me an Elegguá that did not meet my spiritual needs. My eledá, who is Ochún, protected me and that was the reason why I was still alive. They told my madrina that many Ifá priests who had been initiated in Havana were breaking contact with their senior houses. These Ifá priests wanted to be autonomous from their seniors in Havana. However, the Ifá priests from Matanzas have maintained their close relationships with their senior houses. Madrina was told to take me to another Ifá priest to find out the identity of my eledá. We had initial doubts about Yemayá being the one for me.

Changó and Ochún (See Appendix, Interviews 9-13)

In the Lucumí pantheon Ochún, Changó, and Oya are also considered warriors. Like Elegguá, Ogún and Ochosi they are thought to be important in ensuring victory against injustice. Changó is an oricha that encourages a war-like attitude in his devotees. Different from Ogún, he is more concerned with victory than with justice. Changó is a military power that takes vengeance by burning with fire. The most political of the all the powers, he never forgets who has done him wrong. The personality of Changó is also reflected during the Colonial period when large numbers of Afro-Cubans participated in the Spanish military and received commendation for their bravery. They also joined the ranks of rebels that fought against the Spanish government.

> Changó is the force that refuses to submit in front of stronger forces. He was the force that

> pushed the mambises [liberating army , most of whom were Afro-Cubans] in the revolution against Spain or in any political struggle.
>
> When he goes to war Changó is not thinking about family or friendship ties but only about winning the war. Changó does not respect the highest supreme power that is Olofí. Many times he has tried to plot against Olofí himself. Imagine, he is so terrible that he has tried to overthrow other orichas. It was Changó that convinced Oya, his warrior wife, to battle with Osain for the sacred herbs that Oya controlled. Changó does not listen to reason at all and he will encourage his children to use force to become victorious. He is the oricha that is constantly in wars with the other orichas.

Ochún, although female, is also a warrior. Conflicts are won by her using the art of lovemaking and dancing. As a warrior, she is irrational and engages in battles with other orichas; she is not concerned with maintaining harmony among powers. Like Changó, Ochún is described as having unlimited sexual freedom, a privilege of her Warrior class. Both reject monogamy and feel free to explore all sorts of sexual emotions. This oricha is also reflected in the free black women who lived in colonial Havana. These women had sexual relationships with wealthy and influential Spaniards in order to attain economic independence. This also allowed them to financially support the struggle against slavery. Ochún and Changó are the most irrational powers of the Lucumí pantheon. However, it is this particular characteristic that allows them to empower their priests with a special revolutionary force. Changó prefers to manifest himself through drumming rather than Ifá divination, which maintains the natural order. Ochún's

sexuality is in political struggle against powers that are stronger than herself. Sexual power gives Ochún an extra force that other orichas lack. This force gives her a unique position.

The orichas that occupy the top of the hierarchy of the Lucumí pantheon, Obatalá and Yemayá, promote a sense of reciprocity among humans, among orichas, and between humans and their gods, as well as a sense of justice, respect, and fidelity to the traditional order. Oba, an oricha with a smaller following than Yemayá and Obatalá, is also concerned with peace and order.

Ochún and Changó are revolutionary orichas that are pushing constantly for the transformation of the traditional order. Whereas the other orichas depend on the power given to them by the supreme God, Olofí, to win in battles, Changó and Ochún use more of their own personal gifts, like the ability to play music and dance, to become victorious in combat. Sexuality is also a force that Changó and Ochún manipulate to turn things to their advantage and to destroy their enemies. Two other oricha warriors, Oyá, a female, and Aganyú, a male, are both respected as forces to be reckoned with.

The cases studies of Changó priestesses and priest demonstrate the different religious meaning that exists within the Lucumí religion. Changó priests and priestesses are influenced by the irrational forces of Changó which are different from the ideas of Obatalá and Yemayá. The

variation of the personality of the orichas creates tensions and conflicts among the contrasting perception of social change presented by each oricha.

It is important to note that the descriptions of the orichas will vary according to the age, gender, ethnicity and personal experience of the practitioners. For example, in my interviews I became aware that the description of Changó varied with gender. The Changó priests that I spoke with tended to emphasize Changó as being concerned with victory. The Changó priestesses, on the other hand, described Changó as being concerned with justice.

Orula

Orula, the last oricha in the Lucumí pantheon to be discussed in this chapter, is the oricha that reveals the past life of all the orichas. He is the oricha of the Lucumí oracles and a prophet because he is able to discover the future and all new things to come. He is the moral force of Olofí on earth. Orula is also the oricha of all Ifá priests and is the centralizing force for all the orichas. According to one Ifá priest, Orula's power is to fulfill the destiny of each individual and group of people. Here is his explanation why Orula is the most important oricha in the Lucumí pantheon:

> We understand Orula to be the highest oricha in the Lucumí religion because he was the only oricha to be present in the creation. Orula is the oricha that is present when Olofí gives breath at the birth of individuals. He knows the destiny of each individual

> and controls all chains of communications known as the odun. There is one important aspect of the religion that needs to be understood clearly by all the priests and priestesses. This is that Olofí gave Ifá to Orula before distributing aché to the other orichas. The orichas could not communicate with humans without Ifá divination.

In effect, divination is a core religious concept for Lucumís. Miguel, an Ifá priest, told me that Olofí gives devotees a wide range of possible life patterns to follow. The role of the Ifá priest is to counsel each individual by divination with the chain of Ifá, which in Cuba is called ékuele, the sacred chain of eight seeds that the Ifá priest uses to communicate with Olofí. A priestess of Ochún says the following about consulting Ifá divination:

> Olofí is too busy to determine the will of every individual. He allows you to choose your own path. The responsibility of finding the real purpose of your life depends on you. Your madrina sponsor helps you find the right destiny. The problem is that to know your mission in life is not easy because you have to communicate with all the orichas. The babalao has Ifá, the most complete system of divination that serves as a system of communication between Olofí, the orichas, and also humans.
>
> Since the babalao can communicate with all the orichas, the individual can find, through Ifá divination, the right choices to fulfill his destiny in life. I have lots of health problems that my doctors can only cure with harmful medicine. The babalao is a specialist in pharmaceutical herbs used to treat people thousands of years ago. Orula is not only a doctor, but he also can give medicine for the soul. Most doctors can't cure spiritual problems.

In the context of divination, Orula, although an oricha, is totally different from the other orichas in the pantheon. As one Ifá priest has put it:

> We serve Orula, and our mission is to carry out his work on earth. The babalaos are not sons (omo) of this oricha because Orula does not see his priests as

> children--due to that fact Orula does not become incarnate in our head nor spiritually possess us. Orula is not an eledá that exists in our heads like the other orichas. This means that he has a very distinctive category of priests. I feel that his babalaos are totally separate from the Ocha priesthoods who "crown" their orichas in a ritual called Kari Ocha.

Ancestral Spirits in the Lucumí Religion

The eggguns, or ancestral spirits, also have an important place in the Lucumí religion. For many of the Lucumí priests and priestesses whom I interviewed, the eguns are the spirits of the group of priests and priestesses that began the lineage in Cuba. A young Afro-Cuban woman priestess trained by a Lucumí priestess in New York said that her godmother told her that there cannot be a Lucumí ritual that does not begin by saluting the eguns. This priestess had learned from her Lucumí godmother that the eguns are the spirits of the priests and priestesses who gave birth to the lineage back in Africa. These were the elders of the rama who had remained in Africa. In Africa they had prayed and sent many of their sacred objects to Cuba to protect the priests and priestesses of their lineages who were taken as slaves.

The eguns and their role in the Lucumí religion need further research, above all to understand why, in some contexts, they are an integral part of Lucumí rituals while in other contexts, they are placed in marginal positions. In another section of this work, I will describe a case during the transplantation of the Lucumí religion to New

York in which the eguns became marginal. For the majority of the followers of the Lucumí religious tradition, the eguns must be worshipped. However, there is no priesthood that is responsible for the eguns. In the Lucumí religion the eguns do not possess any of the individual priests or priestesses and Lucumí rituals are carefully separated from the eguns. Yet, the Lucumí priestess or priest never forgets to perform the proper rituals for the eguns. The ritual is done in order to secure their alliance in daily struggles. The adoption of the Lucumí religion among Puerto Ricans and African Americans has increased the popularity of eguns (Manson 1981). As spirits of the dead (los muertos) they must be treated with the same respect as they were in Africa, otherwise they will block access to the African powers.

Becoming Specialized: The Coronation of the Oricha

When the eledá or head of a person is claimed by an oricha, a "crowning of oricha" takes place, and the individual becomes a priest or priestess of that oricha. The power of the oricha becomes closely identified with the person's own identity, as he or she makes a break with the accustomed lifestyle of the past. Such priests and priestesses become further distinguished from the rest of the people through transformation in an initiation ritual.

They enjoy a second personal identity that permits them to transcend their immediate surroundings and to communicate with the forces of the universe.

The person who is "crowned" with the aché of an oricha empowers the eledá that lives inside his or her head. Entering a priesthood, this individual gains a new identity that will remain a secret from those outside the ritual family to which he or she is born. In addition, the priest and priestess who initiate the devotee become his or her godparents. This ritual kinship is extensive and based on the idea that through ritual, the orichas re-create themselves. An initiate is also considered a brother or a sister by other members of the ritual family who have been initiated by the same priest or priestess.

A priest or priestess is an individual who has become sacred because he or she has been "coronated" with the aché of a divinity. The majority of the followers have little information about the particular personality of his or her own eledá, but once a person is initiated into an oricha priesthood, he has a direct way to honor his eledá. The eledá will be called by the name of that particular oricha. An eledá that has been consecrated by receiving the aché of the oricha will be worshipped, honored and respected. Accordingly, most new Lucumí priests and priestesses must learn how to perform the traditional rituals for their particular oricha.

The Lucumí priest or priestess must learn to speak in the Lucumí language to address the oricha. Furthermore, the iyabo, as the newly consecrated priestess or priest is called, must be prepared to learn the Lucumí traditional styles of greeting among priests. Especially, he or she needs to learn to show respect to the traditional hierarchy of the religion. In the Lucumí religious tradition, the priestly class has legitimacy due to their office, which separates them from the non-priestly groups. A Lucumí priest or priestess has the authority to interact with the orichas and their legitimacy is the result of having been coronated in the name of their oricha.

Lucumí Initiation

Corresponding to the hierarchical pattern of Orichas is a highly structured and disciplined path of initiation. As a person moves along this ritual path, he or she gains aché. The first stage of initiation involves the imposition of necklaces (collares). An already initiated priest or priestess then takes the devotee to have a divination, or reading, ideally performed by an Ifá priest using 16 nuts or a chain of eight seeds.

The ritual collares (necklaces) become the vehicle by which the devotee will follow the path of his or her particular oricha. The collares ceremonies focus on consecrating the devotee's head where the person's eledá is found. The collares will help to transform or to activate

the eledá in order that the person may find their goal in life. The collares ceremonies are a way for individuals to identify a purpose in life similar to the life of the oricha. They are a step towards building a close identification with the oricha that will determine the person's character. The collares initiations are mainly performed by a priestess.

In the Lucumí religious tradition, strict rules of asceticism are maintained to prepare a devotee for the collares ceremony. The collares have the aché of the orichas because they have been consecrated in sacrificial ceremonies and baptized in a sacred liquid called omiero. In the Ifá House-temples of Cuba, only four collares were given, representing four orichas, each with a particular color: white for Obatalá, red and white for Changó, blue and crystal for Yemayá, and yellow and amber for Ochún. In the United States and in some Ocha House-temples in Cuba, devotees practice a more modern form of Lucumí known as Santería. Five collares are given; the fifth is black and red for Elegguá.

The second stage of initiation, the divination, is the system of communication through which the orichas talk to the devotee. Such divinations are based on the odun, chains of oricha life stories transmitted by Ifá priests. These stories, called patakís, present the orichas as real human beings solving problems to enhance their survival. Most of the patakís show that the Lucumí religion is a

practical religion. The practical solutions to human problems are called ebó. For living people, these include ritual, ceremonies, prayers, and animal sacrifices used to influence the orichas to help humans find solutions to problems. The Ifá priest is the mediator between the orichas and the person receiving the reading.

The Ifá priest's position as the most elite of priests in the Lucumí religion is due to the prestige of Ifá divination. According to Lydia Cabrera, the Ifá odun are older than those presently used in Nigeria (personal communication, 1982). Bascom (1952:179) argues that Cuban Ifá is the most complex system of Ifá in the New World. Ifá divination is based on sixteen major odun with sixteen secondary possibilities each, totalling 256 possible signs. The purpose of divination is to determine which oricha will protect a person for life. As each oricha in the pantheon communicates through Ifá, one of them discloses that a devotee is his or her son or daughter (omo).

Although divinations are ideally performed only by an Ifá priest, in the Santería variant of Lucumí, a visit to an Ifá priest in not always necessary. A lower-level Ocha priest or priestess can also be trained to divine a complex divination technique called dilogún. This system uses 16 cowrie shells and is similar to the Ifá technique of 16 nuts or an eight-seed chain.

The Ocha priests who perform divinations are called italeros. Like the Ifá priests, their prestige is based

upon the ability to memorize as many patakís as possible for each odun. One important distinction between the Ifá priest and the italero is that the italero is only qualified to interpret odun one through twelve. This rule, which is strictly observed by all varieties of Lucumí, gives the Ifá priest the privilege of being the only one to be able to interpret odun 13-16. Thus, the Ifá priest is established as the final authority.

The Ifá priesthood is closed to women, and there are very few women among the italeros. Women are involved in a more simple system of divination known as obi. The power of obi divination rests in the priestess's ability to recite the Lucumí prayers. Obi divining does not require that a priest or priestess learn the patakís necessary to become an Ifá priest or dilogún diviner.

A third step on the path toward priesthood, following the collares ceremony and the divination, is for the devotee to receive the oricha Elegguá (whose shrine opens the path to good fortune) and the other Warriors (the orichas that help an individual overcome obstacles including witchcraft). These ceremonies derive from what has been called the Lucumí reformation, which placed the Ifá priesthood at the center of the Lucumí religion. Prior to the reform which took place in Havana in 1890, Ifá priests only gave devotees Elegguá, and even this was not a requirement for initiation. The emergence of the idea of giving Warriors as a step on the way to initiation allowed the Ifá priests to have more

centralized power (Canet 1973:21; Sandoval 1989). Santería attempts to move away from this centralization of power in the hands of the by Ifá priests. As a result, in Santería, the Warriors can be given by lower level Ocha priests or priestesses.

Among the most traditional Lucumí Houses today, the Warriors are considered to be first steps in the religion. These House-temples place these all male orichas (Elegguá, Ogún, Ochosi) at the top of the hierarchy (Canet 1973:28). In their struggle to centralize the religion, moreover, the Ifá priests have begun to give, along with the Warriors, a necklace and bracelet of their Ifá Orula.

The fourth phase of initiation is the ceremony of Kari Ocha (Kari, to put; Ori, head) in which the devotee is consecrated as a priest or priestess. Lucumí initiation into the priesthood prepares a devotee to specialize in communication with one of the following orichas: Obatalá, Yemayá, Changó, Ochún, Oya in addition to the Warriors. In the ceremony of Kari Ocha, his or her head is consecrated with the aché of the oricha in question. The office of the priesthood carries the power of the oricha. Through many ceremonies, the initiate is given a second identity and a new mission in life. This includes a new, African name representing one of the many identities of the oricha.

The Kari Ocha ceremony involves the whole community. Each of the many priests and priestesses employed has a role to play based on the position of seniority and

specialization in the Lucumí hierarchy. Some are the godfathers or godmothers who provide the orichas from which the new priest or priestess is born.

A priestess called oyugbona (the person who sponsors initiation rituals) fulfills the role of ritual organizer. The song master (oriaté) performs the coronation and the shaving of the head as well as prepares the sacred liquid. Every ritual in Lucumí is performed with songs and prayers. It is believed that singing calls the orichas down to earth.

A traditional Lucumí initiation culminates when an Ifá priest is called in to perform an animal sacrifice in honor of the entire Lucumí pantheon. In addition to song and prayer, this sacrifice is said to bring the orichas down from the sky to feed on the blood of the animals. The sacrifice is the medium through which aché is passed to the new priesthood. Among those who follow the tradition of Santería, the Ifá priest is replaced by an Ocha priest whose privilege it is to sacrifice four-legged animals. In conjunction with the sacrifice, the iyawo, as the new priest or priestess is called, is dressed in the royal clothes of his/her oricha. A throne, having also been prepared for the iyawo, the Lucumí community comes to visit the newly crowned king or queen in a ceremony called Día del Medio.

The ceremony of Día del Medio employs dressmakers and designers. Large amounts of silk and brocade are purchased in preparation for this day and used in making the clothes and the throne. The style of dress worn by the iyawo

follows the costumes worn by the king and queen of the Lucumí cabildo in colonial Cuba, which re-created the idea of a European and African monarchy for Obatalá, Yemayá and Ochún. For Oya and Changó, the style reflects both European and Moorish influences. The Warriors wear African warrior styles. The design of the clothes varies depending on the experiences of the artist.

Other priests and priestesses involved in Día del Medio specialize in ritual cooking of special food for the orichas. These cooks have extensive knowledge of the favorite dishes that need to be prepared for the entire pantheon. They also assemble a large communal dinner to feed the guests who come to salute the new king, queen, or warrior. It is important to mention that the blood of the sacrificial animals is offered to stones (otans) where the orichas will live, but the meat is added to the communal meal.

On the Día del Medio, the House-temple is open to everyone, including strangers. The purpose is for everyone to pay homage not to the initiate, but to the orichas. The identities of the initiate and his or her oricha are viewed as one. The person is only a representative of the oricha among humans. After twelve in the afternoon, the iyawo is dressed in his or her royal clothes. These clothes will not be worn again until he or she is presented to the bata drum. This will take place another day when iyawos from different Houses will gather before the oricha of the drum. On that

day, there is a celebration with drumming, singing and dancing both as a form of prayer and to express joy that a child has been initiated.

Also following the Día del Medio is another day of divination is called ita. On this day, various Ocha priests and priestesses meet to consult the cowrie shells, giving the iyawo more information about how to guide his or her new life. The next day is a visit to the market. Accompanied by other priests and priestesses, the iyawo leaves the House and goes to the market under the influence of the orichas. The new priest or priestess is expected to steal a fruit which will bring good luck.

Lucumí and Santería, a Brief Comparison

As we have seen, the Lucumí religion is a complex phenomenon based on a pantheon of African gods and goddesses, and involving lengthy initiation and divination rituals.

Taken as a whole the Lucumí religion has contributed to Afro-Cuban identity and to the formation of social consciousness among individuals and groups of Afro-Cubans. Lucumí priests and priestesses encourage this consciousness, in part by making sure that there is a reciprocal relationship between humans and the orichas. They see themselves as guardians of an equilibrium between humans on the earth and African powers in the sky.

The Lucumí religion presents the world as dynamic, orichas being forces that can produce change. Humans in the Lucumí tradition are also considered agents of change whose courage derives from interacting with African powers and the forces of the universe. The focus of this religious tradition is on how each divinity and the various priesthoods that represent it can help humans in their access to empowerment in the world.

Santería is a religious variant that formed in the 1930s in Havana as the result of contact among Lucumí, Catholicism, and the tradition of spirit belief. The predominant characteristics of Santería are Lucumí-derived. Indeed, it is not easy to delineate the boundaries clearly, since Santería has the same deities as in the Lucumí pantheon. The most significant difference is its greater tolerance for other religious traditions, in particular Catholicism and the tradition of spirit belief.

Santería is more personalistic than Lucumí, in which there is a major concern with hierarchical, official positions and the rules of the religion (see figure 1, Appendix B). One Lucumí Ifá priest stated that the difference between Lucumí and Santería was that the former is organized in ramas. He added that Santería has no branches, only leaves: "Ahora con Santería no hay Ramas solamente hojas."

Santería appears to allow more innovation. As a result, we find the emergence of many ritual entrepreneurs

who move between the different religious systems as opportunity allows. Nor does Santería depend on the patakís to the same degree as in the Lucumí religion. In Lucumí, the patakís are used to maintain the religious order. Santería uses the patakís not to justify the social organization of the priestly and divine hierarchies, but to demonstrate the heroism of individual orichas.

The priests and priestesses of Santería are not so closely supervised by the Ifá priest, the Lucumí supreme leader. In Santería, the priest and priestess are more concerned with maintaining a devoted clientele that promotes their personal success than with promotion in the priestly hierarchy.

Finally, oricha possession is not controlled by the patakí in Santería. When an oricha possesses a person, he or she has more "freedom of expression," the possession not being predetermined by the description of the deity in the patakí. In other words, Santería does not demand that the person possessed behave like the oricha in the patakí.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

If we are to reach an adequate understanding of Afro-Cuban religious traditions, we must place their development in the appropriate historical context. This requires, first, that we delineate the major political and economic changes affecting their development in Cuba and, second, that we take note of their differential impact on the various regions, east and west of that island. To facilitate this analysis, we shall lay out change in terms of two major periods: 1) the period of initial colonization and of colonial rule during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, overall referred to as the pre-plantation period, and 2) the plantation period from 1790 on, especially the nineteenth century, when the economy became dominated by plantation agriculture. This period was characterized most notably by the expansion of increasingly mechanized sugar-cane cultivation carried on in an increasingly capital-intensive and rationalized form, based on heavily intensified slave labor.

The two periods had a highly differentiated impact on the working population. The pre-plantation period witnessed the imposition of Spanish rule in addition to the creation of numerous social niches and spaces that offered options

for the development of autonomous lifeways. These niches and spaces, in turn, provided opportunities for the maintenance and proliferation of autonomous religious forms and practices. The plantation period, in contrast, affected lifeways and the religious traditions carried by them through the wholesale mobilization of labor for intensified cultivation on large estates (Ibarra 1967:22; Le Riverend 1974).

Colonization and The Early Colonial Period (XVI-XVII Centuries)

Western civilization reached Africa and the Americas in the fifteenth century as a result of Western expansion that sought to find new markets and to spread Christianity. The Iberian peninsula had been under the control of Muslims from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. The Spanish had acquired their territory by offering land to local lords in return for fighting in the name of Castile. The Iberians were influenced by these long wars against the Muslims, thereby developing a culture of conquest (Aguirre 1966:34).

The Portuguese arrived in Africa in the fifteenth century and raided the coastal villages, where much of the population were Muslim peasants and merchants. They discovered that the villages were protected by large, powerful interior states. The Portuguese began dealing with Africans not by trying to colonize them but by making them trading partners. The Africans had many commodities to

trade, such as pepper, rubber, leather, beeswax, and slaves. The slave trade was not very important initially, but European colonization of the Americas made trade a very profitable business. The Spanish made initial contact with Amerindians in the Caribbean in 1492; Christopher Columbus, the leader of this first expedition, thought that he had discovered a direct route to Asia. Two years later, the Spanish and the Portuguese signed the treaty at Tordesillas, which divided the newly acquired territory between Spain and Portugal. As part of the stipulations of this treaty, Spain took all the territory west of an imaginary line 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, and Portugal took the territory east of the line. The treaty enabled Spain to claim most of the Western Hemisphere (Wolf 1982:131).

The conquistadores colonized the island of Cuba between 1510 and 1517, establishing seven villages. Most of them came from the neighboring island of La Hispañiola. The Spaniards also brought with them to Cuba African slaves from Spain known as Ladinos, persons of African descent who had been christianized in the thirteenth century. Some of the Ladinos were made to work in gold-panning along rivers and in the mines alongside the native Amerind population (Ortiz 1975:85; Pike 1967:346).

The Spanish Crown allocated to the conquistadores both Amerindian land and groups of natives in order to search for gold and silver and to cultivate crops for the subsistence of the Europeans. These grants of land and services were

called encomiendas and served the Crown as a way of distributing land and labor without abrogating the centralizing power of the state (Wolf 1959:188-189). Not only was the encomendero given access to land and labor only at the behest of the Crown, but he was also supposed to serve as an agent of the Crown in socializing the slaves into Christianity. Yet the hard labor and the brutality experienced by the indigenous population initiated a tremendous demographic decline. The Amerindians were also unable to resist the new diseases brought to Cuba by the Europeans and began to die rapidly due to epidemics of measles, smallpox, and respiratory infections. By the end of the seventeenth century, most of the indigenous Caribbean population had been wiped out (Harris 1964:13).

The conquistadores expanded their political control through a combination of military conquest and religious conversion. The indigenous population of the island of Cuba were perceived as noble savages who needed to be saved from a stage of religious darkness. The long battles against the Moors in the Iberian peninsula had made violence the predilect cultural stance of the conquistadores. To flee this violence, many Amerindians were forced to escape from the encomiendas and hide in the dense mountain forests covering the eastern part of the island (Franco 1975:326).

For the same reasons, Afro-Spanish slaves arriving from Hispañiola soon began to escape into the forest with the Amerindians. These runaways were called cimarrones, a term

first used to describe feral cattle running free in the savannas. The cimarron was also perceived as an individual who had rejected the Christian god and was severely punished for his relapse if captured. Amerindians like Hatuey, a Taino leader who battled against the conquistadores and attempted to prevent the colonization of the island, were punished by being burned alive (Aguirre 1966:59).

The most important result of the cultural contact between the Amerindians and the Africans was that the latter were enabled to acquire knowledge about surviving in the forest in areas over which the state had no control. The cimarron subculture that emerged on the island was transferred from the Amerindians to the slaves of African descent, who eventually replaced the Amerindians themselves. This culture of combat continued to be passed down from one generation of slaves to another. Consequently, Amerindian culture became the baseline of a new counterculture in the eastern region that stood in opposition to the encomiendas and servitude. This baseline culture embodied both the experiences of the indigenous population in their struggle against the forces of Western expansion and the social ties with the Afro-Spaniards who escaped to the forest. The "Amerindian cimarrones" later became a common symbol of resistance both for the African slaves and for the Afro-Creoles when they began to battle the forces of colonial domination (Ortiz 1987:362; Franco 1975:326).

The conquistadors saw a threat in these ties between

the Amerindians and the Afro-Spanish because of the constant attacks carried out by the cimarrones upon the coastal cities. Moreover, sexual unions between Indians and blacks could only increase the number of offspring loyal to the cimarrones movement, rather than to the masters of slaves (Bastide 1967:73).

As a result, the Spanish took severe measures against possible alliances between the two oppressed groups and prohibited by law the formation of sexual unions between African male slaves and Amerindian females. In contrast, unions between the slave masters and Amerindian or African slave women were encouraged (Ortiz 1916:401). Although the alliances between Indians and people of African descent were soon cut short by the rapid disappearance of the indigenous population, they permitted a phase of cultural contact both within the encomiendas and in the mountain forests.

Ortiz (1987:334-335) has pointed out that during the first century of the pre-plantation period, the relationship between the Amerindians and the Afro-Creoles was closer than that between Amerindians and whites. Moreover, as Amerindians passed down to the Ladinos the tradition of cimarronage, by 1527 the Ladinos were no longer allowed to be brought legally to the Caribbean as slaves. This law did not, however, prevent their arrival, since Ladinos continued to be introduced by illegal means (Cabrera 1980:15; Wright 1970:315). Spain also began recruiting slaves for Cuba from the Portuguese-colonized Congo. At first, in the sixteenth

century, these slaves were subjected to a sojourn in Spain for their Christianization but later, by the seventeenth century, this practice was dropped. By this time, and throughout the eighteenth century, the majority of slaves held in Cuba were of Congolese origin. Escaped slaves, the cimarrones or maroons, were also increasingly Congolese (Franco 1975:271-272; Pike 1967:336; Curtin 1969:106-7).

The division of the newly discovered territories between Spain and Portugal gave rise to a political struggle among the European nations. French and British pirates and privateers initiated constant attacks on the coastal populations of the Spanish possessions, especially those concentrated in the ports of Santiago de Cuba and Havana. In the sixteenth century, African slaves would often join French, Dutch, and British pirates, thus escaping slavery by taking the road to the sea (Franco 1975:334-335). Other African slaves took advantage of these political struggles to rebel against the slave-master class by burning and looting the homes of whites.

The discoveries of Mexico and Peru initiated an uneven development on the island. The city of Havana, located in the western part, became a major port for the fleets traveling between the Americas and Spain. Havana exported cattle, horses, and hides to Spain and also received exclusive authorization as the center for the distribution of slaves and imported goods from Spain. The city became the only port authorized to trade with Seville and to

receive slaves. In contrast, Santiago de Cuba on the east coast was denied this privilege as a major trade center. As a result, the eastern region yielded its economic importance to the western part of the island (Knight 1970:107).

Afro-Cubans in the Western Region During the Pre-Plantation Period

The movement of slaves, free blacks, and mulattoes into both unskilled and skilled occupations before the development of the plantation offered them some opportunities for maneuvering within the limited structure of the colonial system. Herbert Klein (1967) sees those black people, although enslaved, as enjoying a certain degree of choice in the pre-plantation period. He discusses in particular the role played by black women who owned and operated taverns and eating houses. Most of these business women were located in the city of Havana, which began to bloom economically when the fleets used the port as a stopping point before starting on the long journey back to Spain with silver from the Americas. Many of these women made a small fortune from the illegal trade of tobacco they cultivated on small plots of land (estancias). The tobacco was brought to the city and sold by these women to travelers in the fleets (Klein 1967:145-146; Wright 1970:314).

Klein also states that people of African descent dominated the economic sphere during the eighteenth century. He identifies two factors which contributed to the black

control of a niche within the colonial market. The first was the fact that the Crown regulated the immigration of white settlers by not allowing entry to those who had recently converted to Christianity. He states:

> The major reason for this early predominance of coloreds in the labor market was essentially due to the initial lack of heavy white migration into the island in the first two centuries of colonization. In the history of Spanish migration to the Indies in this two hundred year span of time, the system of white indenture was never carried into effect. The careful exclusion of large numbers of "new Christians" and (in the first year) non-Castillians, did not allow for unrestricted immigration, and those who could meet the qualifications were required to pay for their own passage. Although large numbers were transported free under particular expeditions supported either by the crown or by private funds, they were primarily soldiers rather than peasants or laborers. (1967:142).

The second reason was that Spaniards who arrived during the pre-plantation period dreamt of becoming "great hidalgos," the social ideal of medieval Spain. They thus emphasized land ownership, showing less interest in men involved in craft production. Only concerned with having large plots of land and many slaves to do the manual labor, they bought slaves without any fear that they would be able to replace whites in the urban colonial market.

The population that developed in Cuba in the eighteenth century can be characterized as unique because it also included a very large free population of African descent. One of the important reasons for the rapid growth of a free black population (Klein 1967:194) during the pre-plantation period was a form of manumission (coartación) which allowed the slave to purchase his own freedom. This idea had its

roots in Roman law permitting the slave to own property, including property in his own person. Under the coartación system, slaves were also allowed to buy their freedom at the same price paid for them by their masters and were permitted to pay the price in installments. Aimes states:

> Coartación achieved its most refined state in Cuba. By the seventeenth century, it was a well-established custom, and by the eighteenth century, it had been codified by royal decrees. Essentially, Cuban coartación gave slaves the right to demand that their price be publicly announced in a law court, and that they were entitled to pay the price in installments (Aimes 1975:226).

Klein says about the pre-plantation period that

> From the very beginning of the colonial period, in fact, a large and vital free colored population was developed on the island. Probably the most important reason for this rapid growth was the climate of opinion in Cuba, which regarded manumission as a natural part of slavery and something that was to be expected for the majority of slaves. This attitude was deeply imbedded in traditional custom and law and was fully promoted by the church. It was also supported by the economic and even military dependence of the larger white population on the colored slaves (1967:194).

In contrast to the slaves in cities, rural slaves did not have the same opportunities to save money in order to buy their freedom; yet, even these rural slaves found a way to save some capital. Rural slaves were given small plots on hacienda lands to grow their own food. In the pre-plantation period, masters sometimes found themselves with insufficient food supplies for their slaves, and they depended on the slaves to grow their own food. However, the slaves did not consume all the crops that they had planted and bartered surpluses with peasants, with slaves from other

plantations, or with cimarrones. Slaves in the rural areas were also allowed leisure time on Sunday, and many took advantage of this opportunity to come to the markets in order to sell their products to travellers (Ortiz 1974:159; Pérez de la Riva 1946:97). Throughout the eighteenth century, Cuba witnessed an expansion of social opportunities not only for slaves but also for the growing population of free blacks, but also for slaves (Kipler 1976:42).

During the pre-plantation period, land became the most valuable commodity after the mining industry disappeared along with the native people. The conquistadores hoped to become the new American feudal lords, similar to those in Spain where the kingdom of Castile provided land for nobles in return for fighting against the Moors during the Reconquista. In Cuba, the military nobility received the largest grants of land even though some of the recipients did not live on the island. Much of this land in the western region came to be used as pasture grounds for horses and cattle. Horses were in great demand both in internal and external markets for their military significance and for their symbolic role as indices of power and wealth. Such horse-raising came to add luster not only to the Spanish land-owning elite, but also to their slaves who worked with horses.

Slaves worked alongside other laborers on the horse and cattle estates. Work with horses not only qualified them for top positions in value within the slave system, but the

African association of the horse with royalty and governing power also carried over into the New World. In addition, such slaves were permitted to carry arms (Ortiz 1916:406). Cattle ranches (hatos), in turn, proved a highly profitable enterprise that did not require large outlays of capital and investment and yet had a dependable market in supplying meat to the growing urban population. (Aguirre 1966; Klein 1966:58).

Some members of the military elite also invested in tobacco (vegas), as did other growers, especially when tobacco became a profitable commodity in the seventeenth century. Many planters (vegueros) established their farms in the vicinity of Havana, where they could sell their product to the Cadiz merchants settled there. Yet the proximity of such profitable holdings in the vicinity of the city invited royal efforts to control the trade (Guerra and Pérez 1952:151). The Crown sought to control tobacco prices and to ensure that tobacco could be sold only to Spain (Le Riverend 1981:32-34; Guanche 1983:178). This led tobacco planters to disperse into the rural area, and to distance themselves from the urban centers, in order to escape the control of the state. It has been noted that relations between planters and slaves were more equitable in tobacco-growing than in other enterprises, perhaps because both masters and dependents found common ground in resisting colonial control. African slaves never constituted the main labor force on these farms and worked in cultivation

alongside their masters (Guerra and Pérez 1952:195; Moreno Fraginals 1978:55-56).

During the pre-plantation period, the free population of African descent gained certain privileges and democratic rights. They were able to obtain land, and males were given the opportunity to become small entrepreneurs. The free population was specifically involved in the cultivation of fruits and vegetables and in raising chickens and pigs (Guerra and Pérez 1952:192). Free blacks played a significant part in providing the food necessary to feed Havana's rapidly growing urban population (Le Riverend 1981:16; Wright 1970:198; Saenz 1961:24).

Free blacks thus came to control some important resources such as land and slaves, which gave them financial security. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a group of free blacks emerged as a black elite, backed by their wealth, status, and privilege within the slave-based society. (Carpentier 1946:108; Deschamps 1974:14). The black elite of this pre-plantation period was recruited mainly from individuals who had chosen military careers with the Spanish militias. The first free black individuals were recruited for the voluntary militias in 1586 to protect the harbor from the constant attacks by French and English pirates (Guerra and Pérez 1952:284).

Fortresses were soon built along the coast of Havana to protect the silver and the wealth of cattle ranchers being carried to Spain from the attacks of pirates and privateers.

Voluntary armies were similarly organized to patrol the coast and to capture Indians and slaves who became cimarrones (Klein 1967:211; Wright 1970:220).

The first people of African descent recruited were mulattos, but soon free blacks were also recruited. Klein (1967:214) describes the rapid growth of the Spanish battalion of mulattos and blacks.

> The first organization of formal militia companies in Cuba was carried out in 1586 under the threat of an attack of English corsairs. The local governor at Havana created a force of some 1,000 armed civilian volunteers, in which some 400 men were organized into several permanent militia companies, "among whom were many men of color." By 1600, with the constant expansion of the free colored population throughout the rest of the century, the governor of Havana was finally able to establish a completely independent 100-man colored militia company, which became known as the Compania de Pardos Libres, pardos being the Cuban term for mulattos.
>
> With the increased tempo of foreign invasions and corsair alarms in the late seventeenth century, the local officials created ever-larger numbers of permanent militia companies, both white and colored, not only in Havana but in all the major provincial capitals as well. By 1700, the one Havana pardo militia company had been expanded into four full companies, for a total of 400 men. By this time as well, there were established pardo companies in Santiago de Cuba and other provincial centers, along with an almost equal number of moreno, or Negro, companies in the same cities (1967:214).

The Afro-Cuban battalions were organized locally and were assigned to the jurisdiction of the local city councils of Spanish whites known as cabildos. The majority of the soldiers lived in the same neighborhoods (barrios) which permitted them to assemble rapidly in case of pirate attacks (Guanche 1983:258).

Members of these battalions received grants of land in

the same manner as the white colonists. In the colony, land was distributed according to the rank and status of individuals. Holding the highest ranks, members of the Afro-Battalion received enough land to number among the earliest coffee and sugar entrepreneurs during the pre-plantation period. In an analysis of the marriage licenses and death wills, Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux shows that members of black military groups came to hold large extensions of land, capital, and slaves (1970:61).

According to Deschamps, the black and mulatto military consolidated their power by uniting their wealth through marriage. He comments as follows:

> Los llamados matrimonios de conveniencia, que normaban las relaciones de la sociedad esclavista, o sea la fusión de capitales mediante las uniones de familias consideradas ricas, acomodadas o de posición desahogada; se produjeron también entre los integrantes de los batallones de pardos y morenos, oficiales o no, que posedores de algún capital, buscaban a través del matrimonio, aumentar su caudal y cuando no, consolidación social de la familia militar (1970:63).
>
> [The so-called marriages of convenience typical of relationships in slave society, that is, the fusion of capital through the unification of wealthy families in order to promote financial security, also arose among the members of the battalions of pardos and morenos, whether officers or not, who possessed a certain amount of capital and looked upon marriage as a way to increase their wealth or to consolidate the social nucleus of the military family.]

Development of the Eastern Region

Compared to the Cuban West, the eastern region constituted a "frontier," of little significance to the accumulation of wealth on the island and an area generally

neglected by the officials of the Crown (Moreno Fraginals 1976:23). Given this reduced measure of economic and political attention, it also became a region of numerous niches and hideouts in which alternative social networks could find a footing and develop beyond the control of officialdom.

Thus, for example, the economic marginalization of the region induced many inhabitants to enter into relations with pirates. The town of Bayamo illustrates this relationship between the people of the eastern region and the enemies of Spain. The governor of the island sent Crown officials there to investigate the illegal trade between the people in the east and the French, British and Dutch. When officials arrived in Bayamo, they discovered that everyone -- Crown officials, priests, land owners, peasants, free blacks, and slaves -- was involved in contraband trade. The Crown officials attempted to arrest people in the town, but the people in Bayamo revolted. The officials once again left for Havana without condemning anyone for the illegal trade.

Eventually, two contrasting social orders developed on the island of Cuba. In the western region, the legal social order was directly linked with the metropolis. In the east, an illegal order developed that found its connections with the coastal trade linking Cuba with other Caribbean islands on which pirates had settled. One of the groups that gained a foothold in this illegal trade of the eastern region was made up of the <u>cimarrones</u>, runaway slave rebels of Afro-

Creole, Guineans and Congolese origin (Aguirre 1966:121-125; Franco 1975:271; Lachatañere 1961:10; Kiple 1976:19).

The cimarrones utilized the opportunities furnished by the eastern region to establish numerous rebel communities or palenques in the forests of the back country. These communities served as a defensive shield against renewed capture, most especially against groups of slave-hunters known as ranchadores (ranchers) organized by the slave masters of the region (Franco 1975:33-333). Within the precincts of these rebel communities, the runaway slaves also began to cultivate gardens and to reconstitute African-style villages on Cuban soil. Leadership in these communities usually fell to single military leaders who combined exceptional military skills with the ability to win the loyalty of their followers. As we shall see, these abilities included special religious qualifications, focused as in Congolese tradition on a connection with the dead (see below) (Pérez de la Riva 1973:51-52; Bastide 1967:105-112).

Gradually, these communities also forged economic and social ties with people and communities beyond their boundaries. Thus, cimarrones would descend to the coastal haciendas to work as day laborers (peones), a role enhanced by the lack of slave labor on the island. Cimarrones also began to supply forest products and surplus garden crops to peasants and free blacks faced with repeated shortages and scarcities in the marginalized economy of the eastern region. Pérez de la Riva shows us how this trade developed,

and traces some of its wider social implications:

> The main commerce of the palenques was the sale of virgin wax and honey, which they got by cutting the honeycombs from beehives in the forest, and exchanging them for sugar, clothing, gunpowder, weapons and other tools they lacked, through the overseers of the neighboring farms who accepted the transactions despite the fact that they knew where the goods were coming from. Sometimes the maroons could not barter directly, since the things they needed the most, such as gunpowder for their guns, had to be bought in the towns or at roadside stores, which were rarely visited by the apalencados. In those cases, trade was carried out by means of slaves on neighboring plantations who agreed to pick up the wax and the honey at a predetermined site and to deposit, at the same site, the money made on the sale (Pérez de la Riva 1953:53).

The trade thus involved a number of different groups. Slaves played an important role as intermediaries in moving the items among groups. Free blacks similarly developed a middleman role between the rebel communities and the townspeople on the coast. Guanches (1983) also tells us of the role of Catalan merchants in connecting these exchange networks with the contraband carried on by Italians and the English. In exchange for their forest and garden products -- especially beeswax, which served as money -- the cimarrones obtained salt, cloth, agricultural tools, and above all arms. Their exchange networks even extended to Jamaica and Haiti (Franco 1975:120).

To obtain arms, the cimarrones took advantage of the general looseness of the structure of slavery during the pre-plantation period. During this period, free blacks and even slaves were allowed to carry guns as part of service in the Spanish militia. A law passed in 1551 controlling the

access of slaves to firearms nevertheless permitted slaves who worked on rural cattle ranches to possess guns (Wright 1970:315). These same laws also made it a punishable offense for the slaves to lose their guns. Slave masters were required to report the loss of arms by slaves and were charged heavy fines in case of failure to report (Ortiz 1975:403; Guerra and Pérez 1952:282; Saco 1889:25). Yet cimarrones were able to obtain guns, often trading honey and beeswax for ammunition (Franco 1975).

Still another population that contributed to the ethnic and cultural mix of eastern Cuba in the pre-plantation period were peasants from the Canary Islands. Canary Islanders began to arrive in Cuba in the sixteenth century. The Spanish fleet bound for the Indies used the Canary Islands as a stopping place before undertaking the transatlantic voyage, and islanders took advantage of the opportunity to emigrate to the New World. Indeed, Guanche (1983:173) has pointed out that the first European domestic animals and plants in Cuba arrived from the Canary Islands together with European peasants. Guanche adds that the Canary Island immigrants came with entire families, in contrast to the immigration from Spain which was composed mainly of single white males. In 1688 a law formally allocated land to the isleños in both Puerto Rico and Cuba, but Guanche (1983:176) points out that many of the Canary Islanders arriving in the seventeenth century settled on unclaimed land between established cattle ranches (hatos).

Although the land claimed by the Canary Islanders did not belong to Spanish estate owners, the hacendero class made numerous attempts to use the new settlers, together with free blacks, as sources of cheap labor on their holdings (Far 1978:45). The new immigrants found their major source of support in the cultivation of tobacco (Guanches 1983:178). To escape governmental surveillance and price controls, and to put some distance between themselves and the cattle ranchers, the Canary tobacco planters (vegueros) moved ever further inland, away from urban centers and cattle stations (Guerra and Pérez 1952). Here they also entered into contact with cimarrones and their rebel communities, furnishing one more set of links in the developing social network beyond formal governmental control. The government responded by passing laws to prevent the planters from providing shelter and protection to fugitive slaves and from hiring cimarrones as laborers on their holdings (Franco 1975:278-279).

The Development of a Plantation Society

It is easy to characterize the beginning of Cuban culture as a culture of conquest that destroyed and uprooted the cultures of the people who were colonized. The population that developed as the product of the intermixing between the Spanish, Indians, and blacks during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to be referred to as "Creole Society." This term was used to identify all

those persons of Spanish or African descent born in Cuba. The number of Africans in the overall mix did not become significant, however, until the nineteenth century. Until then, the degree of intermixing which took place was very high compared with most of the other colonial islands (Martinez-Alier 1974:95). There was also an unusually large number of free blacks. One North American military officer, a certain Major Gosham, compared eighteenth-century Cuba with the British Islands of the West Indies by remarking that in Havana a third of the black population was free (Thomas 1971:13). This was very different from the West Indies, where the degree of intermixing was low and there were few free blacks. Thomas (1971:13) states that many free mulattos were allowed to attend the university, although slaves and free blacks, like Jews and Moors, were excluded.

The small number of African slaves during the seventeenth century suggests a correspondingly weak diffusion of African cultural patterns at the time. Yet by the nineteenth century, a new internal social order was emerging, forged by the expansion of a new class of sugar plantation owners. This class had the capability of expanding and investing in more advanced machinery and the importation of slaves. By the nineteenth century, sugar production had become a large and booming enterprise in Cuba (Knight 1970:38), with implications for the large-scale recruitment of slaves (Guerra and Pérez 1952:140). Ibarra

sees the development of the plantation system after 1790 as a result of the accumulation of capital. He points out that from 1868, more than 476,288 slaves entered Cuba, causing major changes in colonial life on the island (1967:12). Among these slaves there continued to be a preponderance of Congolese. But now West Africans, above all Yoruba, were also included. Often of urban provenance and highly skilled, many of the latter played a distinctive role in nineteenth-century Cuba, as will become clear later (Moreno Fraginals 1976:15).

As labor was intensified on the nineteenth-century Cuban plantations, slaves were forced to work extremely long hours. Those who grew weak physically or worked too slowly were awakened with the foreman's whip. Knight states that

> In order to keep the slaves awake, and as a stimulus to work, the whip became the chief instrument of the mayorales and contramayorales. Sometimes, the slaves were flogged owing to the sadism of the supervisory personnel, but during crop time, whipping was, by some reports, almost incessantly employed to keep the slaves on the job and to prevent their malingering or falling asleep (1970:73-74).

The slaves responded to such oppression by running away or by committing suicide. As Hall has stated, suicide was not only very common among the slaves, but also carried a redemptive meaning within their religious and moral framework which included belief in the transmigration of the soul. To commit suicide was to escape their terrible suffering and to be reborn in their African nation. Significantly, the suicide rate reflected the demand for

labor in the developing sugar industry.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba had become one of the largest sugar-producing colonies. The slaves were forced to work as much as was humanly possible, and the rates of suicide increased (ibid.:20). So did slave rebellions. Knight reports the following:

> The most emphatic form of resistance to slavery consisted of open rebellion. In a number of cases, most notably in 1825 and 1843 in Matanzas, the slave revolts revealed widespread planning, and even included whites and free persons of color. Far more frequently, however, all the slaves on a single estate would erupt in violence, destroying property and killing those whites they could get their hands on. Spontaneous uprisings, confined to the slaves of the same owner, were very common throughout the Caribbean region. Proslavery writers tended to explain them as symptomatic of lax supervision and absenteeism. More objective observers realized that servility bred revolt, and that men subordinate to hostile overseers reacted with hostility themselves (1970:80-81).

The largest and best-organized slave revolt took place in early 1844. The revolt was discovered, leading to heavy political repression against all the blacks in the colony. The rebellion has been called La Escalera (The Ladder) because those arrested were tied to ladders and repeatedly whipped until they died. La Escalera was extremely well planned and, if it had not been betrayed, it could have united both rural and urban slaves in a single struggle for freedom. Hall states the following:

> The Conspiracy of the Ladder, a far-reaching conspiracy among the slaves on estates and in towns and among the free colored population, who plotted to seize power in Cuba, was uncovered. The coordinated uprising was scheduled to erupt in March, 1844. Although it has been charged that the insular authorities took advantage of the situation to implicate in the

> conspiracy whatever elements of the population they felt to be potentially disloyal, and that British agents, especially the former British Consul David Turnbull, were deeply implicated, there is little doubt that the conspiracy among the estate slaves was very real and extraordinarily well organized. The organization had been slow and extensive, and had been carried out through the tribal organizations and dance groups of the plantations. Each plantation had also elected a king and queen. The conspiracy was not only the most premeditated but also the largest uprising in Cuba. Four thousand people were tried by a military tribunal; 98 were condemned to death, about 600 to prison, and over 400 deported (1971:57).

Between the slave revolts, exemplified by La Escalera, Cuba's unusually large numbers of free blacks, and the "outlaw" networks of the eastern region, the island nurtured a set of conditions that was favorable to the development of religious traditions separate from, indeed challenging to, Christianity. In the following chapter, I outline the African-Cuban traditions that emerged out of the divergent regional contexts of east and west (see figure 2, Appendix B).

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS: YORUBA AND CONGOLESE VARIATIONS

We can define two settings crucial to the development of Afro-Cuban religious traditions in Cuba. One of these, anchored primarily in Havana, Matanzas province, and the midwestern region, was constituted by religious organizations known as cabildos. The other was furnished by the rebel cimarron communities of runaway slaves. We shall look at these two different scenarios in turn.

Cabildo Organization

During colonial times, religious cabildos emerged formally as organizations devoted to the Catholic cult of saints. They were formed by both slaves and free blacks, who, as owners of property and slaves themselves, constituted the black elite. Each cabildo was associated with a particular African nation. One important feature of the cabildos was that they provided the framework within which worship of the Catholic saint could be combined with the worship of African deities or orichas, permitting a fusion between the representations of the Catholic and African supernaturals (Ortiz 1984:16-17). Thus the cabildos played an important part in rebuilding and maintaining African ethnic identities in the new transatlantic context

(Furé Martinez 1979). Another major function of the cabildos was the role they came to play in providing mutual aid and assistance. In Havana, each cabildo usually had a large kitchen, a yard where the animals used in the rituals were kept, and an oricha or santo room where all religious activities took place (León 1981). On Sundays and Catholic festival-days, such as the Day of the Three Kings, slaves and free blacks were allowed to congregate there and to sing, dance, and play their drums through the streets according to their particular African traditions.

As far as the colonial government was concerned, each cabildo house was directed towards the worship of a particular Catholic saint. Yet these cabildos also became the places in which Africans could rebuild their religious institutions within the Catholic cult of the saints, with orientations quite different from those of the hegemonic Church (Ortiz 1984:19). In this way, the cabildos permitted the development of Lucumí religion in Cuba (Bastide 1967:95; León 1981). This religion was led by Yoruba priests and priestesses who officiated in the novel religious centers, mediating between humans and the universal cosmos in a manner similar to the hierarchical mediating role of the Catholic priest. Yet whereas Catholicism was oriented towards achieving salvation in the next world and teaching humility and the extension of brotherly love even toward one's enemies and oppressors on earth, (see Schneider 1990), the Yoruba-derived Lucumí religion emphasized the values of

autonomy, self-reliance, and resistance to oppression in this world.

During the nineteenth century, two rather different types of internal organization came to characterize the cabildos. One of these was the Yoruba or Lucumí type of cabildo; the other emphasized traits associated with a Congolese background. Yoruba cabildos were more prevalent in the urban context of Havana, the Congolese type more prevalent on the slave plantations, especially in Matanzas province, but also in eastern Cuba (Lachatañere 1961:10)

According to Moreno Fraginals, there was a sudden increase in the number of slaves, especially women, arriving from Yoruba land between 1850 and 1870 (1977:191-93). The kingdom of Oyo, which had controlled its extensive territories with a powerful cavalry, finally declined (Forde 1951:2). Oyo, which in the eighteenth century had been a major supplier of slaves, finally fell when internal conflicts arose between the king (Alafin) and the hereditary nobility. The Muslims and the British also played a part in this division (Wolf 1980:213-216). The final decline of the old Oyo empire resulted in the exportation of priests and priestesses who had been religious leaders in their towns. Thus, in the nineteenth century, with the great flow of West Africans from Yoruba land, the Afro-Cuban religion came under the influence of Africans from Oyo. It was under this influence that the Yoruba cabildos became a dynamic force in Cuba. Oyo priests -- male Ifá diviners known as Babalaos --

provided the framework for building a Cuban Ifá tradition (Ortiz 1984; Canet 1973). Slave women were also agents of Cuba's Yoruba religious development (Cabrera 1980; Furé Martinez 1979:126).

The slave trade to Cuba of the third quarter of the nineteenth century also explains how this religious development got its name. The word Lucumí refers to the West African port from which the slaves were shipped to Cuba (Ortiz 1974:315-317). At first it was an ethnonym imposed by the colonial government, lumping together all the groups from Yorubaland under one more manageable cover term. Later, the term Lucumí was used by the various Yoruba groups themselves as an emblem of solidarity in the reinstatement of their religious system. This religious system became known as the Lucumí religion, and its devotees came to be called Lucumís.

The Lucumí Priesthoods in Cuba

As we have suggested, cabildos were voluntary associations whose major function was mutual aid and, especially among the Yoruba, the preservation of ethnic identity. Slaves of Yoruba origin included in their ranks many priests, called Ifá, who were the carriers of the arts and sciences and were considered to be the intellectuals of society (Bascom 1944:23; Fadipe 1970:139). The black elite in Havana assisted them in buying their freedom and

contributed to their support. Under the influence of the Ifá priests, the cabildos became African religious academies in which Yoruba cults were transformed into the Lucumí religion. This religious order provided the best roles for the free blacks (Cabrera 1980:102; Furé Martinez 1979:191).

The first of the cabildos with a Yoruba identity in Cuba was organized by a group of diviners trained in the Ifá tradition. The diviners strove to replicate in Havana the hierarchy of the Yoruba pantheon and its religious structure. The Ifá diviner's role was transformed in the context of slavery, however. He was destined by the African powers to bring salvation to the African slaves in the Americas. The Ifá priest was charged with the task of discovering the proper path of the oricha that an individual had to follow in order to be saved. Salvation for the Lucumí was not the same as for the Christian, whose goal was to be saved for the next world. The focus of Lucumí religion was more immediate and practical, to ensure the survival of the African during slavery. The Lucumís believed that their situation could be changed by drawing on the spiritual powers who could point the way to victory (Cabrera 1980; Ortiz 1984; Sandoval 1989).

Actually, the Yoruba religious tradition was rebuilt on Cuban soil by two different priestly groups. The first of these, the Ifá priesthood of babalaos, was an exclusive and privileged category considered by all Yoruba to constitute the highest level in the hierarchy of religious specialists.

The second was the Ocha priesthood known as babalocha (male) or iyalocha (female). Both the Ifá and Ocha priesthoods dedicated themselves to the worship of the Yoruba pantheon in the framework of the cabildos, however, the former was exclusively male, whereas the latter was a mix of men and women priests.

The Ifá priest is the only person in the Lucumí religion who knows all the life stories of the orichas and comprehends how each oricha fits in the universe. An Ocha priest or priestess -- belonging to the second type of priesthood -- depends on the Ifá priest to understand the different dimensions of his/her oricha (Fadipe 1970:139). Nevertheless, for many purposes, Ifá and Ocha priests worked together, complementing one another. For example, the Ocha priests and priestesses communicated directly with individuals and groups of African-Cuban slaves, teaching them that the orichas were not passive and submissive, rather that the these divinities wanted them to liberate themselves. One major problem was that the Christian symbols used to dominate Africans needed to be transformed into African symbols of liberation. The Lucumí religion had entered into a process of absorbing Christian symbols, but the process of syncretism was a political one, and the Ocha priests and priestesses had to carefully select Christian symbols that could be transformed into symbols of political resistance. Meanwhile, the Ifá priests used the stories of the orichas, the patakis, to teach the slaves how the

orichas had struggled against obstacles when they lived on earth. They too provided individuals with alternative ways to break with the established social order. The Ocha clergy, encouraging each devotee to behave in the way that his/her oricha expected him to act, reinforced the message. A son of the oricha Changó, who was a strong warrior, could not be a docile slave or submissive to authority (Furé Martinez 1979:213-215).

Ocha priests and priestesses were privileged to perform initiation rituals. They could conduct everyday divinations (dilogún), but the more specialized and powerful Ifá divination could be carried out only by male priests (Furé Martinez 1979:180-181). Ifá priests were excluded from participation in Ocha rituals, however, unless the Ifá priest had previously been initiated into the Ocha priesthood. He was then considered an Oba, a high priest in the division of Ocha priesthoods, and allowed to participate in Ocha rituals (Cabrera 1980).

As the rules and obligations for the practice of oricha worship were established in the Cuban cabildos, the Ifá priesthood claimed the rituals for the egun (the dead), which gave them the power to communicate with their African ancestors. Some of the Ifá priests had been members of the Yoruba egun society and as such, they were the only priests who remembered songs and rituals performed by the eguns in Africa. As a result the egun association was incorporated into the Ifá priesthood, and the egun ritual and songs

became part of the education of Ifá but not Ocha priests (López 1986; Ortiz 1984).

Under the leadership of the Ifá priests, the different priesthoods dedicated in Africa to the worship of a particular oricha began to cooperate in Havana. In particular, Ocha priests and priestesses came together in the urban context of the western region to perform rituals in cooperation with Ifá (Ortiz 1984:404). Such was not the case, however, in Matanzas, a province to the east of Havana to which the majority of the Lucumís had been brought to work in sugar plantations alongside Congolese slaves. Here, Ocha priests and priestesses were not concerned with hierarchy or with the rank a priest had held in Africa. Unlike the Lucumís in Havana, who had developed strict guidelines or codes (known as Regla Ocha) to govern the practice of their religion in the New World, the Matanzas Lucumís came to rely on individual priests who claimed to have knowledge of the Yoruba tradition. Whenever a priest from Matanzas came to Havana, he was thoroughly investigated by Ifá priests who checked his credentials and African connections. Thus Obadimeye, a famous priest in late nineteenth century Matanzas, had to be reinitiated in Havana (Cabrera 1980:244; Sandoval 1989).

The Royal Imagery of the Western Cabildos

In the Yoruba cabildos, the Ifá priest or babalao is the high priest, charged with divining and discovering a

person's ancestors and guardian. A member of the second priesthood (Ocha) is called babalocha or iyalocha. He or she is the leader of the House-temple where the religious meetings are held. The task of the Ocha priesthood was and is to look after the shrine as well as to help their godchildren or house members solve their daily problems. The Ocha priesthood also practices divination for individual clients who are not regular members of the House. And Ocha priests or priestesses specialize in medical herbs and healing (Cabrera 1980; Leon 1981:41).

There is a third priest, too: the Batá Drummer. These drummers occupy a very privileged place in the Lucumí religion. Their role has been to play the three blessed drums called "Batá Drums." The drummer's role is critical because without him, communication with the Lucumí gods is thought to be impossible. Each Yoruba god responds to a particular dance and drumming style (Ortiz 1984:404).

An important function of the Yoruba cabildo in nineteenth-century Cuba was to conduct religious festivals in which communal dinners were offered in honor of the orichas. These activities were held for both the orichas and the town. Yoruba festivals were more oriented towards external audiences than those of their Congolese brethren. Correspondingly, the Yoruba cabildos were also continuous with European taste. Organized as mini-royal courts, these cabildos had a king and queen and other positions such as musicians, cooks, and flag carriers (abanderados), the

latter developing during the period when the cabildos were allowed to have their own flags. The king in these cabildos acted on behalf of his community, closing the gap that existed between the black slaves and the wider society (Ortiz 1973:122).

The extent of European influence in the royal imagery of the Yoruba cabildos is a matter of controversy. According to Betty M. Kugh, we must begin to research the African roots of Afro-American institutions (1983:560). Ortiz (1921) also states that the cabildos could probably be traced to African societies. It is possible that they were modeled not after European kingdoms (Bastide 1976), but by following a model of African kingdoms. An in-depth study of the cabildos needs to be conducted to better understand their forms and function in colonial Cuba.

One way the king showed his rank was through the clothing he was allowed to wear by the colonial authorities. Only the king was permitted to wear the attire otherwise used exclusively by white persons. There were many military uniforms. The kings also had elaborate royal funerals. Indeed, a chronology was kept on the royal elites who died in slavery (Ortiz 1973:124).

> El Rey De Los Congos Ha Muerto
> Febrero 9 [1913]. En estos momentos se verifica el entierro del rey de los Congos, su majestad Canuto Montalvo, al cual se le tributan los honores de su alta jerarquía al estilo de su nación.
> Numerosos subditors acompaña el cadaver entonando cantos lugubres con acompañamiento del indispensable tambor y de los bailes de ordenanza.
> Al pasar por la iglesia catolica las companas

> doblaban en honor del desaparecido, al que deseamos un eterno descanso, enviando al propio tiempo a su numerosa familia nuestro más sentido pésame. El Corresponsal (Ortiz 1973:124).
>
> [The Congo King Has Died
> February 9, 1913. We have now verified the burial of the King of the Congo, his majesty Canuto Montalvo, who was given all the honors of his high station in the style of his nation.
> Numerous subjects accompanied the body, singing funereal songs to the accompaniment of the indispensable drum and the requisite dances.
> As the body passed by the Catholic Church, the bells rang to honor the deceased, to whom we wish eternal rest, sending at the same time our deepest sympathy to his numerous family.]

The figure of king was held in very high esteem among the slaves and free blacks, especially because of his role as a link between the worlds of the slave and the master. Like most African kings, he was in control of both the secular and religious spheres. Moreover, he was the medicine doctor, and thought to be responsible for the health of all his people. He was, of course, paid handsomely for all his services. Bastide had the following to say about the African associations with kings in the New World:

> Some scholars have argued that what we have here is a perpetuation of African kingship. Others suppose that the Negroes (having no say in political matters) wanted to vote themselves, just as their white masters did; and that they met to "elect" their own governors, whose jurisdiction sometimes extended--in theory at least--over an entire province. Now we know that the Europeans would send their delinquent slaves before these governors, to be tried, sentenced and flogged. In this way, they diverted the resentment which the slave would otherwise have felt against his master, while the latter could count on keeping good order among his "flock" (1967:92).

Yoruba and Congolese Variants

An important difference between Yoruba and Congolese cults in Cuba concerned their mode of interaction with the spiritual realm. The Yoruba sustained a pantheon of gods, and Yoruba Houses were required to stage festival and communal dinners to thank their orichas for favors the gods had done for either the priest or a member of his cabildo. Such constant reciprocity was not required of the Congolese practitioner (nganga). As one of Cabrera's informants told her, "The Congo priest is not obligated by his spirits to constantly make offerings to them" (1979:122).

Congolese tradition embraced both ancestral cults and a hierarchically organized cult of priests. In Cuba, however, under conditions of slavery, the Congolese were unable to maintain their ancestral cults, which had reinforced ties to particular lineages. No longer anchored in the kinship system, Congolese religious practice focused instead on the spirits of early slaves, cimarrones, and Amerindians. It should also be noted that the Congolese matrilineages that supported cults of maternal ancestors had already experienced transformations before the arrival of Congolese slaves in Cuba (Richards 1961:212). The chiefs involved in the slave trade with the Portuguese had already begun to claim the offspring of their female slaves in order to increase both their own manpower and their chances to earn higher profits through the capture of more slaves. As a result, the Congolese kinship system had already shifted to

patricentric groupings (Wolf 1980:223).

For whatever reason, Congolese religious practice in Cuba focused much less on a pantheon of deities than on a complex system of sacred medicines (minkisi) (Thompson 1983:107). Religious practices consisted of prayers and sacrifices to the spirits of deceased ancestors and spirits of nature, such as rivers, bush, and mountains. The following statement by a contemporary Cuban Congolese shows the emphasis on control of the dead that came to the fore in La Regla Congo:

> Los Congos eran los negros que tenian mas apego que cuidaban mas de sus muertos, y por eso nuestra religionse basas principalmente en el Muerto. Nos enseño el Taita Nganga Jose Santos. Hacemos nuestros tratos con los muertos. Y aqui nos distanciamos fundamentalmente de la Regla Lucumí, en que los Mayores difuntos se les implora, venera, sacrifica y festeja, pero 'no se les Manda' (Cabrera 1979:125).
>
> [The Congolese were the blacks that had the closest relationship with, and took most care of, the dead, and it is because of that that our religion is based mainly on the dead. As we were taught by Taita Nganga Jose Santos, we make pacts with the dead. It is at this point that we distance ourselves fundamentally from the Regla Lucumí, in that the greatest ancestors are offered our prayers, adoration, sacrifice, and festivals in their honor, but "you never order them."]

In other words, Congolese religion emphasized control of the spirits of the dead and healing with herbs and roots through the use of charms. The religious tradition known as Palo Mayombe is an outgrowth of this emphasis. Congolese magicians and sorcerers developed a powerful role both in cities and on plantations, as well as in the cimarron rebel communities. Their ability to communicate with the dead and

to use medicines to cure and harm made them major figures in maintaining social harmony but also in disrupting the social order.

According to Bastide, the Congo cabildos never reached the sophistication of the Yoruba cabildos because of their closer association with plantation slavery. He states that

> the Bantus were chiefly valued for their physical strength and endurance, their capacity for work, their known skill as agricultural laborers. While ethnic groups such as the Fon, Yoruba and Mina were chosen as "house slaves," and thus became relatively numerous in the towns, the vast majority of the Bantus remained "field hands," tied to the plantations--where, as we have seen, it was far harder to reorganize "nations" than in the urban areas (1969:106).

Clearly, there was a structural difference between the Yoruba and Congo groups. Although they were both slaves living under similar conditions, they occupied different places in the colonial division of labor. In general, plantation owners considered most of the Yoruba slaves more intelligent and sophisticated than the Congo slaves. Only the Yoruba cabildos, given their more fortunate situation, raised funds for festivals from membership dues and entrance fees. The Congolese, in contrast, conducted more of their rituals "underground." A Congolese priest, acknowledging a certain feeling of privacy among the Congolese slaves, put it this way:

> Par tocar tambor, desde los tiempos de España, hay que sacar un permiso. Si los brujos, que tenemos que hacerlo toda escondido porque son obras de secreto, llamásemos con tambor, nos venderíamos. Todos los muertos van volando al tambor. Pero el Dundu Tonga (la policía) la oiría. Una cosa es tocar a los ojos de todo el mundo, para divertirse o el día que se celebra al

> Fundamento--ese dia la Nganga como novillo o chivo--y otra para trabajar brujo. Eso es callado y tapado (Cabrera, 1979:124).
>
> [To play drums since the time of Spain, we have had to secure a permit. The sorcerers need to do all their work for the people in secret. Calling with the drum is to sell ourselves. All the dead would come flying to the drum. But the police (Dundu Tonga) would have listened to us. It is one thing in the eyes of the world to have fun or to celebrate a birthday--of Nganga and the day it eats a goat--and another to practice witchcraft. That is done silently and in secret.]

The Lucumí Religion and Resistance

As Hall (1971) has argued, African religious beliefs and practices influenced the political behavior of the slaves and contributed to slave rebellions. African resistance to slavery is exemplified in the attempts by slaves to control the slave master through making him fearful of their magical powers. The notion of magic was a problem with which the colonizer did not know how to cope. According to Hall, religious beliefs largely influence how one perceives the world. African religious systems make no distinction between the supernatural world and the natural world. According to this world view, the universe is controlled by mysterious powers which an individual can manipulate in his favor. Hall notes that African religious thought strongly influenced slaves to take political action against the colonial power. Their religious beliefs led them to political behavior because those beliefs encouraged them to obtain the protection of spiritual powers and use

magic to destroy their enemies.

Yoruba rituals, carried on in the cabildos, encouraged resistance against the Spanish government, in contrast to hegemonic Christianity which sought to make Afro-Cubans accept as the will of God their position at the bottom of society. Ritual music and dance also came to serve as a form of transcending the colonial order, resisting its oppression (Deschamps 1971:21). Of all the orichas, the most powerful was Changó. His power was seen as connected with his knowledge of magic. Thus, it was also the Changó priesthood that became the most powerful in Cuba (Lachatañere 1948). Changó called for retribution and justice. His figure exercised a special attraction for blacks who were fighting against colonialism and slavery (Guanche 1983:256; Fadipe 1979:49; Ortiz 1984).

Many Changó priests enlisted in the Spanish army and later used their military skills to become leaders in the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain (Franco 1975:411). Among the priesthoods of all the orichas, it was the Changó priests who set the standards for the practice of Lucumí in Cuba and who exerted tremendous control over who could enter the priesthood. The Lucumí religion was guided, in particular, by two Changó priests, Latúa and Obadimeye (Cabrera 1980:242), who established the rules and prevented the disintegration of the religion. These two priests headed their own cabildos and were oriatés (ritual leaders) who officiated at all Lucumí ritual ceremonies performed in

Havana from 1887 to 1944 (Cabrera 1980:244; Sandoval 1989). All the Ocha priests in Havana came from one of these two cabildos. Originally initiated in Matanzas, Obadimeye became the most famous priest, performing more initiations than any other. However, as noted above, when he came to Havana he had to be reinitiated according to the order of Latúa and the Adechine, Havana's highest Ifá priest (Cabrera 1980:242; Sandoval 1989).

Deschamps tells us that Changó priests were involved in some key rebellions. For example, in 1812 Jose Antonio-Ponte, an ex-soldier in the Spanish military, was able to unite free blacks, slaves, and whites in a movement against the colonial government (1971:20). Guanche states specifically that Jose Antonio Ponte belonged to the Cabildo Changó Teddun (1983:197). The king of Cabildo Changó Teddun, Latikua Achiku Lattica, had been a prince in the Kingdom of Oyo. This cabildo linked people from both the western and the eastern regions in a rising against the colonial government. It was also from this cabildo that many of the leaders of the western slave rebellions were drawn (Cabrera 1982:25; Sandoval 1989).

In considering the issue of religion and rebellion, it is important to realize that the government was especially worried about free blacks. In the nineteenth century, Havana was a very complex city in which white aristocrats had come to depend heavily on the large groups of such blacks who included military elite, craftsmen, musicians,

midwifes, and teachers (Carpentier 1946). The free black population also directed the cabildos. Later these cabildos furnished the settings for political activities when free blacks began to organize against the state (Deschamps 1974:20; Ortiz 1923:21). This was especially true as free blacks learned from arriving Lucumís of new ways to organize and rebel (Guanche 1983:249; Ortiz 1979).

The political resistance against the state suffused life on the nearby plantations which was characterized by frequent slave rebellions. The state feared that free blacks were organizing plantation cabildos to declare Cuba a black republic. The Cuban planters began to re-evaluate the role of free blacks in light of the rebellions and revolutions that had taken place in Haiti in the beginning of the nineteenth century (Deschamps 1971:20; Guanche 1983:256). In an attempt to prevent such uprisings, the government sought to curtail the movement of free blacks, denying them the right to gather in cabildos (Ortiz 1923:21; 1983:50). Yet the Lucumís arriving as slaves found the free blacks willing to assist in building additional cabildos (Deschamps 1973:39). In the course of the nineteenth century, the new arrivees from Africa lent energy to the cabildo phenomenon (Ortiz 1983:50).

Meanwhile, the Catholic church supported the colonial government and used the cabildos to assist them in reinforcing colonial society. To the colonial authorities, the cabildo was by nature a bureaucratic, corporate

organization much like the military, with officers, written rules, and a very clear hierarchical distribution of roles. The officers were elected and many of the symbols and terminology were borrowed from the military (Ortiz 1984:12; Guanche 1983:248).

Developments in Eastern Cuba

While the descendants of African slaves and freemen were organizing themselves in cabildos in the western region, religious beliefs and practices found a different expression in the rebel cimarron communities of the east. One significant aspect of this cimarron religious stream centered around the person of the palenque or settlement leader. Success in holding off enemies, in organizing resistance, and in managing community life imparted to such leaders a charismatic aura. Drawing on Congolese religious understandings, such leaders reinforced this dimension of their role through their claims to control the dead and their expertise in preparing charms and medicines.

Successful rebel community leaders demonstrated their power by their ability to resist the demons of white witchcraft (brujería blanca) sent against them; they were thought to be capable of making themselves invisible to their antagonists. Their early relations with Amerindians also brought them to enlist powerful Amerindian spirits on their side and to adopt Amerindian patterns of smoking tobacco as a means of contacting the supernatural (Ortiz

1983:146). They also took over Amerindian patterns of using the bones of the powerful dead in the furtherance of their purposes.

The Amerindians had smoked tobacco to please the high spirits and to communicate with them; and they had used the bones of dead chiefs (caciques) to gain access to supernatural force, treating the skeletons believed to belong to chiefs in a special way to bring out their spiritual power. The bones were used to ensure the return of the spirits with the highest level of potency. A cult of higher-ranking spirits like caciques ensured victory in battles. The cacique's bones were placed in a pot, and smoke was blown into it to make the spirit more powerful. The Afro-Cuban practitioners continued to blow tobacco to please their spirits and increase their potency. They too were convinced that a cacique who was brutally killed along with his people came back to make the Spanish accountable for their actions. One of these famous grand "spirit caciques," Mabey, is supposed to have appeared to white peasants in the eastern region in the sixteenth century, accompanied by his whole family at the site of their deaths. (Ortiz 1983:158)

One way that the cimarrones were able to communicate with other ancestral warriors was by keeping their bones in a clay pot and by smoking tobacco to please these ancestors, winning their support for victory (Guanches 1983). One of the most interesting rituals still practiced in Afro-Cuban

spiritual centers is the smoking of the tobacco by mediums. Afro-Cuban mediums who are going to communicate with the ancestral world place the lit end of a cigar in their mouths. They inhale the smoke through the lit end without breathing or opening the mouth. At the extreme end of the cigar which is pointed and has no fire, they exhale the smoke. The smoke rushes out in a fine, beautiful line and leaves a trail of aroma in the air, covering the room and the group that sits in a circle. Afterwards, this tobacco ritual is performed by the head medium who has prepared the environment in the room so that the group can transcend the everyday world. (Ortiz 1983:227-228).

From the Canary island settlers, the rebels and their allies appear to have borrowed beliefs and practices regarding the "evil eye." The islanders wore charms to protect themselves from the "evil eyes" of their enemies as well as from witches who were thought to attack individuals at night. This custom of wearing protective charms dovetailed with Congolese and Angolan usages regarding charms (Guanche 1983:141-142).

The cult of the spirits of the dead carried by the Congolese slaves appears to have reached the rebel communities of eastern Cuba before it became organized in the cities or on the slave plantations. In the palenques the cult of the dead was influenced by the ancestor worship of both Amerindians and the Africans. Already in the sixteenth century, the spirits became a revolutionary force

that directed the cimarrones to attack their oppressor. The power of the great cimarron leaders was retained after their deaths by keeping their bones in bags or in a pot (Ortiz 1983:203). The leaders of the palenques worshipped these powerful spirits and conducted rituals to ensure protection before confronting their enemies (Sandoval 1989). Preparing charms for each spirit gave the rebels who went into battle a feeling of spiritual potency that multiplied their commitment to fight (1983:133).

The Church became very concerned with the struggles that had emerged between the slave-owner class and the cimarrones in the eastern region. In particular, the belief that powerful mystical spirits were controlled by the cimarrones was very threatening to both the State and the Church. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the Church began an intensive program of Christianization for the slaves. One of the goals was to stop the spread of belief in spirits. Some beliefs, moreover, existed not only among the Amerindians and the Africans but also among the peasants who had come from Andalusia and the Canary Islands (Guanche 1983).

The belief in the persistence of spirits clashed with the Church's ideas about life after death. The Church began an attack against such a belief, in particular condemning spiritual possession, which was seen as proof that the spirits could return. The Church wanted the slaves to accept the Christian faith, submitting to their masters in

return for rewards in an afterlife. In contrast, the spirits of the dead Amerindians and Africans called for exact retribution for their oppression. The dead wanted retribution for the destruction of their land, their religion and their people. Amerindians, Bantu slaves, and immigrants from the Canary Islands perceived humans as able to control spiritual forces through the use of magic. For them, the Christian God was too occupied and distant to be concerned with man's everyday problems, and they called on their ancestors to mediate on their behalf between the spirit world and the material world.

The Catholic religion was never able to dominate the religious life and behavior of the mixed population in the pre-plantation period. The belief in spirits easily competed with the dominant Catholic church. Early pre-plantation spirit worship drew on the beliefs of different ethnic groups: spirits from the Canary Islands and Andalusia (which caused illness and the destruction of crops), Congolese and Angolan spirits (which mediated between the spirit world and the material world), and various demons including the devil (which destroyed harmony and the social order).

In his book Historia de una Pelea Contra los Demonios, Fernando Ortiz (1975) provides us with a good case of how, in the sixteenth century, the devil and demons were used to mystify the peasants in order to take away their land and curtail their access to the coastal trade. It involves the

village of Los Remedios. Settlers in Los Remedios had done very well economically because they were involved in the illegal trade of the eastern region. The villagers also controlled some of the region's most fertile land. The parish priest of Remedios wanted them to move the village to his hacienda, however, which was located in the interior. Since the people of Remedios had learned to adjust to the attacks of the pirates by trading with them, they had no need or reason to move to the hinterlands. Moreover, the priest's land was not as rich as their own coastal land. The priest grew angry when the villagers refused to move the village, informing them that Lucifer himself had entered Los Remedios and was living inside an Afro-Creole slave woman. He announced that unless they moved to his hacienda immediately, the devil would take possession of their village.

When the people still refused to move, the priest asked the governor of the island to use military force to move them to his hacienda. The town was harassed and burned to the ground by government troops, yet the people rebuilt it. The priest finally gave in when high government and church officials ordered him to leave the people of Los Remedios alone. The victory of the people against the interests of the Church and the devil showed the strength of the peasants to fight oppression. In this case, not even the devil could force the peasants to give up their land.

The case of Los Remedios can also serve to show that

the daily struggle between the landowners, the state, the Church and the peasants was ideological as well as economic and political. The case legitimized the idea of spirit possession as a form of political expression for the Indians, Africans, and poor white peasants. In the eastern region, the devil became merely another spirit to be pacified, like the ancestors of the Indians and the Africans (Ortiz 1975). Lined up against this view was the church position that demonized all such spirits. Yet in a way, this position did not matter, since the groups being possessed believed that they were dealing with spirits of the dead and with earth spirits, not with the Christian devil.

Spirit possession became a basic belief during the early decades of the colonization of Cuba. This contributed to the formation of a religious idea that saw the world as governed by outside forces which the individual could manipulate with the use of magic. As Schneider (1990) points out, belief in earth spirits and spirits of the dead encouraged equity in the distribution of capital, land and resources. The case of Los Remedios exemplifies how the Church tried to use religion to prevent the people from becoming aware of their oppression.

If belief in spirits came to constitute one important component of popular religiosity, another significant component in this religiosity was provided by the cult of the saints, focused on supernatural personalities rather

than on the worship of an abstract deity as taught by the literate clergy. A telling illustration of the importance of such cults is furnished by the episode of the appearance of the Virgin to the inhabitants of Cobre, in the eastern region. My account is based on the research of Jose Luciano Franco in Las Minas de Santiago del Parado y la Rebelion de los Cobreros 1530-1800. (1975).

The Spaniards had discovered copper in the eastern region during the early sixteenth century. The Crown sent one hundred Ladinos slaves to work these mines alongside the indigenous people of the region. At this time, the Virgin Mary is said to have made her first appearance on the island in the hills of Cobre (where the copper mines were located) to a small Afro-Cuban girl named Apolonia. Due to the Virgin Mary's appearance, the cult of the Virgin became a major focus for the people of the region, and the hills of Cobre a public place of worship. The surrounding towns organized processions and came in pilgrimage to see the Virgin.

The Virgin Mary brought hope of salvation to the marginal groups of Cobre. To the Ladino slaves in the mines, the Virgin offered protection from the cruelty of slave hunters (ranchadores). The local priest encouraged the Ladino miners to pray to the Virgin to help solve their daily problems. However, the Ladinos were aware that being Christian would not ensure their survival in this world. Free Ladinos who lived in the city of Santiago were still

being persecuted and their homes raided by the ranchadores. Many took to the hills of the copper mines to seek refuge in the cimarron communities. There the figure of the Catholic supernatural eventually became merged with an African divinity to form a powerful emblem of struggle. Additional slaves, arriving from the Congolese region of Africa in the seventeenth century, brought with them a powerful female ancestral spirit known as "Chola Anguenge." These slaves identified this spirit with the Virgin Mary in the hills of Cobre.

Already in the 1500s, the Spaniards were losing control of the miners. The cimarrones in the hills of Cobre had begun to form stable communities with the assistance of the Ladino miners. The cimarrones depended on the miners to bring them clothes, food and guns, gradually shifting from raiding plantations to cultivating their own gardens. The cimarron power in the hills of Cobre produced local leaders who organized the communities and made alliances with other rebel communities when under heavy Spanish attack.

The Spanish Crown proved unable to end the illegal trade of the eastern region. The social order had become based on the interweaving of ties among many different groups whose common interest was to oppose the Crown. Their networks too complex for the Crown to control, the rebel communities consolidated their hold on the mountain ranges.

The Church was concerned that the cimarrones were spreading paganism among the Ladino slaves and preventing

the new African bozales from converting to Christianity. The slave masters tortured cimarrones whenever they were caught. It was the custom to cut off parts of a rebel's body--an ear, arm, or leg. In early colonial times male cimarrones were castrated, although the Crown passed a law prohibiting genital mutilation. Yet none of these brutal acts put an end to slave resistance.

It was during this time of political insecurity toward the end of the sixteenth century that the Virgin appeared for a second time, this time to three Ladinos from the Cobre region in the bay of Nipe. Caught in a storm, they began to pray to God. They saw an object floating in the water and, picking it up, discovered it to be a statue of the Virgin of Cobre. The pedestal on which she was standing bore a message: "I am the Virgin de la Caridad. Caridad means to love your neighbor as you love yourself." The Virgin became known as the Virgin del Cobre, the Virgin of the town of copper and also as the Virgin of Charity (caridad).

The mines declined economically and ultimately were abandoned because the cimarrones prevented the extraction of copper. In the meantime, however, the miners and their descendants had created a homogenous subculture that provided a baseline for the Creole culture Cuba. This culture was, however, soon to be challenged as the rich cattle ranches shifted over from cattle raising to sugar cultivation and found themselves suddenly short of land and slaves. The new sugar planters in the eastern region soon

became aware that the people of Cobre had under their control some of the most fertile land in the region.

Up to this point in time, the Afro-Creole miners and their descendants had lived in peace for a period of about a century, but in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a Spanish law was passed stating that the descendants of Ladinos would be sold into slavery. The victims of this decree opted to fight for freedom, and selected among them leaders to join the cimarrones. The cimarrones in the hills of Cobre built extensive networks between the different rebel communities and decided to consolidate all of their forces under a single leadership to face the Spanish battalions. The majority of the population took to the hills of Cobre where, by 1781, they numbered over 1,000. Few remained near the mines. The majority had become rebels, living in the hills with the cimarrones. With the help of the cimarrones, who had great skill in guerrilla warfare, the Cobreans became excellent warriors. The Spanish militias that were sent to the hills in Cobre came down one by one, defeated by the cimarrones and the Cobreans. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Spanish king was forced to declare the Cobreans free.

Independence and United States Domination

Having traced the differential development of religious traditions in the eastern and western regions of Cuba during the colonial period, it remains to indicate further

transformations in organization and relevance as Cuba moved towards independence at the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the aspects of this transformation was the emergence, in addition to the Yoruba Lucumí cabildos and the Congolese organizations, of a third type of formation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, there developed numerous small Ocha House-temples, as they were known, in which ethnic origin was no longer significant in determining membership. In these House-temples, blacks from various African nationalities could join together, related to one another not by notions of descent, but by religious kinship. Like the Ifá cabildos, these Ocha Houses served as organizations of mutual assistance, helping people to meet their basic needs. When Havana began to expand in the twentieth century and the cabildos began to disappear, these small Ocha houses became the dominant organized form of Afro-Cuban religion. It was these Ocha House-temples that were transplanted to New York during the 1940s (León 1964:unpaged), and that, both in Cuba and New York, evolved as Santería (Bascom 1950; Lachatañere 1942).

The context for the initial formation of the Ocha House-temples was the movement for national independence and the abolition of slavery. The Cuban War of Independence, 1868-1898, and abolition were major forces in forming and developing a national identity for the peasant and black populations. This period witnessed the emergence of black

leaders such as Antonio Maceo and Juan Alberto who became major symbols of the Cuban nation. It is also during this period that there was a rapid diffusion of African cultural patterns through the entire Cuban society, especially as slavery ended between 1880 and 1886.

Anyone familiar with Cuban history would agree that a close relationship existed between the Afro-Cuban identity and the Cuban political struggle. Eric Wolf, who has written about the Cuban revolution, concludes that

> the relative autonomy of slave groups during the preceding centuries combined with the recency of massive slave imports helped to preserve the significant African cultural patterns on Cuban soil. This was not only evident in the growth of Afro-Cuban religious organizations which represented an autonomous fusion of African and Christian rituals, but also in Negro secret societies, such as the mafia-like Abakuá society which governed the docks of Havana (López Valdés, 1966). Both cult and extra-legal organizations provided foci for a continuing self-consciousness in Negro social and political life. Such religious and political factors played a significant part in Negro opposition to slavery as well as in the formation of a Negro consciousness among the urban lower class (1969:253-254).

After Cuban independence from Spain in 1898, the cabildos and their leadership continued to play a key political role in providing support for black politicians who were elected to serve in the independent government. These politicians were important in ensuring black participation in the new social order. When the government became aware of the link between Lucumí and the growing black political power, however, there was a move to repress this power. The cabildos and their leaders became targets

of attack. According to Ortiz (1906), in 1902 an outbreak of witchcraft accusations threw the island into a panic. The newspaper carried daily stories claiming that the leaders of the cabildos were witches and that they were using the blood and bones of white children to make African medicine (Furé Martinez 1979:185; Pérez de la Riva 1975:63).

Furé Martinez (1979) states that agents of the newly independent Cuban state entered the cabildos, destroying the drums and burning other religious items. In response to these attacks and to the loss of their newly won rights, black politicians in the eastern region organized a separatist political party (Partido Independiente de Color) that came to unite black politicians from all parts of the island. After making every legal attempt to regain their rights peacefully, the blacks resorted to armed struggle. In retaliation, in 1912, the government of Cuba massacred more than 3,000 blacks and mulattos in the eastern part of the island (Aguirre 1974:352).

The independent government of Cuba was, of course, not really independent. From 1899, it had come under the influence of United States imperialism (Aguirre 1974:311). As Rafael L. López Valdés (1973) has put it, by 1915 Cuba was in the hands of large American industrial companies. As the twentieth century continued, moreover, the United States developed domestic laws to prohibit the participation of blacks in Cuban society. Race and class distinctions became sharper than ever before. Blacks were excluded from

participation in the social and political life of Cuban society. They were executed for the most minor offenses. Furé Martinez (1979:185) points out that the persecution of the Ocha priesthood grew intense after American involvement (Foner 1977:260).

The Lucumí prests and Abakuá religious leaders (not discussed in this thesis) continued to influence the political structure informally as they had during the colonial period, however. One way these leaders attempted to gain democratic rights was by taking control of many labor unions. It is well known among Afro-Cubans that the leaders in the sugar and transportation industries were connected with Lucumí or Abakuá religious organizations (Cabrera 1980:254-255; Thomas 1971:1179).

Despite repression, the Lucumí religion also managed to survive by incorporating symbols drawn from other religions such as Catholicism and the tradition of spirit beliefs. In this way it won support from the larger white Cuban population, nurturing the religious form of Santería (Lachatañere 1942). Like the Lucumí tradition before it, Santería championed the cause of the oppressed. Meanwhile, Lucumí continued underground as the exclusive and private religion of a small group of Cubans in western Havana.

As we have seen, while many blacks in Cuba were confined to work on the sugar plantations, most of the devotees of Lucumí were able to secure jobs as musicians, artists, bricklayers, dressmakers, carpenters, decoration

painters, bakers, cooks, cigar makers, and stevedores. It was these Lucumís and their descendants who became the leaders in local politics and in labor movements such as Aracelio Iglesia (Cabrera 1980:254). The followers of Lucumí thus continue through modern Cuban history to exercise a measure of influence and to avoid marginalization.

The Cuban Revolution and the Struggle Against Institutionalized Racism

Another example of the informal influences of Afro-Cuban religious leaders on political structure in the twentieth century was the leadership of the mulatto-Chinese president, Fulgencio Batista. According to Thompson, Batista received considerable support from Lucumí and Abakuá leaders. On the eve of the 1959 revolution, santeros, high priests of the more syncretic branch of Afro-Cuban religion, were called in by the president to perform religious rituals in order to weaken the revolution (1971:1178). Yet a clear pattern of opposition between revolution and religion cannot be established. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 and its leaders addressed above all the goal of putting an end to the marginalization of blacks in the labor market. That is, the revolutionary leaders wanted to encourage black people to enter the mainstream of the labor force and to be accepted as human beings with rights. This has included, in practice, the right to religious belief.

The present government, although officially atheist, tolerates Afro-Cuban religion. The fact is that the majority of the black population in Cuba continues to be much involved in Lucumí, Palo, and Abakuá. The revolutionary state seems aware that, in the past, the priests of these religions were not as passive or reactionary as the Communist Party of the 1930s and 1940s described them (Thompson 1971:1125). On the contrary, many of the African religious leaders have at one time or another represented a real threat to the established order. Benin, a babalocha and Abakuá, provides us with an example of how many Afro-Cuban priests felt about the revolution:

> The fact that I'm religious has not done me the slightest harm with the Revolution or in any other way. After all,if the Revolution didn't recognize the effectiveness of Santería, it would have suspended all our religious festivities long ago. On the contrary,it leaves us totally free to belong to any religion as long as it doesn't interfere with politics.
>
> I went to the museum of African religion established by Fidel and was impressed. I'd never imagined there could be a museum dedicated wholly to religion! I still think that the African religion will disappear completely, but I once heard Fidel say he wished that they would build a temple to the religion, just as the Masons and the Catholics have temples (Benin 1977:130).

Notwithstanding Benin's optimism, we are today witnessing the immigration in large numbers of Lucumí, Palo Mayombe, and Abakuá priests into the United States, many of whom complain that they were not allowed to worship freely in Cuba. It appears that all these Afro-Cuban systems of belief are rapidly spreading in the United States, and among Hispanics and African-Americans as well as Afro-Cubans

(Bascom 1967).

It would seem to be important to study the adaptations of these Afro-Cuban priests in the United States if we are to improve our understanding of how large scale social change such as immigration affects religious systems. Moreover, from an anthropological perspective, the study of the transplantation of Lucumí and Palo Mayombe can allow us to observe how the process of culture change actually takes place. Up to this point we have only been able to understand some of these processes through historical reconstruction. By examining immigrants and the adaptation of their religious systems to new conditions, we will have a better understanding of what happened in the past.

In order to appreciate the development of religious traditions among African-Cuban individuals and groups, one must understand that they have had a significant, dynamic history and have played an important role in maneuvering within the political and economic limitations placed upon them by a dominant society. In this chapter, we have tried to show how Afro-Cuban individuals and groups have created their own history while attempting to increase their opportunities for a life with dignity and autonomy. Religion has played a double role in this history. It has promoted both social solidarity and courage to endure and to overcome oppression. This chapter has demonstrated how, in each different historical period, Afro-Cubans have used African cultural forms as a way to solve their problems and

to create a new identity that emerges from within rather than one that is imposed upon them.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM CUBA TO NEW YORK: 1930 - 1940

The Afro-Cuban community in New York was initially created in the 1930s and 1940s by artists and craftsmen. There was also a small number of intellectuals, such as Romolu Lachatañere, an anthropologist who has written extensively about Afro-Cuban religion. Along with other professionals, Lachatañere organized a social club, called Club Cubano Inter-Americano, to bring together Afro-Cubans and other Latin Americans in New York. Members of the leadership came from a senior club in Tampa; indeed, many of the members of the Tampa club were involved in establishing the New York club. Several members of this club practiced Lucumí, indeed, some were powerful priests, and priestesses. As a result, many club sponsored activities served a dual function with the Lucumí religion. For example, the New Year dances at the Afro-Cuban club were well attended by members, because at this time, Lucumí priests and priestesses in New York, through their network, would make known which Orichas were ruling for the year. The priests and priestesses had received this information directly from Ifá priests in Cuba. Whether they were Lucumí devotees or not, all Afro-Cubans in New York knew that at the first dance after the new year the Ifá priests in Cuba would

perform a ceremony called the Opening of the Year in which predictions for the new year were made.

Also among the early groups of Afro-Cubans to arrive in New York were tourists, who came during World War II. Many came back after the war to stay, including some who had been involved in Afro-Cuban religions in Cuba. When these migrants decided to become priests or priestesses of the Lucumí religion, they returned to Cuba to be initiated and to receive religious training. Cuba was then, and still is, the mecca of the Lucumí tradition.

Although Lucumí was represented among Afro-Cubans in New York in the 1940s, the majority of migrants were Catholics and spiritual mediums. Like the Lucumís, they came from the western part of the island, mainly Havana. Traditions of spirit belief during the 1940s were popular among Hispanics across class and ethnic lines. It was not impossible to find spiritual sessions in which there were factory workers as well as professionals, Puerto Ricans as well as Cubans. Indeed, the traditions of spirit belief in the United States during the 1940s were elaborated by both Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants to cope with problems of adapting to a radically different culture that challenged the basis of their identity.

Afro-Cuban musicians who immigrated from Cuba in the 1930s have described how they suffered from considerable ascribed inferiority. Mongo Santamaria, a famous Afro-Cuban drummer who immigrated at that time, tells me that when he

walked in the streets with his drum, people would say that he was carrying a monkey on his back. Early Afro-Cuban immigrants were not alone to experience such discrimination, however. Among the many other groups who shared the same sort of stigma, Puerto Rican migrants were especially important. In New York City, Afro-Cubans lived intimately with the Puerto Rican community, often marrying within it. Most important for the purposes of this thesis, the religious traditions of the two peoples mutually influenced one another. We must also not ignore the contributions of African Americans to the growth of Yoruba religion in the United States. This group has maintained ties with both African and Afro-Cuban religious specialists, and have developed, along with Puerto Ricans, new variant forms of Yoruba belief and worship that command to be studied in their own right.

In the United States the Puerto Rican culture marked its carriers with an inferior status, thus impeding their escape from the bottom of the labor market. In this early period of the forties, young Puerto Ricans were told by teachers and counselors that to improve their position in society they needed to assimilate. The schools forced them to speak only English and to adapt to Anglo culture, eliminating their Caribbean background, which was considered inferior (partly because of its African content). The Puerto Ricans were also engaged in a political struggle for self-determination. It is important to recognize that

religious specialists were sought to heal those who suffered from a loss of identity; they helped their clients discover alternative self-identification in the spirits.

One Puerto Rican spiritual medium, a priestess of Ochún, reports that most of her clientele suffered from having been separated from kin. An extended family and relations of godparenthood (compadrazgo) were traditional institutions that had provided support to individuals under stress. With those ties broken in New York, the practitioner of traditions of spirit belief emerged as one who could provide spiritual relief to those who, in the process of adaptation, had lost their previous social locations and sense of who they were. Spiritual mediums also helped immigrants to discover the causes of problems that prevented them from taking advantage of resources in their environment.

One Puerto Rican Ocha priestess told me that she met her first Puerto Rican spiritual medium by going to the social clubs organized by people from her hometown. She says that in these clubs one could always meet someone who would help uplift spiritually. According to F. Bonilla and his colleagues, these voluntary associations played a critical social and political role in the Puerto Rican community of the 1940s and 1950s (1980:151). It is not surprising then that a hometown club would have a spiritualist who could assist people suffering the mental stress of adaptation to a harsh new life and separation from

family and friends.

In providing support to their clients, the Puerto Rican spiritual mediums of the period called upon a variety of spirits. For example, three of the Puerto Rican spiritual mediums who later became members of a Lucumí House-temple informed me that as spiritual mediums they worked with the spirits of local cultural heroes to defend people who were suffering. Another Puerto Rican Lucumí priest told me that he had worked with the spirit of his father who was a healer in one of the rural villages near San Juan. A Puerto Rican Lucumí priestess born in the U.S.A., who practiced traditions of spirit belief in the early phase, received the spirit of her deceased grandmother, who eventually became her source of spiritual strength. One Puerto Rican spiritual medium whom I interviewed had brought Amerindian spirits with her to the United States. These Amerindian forces gave those who visited her an inner strength and the hope that things could get better. The fight for cultural identity was conducted each time that the Puerto Rican spiritual medium became possessed and an Amerindian spirit was able to visit the earth to remind those in stress that they were not alone in their struggle for survival.

At first, the Amerindian spirits or "guides" predominated over African guides, who did not appear in full force until the Afro-Cuban religious traditions became better established in the United States. Early Puerto Rican spiritual mediums tell me that they don't recall any

sessions in the 1940s where spiritual mediums worked with African spirits. One tells me that she remembers two spiritual mediums in Brooklyn who had Amerindian guias but does not recall any African spirits. We must conclude that the early period was characterized by the absence of the African spirits in the front line of development of traditions of spirit belief.

One reason for this absence may be that the historical conditions of Puerto Rican and other Caribbean immigrants in the forties' pre-Black Power Movement were not favorable for the emergence of what might be called Afro-Spiritualism, traditions of spirit belief with African spirits and rituals. One explanation for the absence of African guias espirituales (spiritual guides) is that African culture had not at this time become a vehicle that could unite all African-Americans to struggle for democratic rights. Afro-Caribbean immigrants at this early time did not want to be classified as African-American. They feared that such an identification would lower their status more than it had been already. One factor is that the racism of this early period affected everyone. It influenced many individuals and groups to identify themselves as Hispanic in order to emphasize their links with Spain rather than Africa. The Caribbean's long historical participation in the slave trade had given them an African identity that they hoped to erase. The African spirits had to wait for more favorable historical conditions, ones that would allow the growth of

African culture in general in the United States.

Silvio

Ana Maria, married to a Dominican, is half Cuban and half Puerto Rican. She comes from a long line of female Puerto Rican spiritual mediums who lived in New York during the thirties and forties. Her father Silvio is a Lucumí priest. His own life history conveys the process by which he first encountered the Puerto Rican tradition of spirit belief and the role it played in his life. He also gives reasons that could have possibly influenced many spiritual mediums in the 1970s to adopt the Lucumí religion. (We discuss his "conversion" to Lucumí later on.)

Silvio was part of a small Afro-Cuban elite whose members attended private Catholic schools in Cuba. Afro-Cubans like Silvio were discriminated against in most all the professions which were reserved for whites. Silvio explains the reasons that he left Cuba in early 1940s as follows:

> I was trained as a legal secretary, but opportunities to work in my field were always denied to me. Instead the jobs were offered to white boys with fewer skills and less experience. I was turned down for one job after another. I became very discouraged and I told myself there was no difference between myself and other black men who had become members of a secret Afro-Cuban male society. My parents were members of a club that organized tours to the United States and arranged my trip with the idea that I stay and build there a new life for myself.

The Afro-Cuban elite of Havana were organized into professional social clubs like the Atena, which attempted to

emulate the lifestyle of Americans in the United States. These clubs arranged trips twice a year to the U.S. exclusively for members. Many Afro-Cuban professionals took the opportunity to travel but returned to Cuba. Others, like Silvio, decided to remain in the U.S., illegally.

> When I arrived in New York, I went to live with a friend of my father from Tampa who had a nice apartment on 150th on the West Side. He promised me that he would help find me a job that could use my educational preparation, but I had no luck. I was hoping to be hired in an office as a secretary. I had no problem with the language since my father was from Tampa. He spoke English and forced us to study English with him at home. Later, I studied English with a Jamaican teacher who held classes in the social club. Although I could speak English, French and Spanish, I only succeeded in becoming a building superintendent. I became very depressed and when the winter arrived I was sick every day. I was absent so much that I don't know why I was not fired. Well, I guess the spirits protected me because there were many people after that job. One day, my friend introduced me to a Puerto Rican woman who worked as a nurse in the building. He thought I needed a girlfriend to "give me a lift." She told me that her mother was very good in lifting people's spirits and that she could help me make my job secure. Well, I said to her that Espiritistas were all fakes but it was an opportunity to get to know her better. I was surprised that night to discover that an Amerindian spirit could give me the same type of guidance [consejos] that my parents gave before I left for the United States. I never missed a spiritual session because the spirits began to help me to orient my life; particularly I was helped to put my body and head back together. I really believe that I would have become an alcoholic without the consejos of my mother-in-law's guias espirituales (spiritual guides).

Like Silvio, other early priests and priestesses of Lucumí in the United States practiced their religion as primarily within the family unit, although holding spiritual sessions for the community. Moreover, their initiation into Ocha was long unknown to many of the people who attended

their spiritual sessions. Indeed, the Lucumí religion was not yet a dominant strand even though it did have influence. Nonetheless, certain Lucumí forms were beginning to be present, as the following case of an Afro-Cuban spiritual medium demonstrates.

María del Carmen

María del Carmen is a spiritual medium who worked in the early period in New York, but with African spirits. Her case provides us with an example of the first traditions of spirit belief that could be called Afro-Spiritualism. It should be noted that, although she worked at transplanting Afro-Cuban traditions of spirit belief, she has not to this day been motivated to become a priestess in the Lucumí religion. María del Carmen tells her story as follows:

> In the early forties I came to live with an aunt who had been employed by an American lady in Cuba and who was later brought by this lady to the United States. My aunt sent me to live with her cousin at 103rd and Broadway. Luisa, my aunt's cousin, lived alone with her little boy. Her husband had died after a long illness but she did not like to talk about him. I took care of the house and the child because I did not know a word of English; there were no other choices for me at that time. Sometimes, Luisa treated me as her maid but I paid no mind. People had told me in Cuba that life was hard in the United States at the beginning. People told me that later you will laugh at this difficult time. Luisa and I lived for two years without any serious problems until her son became sick. My aunt told me that Luisa needed me now and that I had an obligation to assist her with whatever she needed.
>
> Luisa had spiritual problems that she had ignored. One day I asked her if she offered the spirit of her husband a mass. She told me that every six months she gave her dead husband a mass in a Catholic church. Luisa was very Catholic for as a child she had wanted to be a nun but her family had refused. As a true

Catholic, she perceived any other religion as evil and backward. One day when I suggested that she consult a Puerto Rican espiritista [medium] whom I knew, she said that nobody was ever going to convince her to get involved in religious practices that were not Catholic. Her mother, a strict Catholic, had told Luisa to struggle against the ignorant and fanatic practices of Afro-Cuban religion. Since Luisa had told me that, I never told her that I was a practitioner of Espiritismo. I would often see her husband next to her at night and also next to the little boy.

When the boy entered the hospital, my aunt asked me to give him a despojos [spiritual cleaning] and asked me to go to the hospital to perform it for him. I called Luisa that day before going to the hospital to tell her about the ebo [purification, Lu.] for her son and told her that I had seen the spirit of her husband in the house and that he could be one of the causes of the boy's sickness. She told me she had felt him at night next to her in bed and that she had dreams in which her husband made love to her. I knew that her husband's spirit needed to leave her and her child alone. She was very scared. She explained that she had gone to a Catholic priest to request a mass for her husband and it hadn't helped. Luisa said her husband's spirit was not resting in peace because he was against religion in any form. He would make fun of her because of her obsession with the sacraments of the Church.

Luisa told me that her husband had refused to be married in the Church. Her goal had been to transform him into a practicing Catholic by arranging a Church marriage and by getting him to go to mass on Sundays. Not being married in church proved you were not a Catholic. But her husband never went to church and at his death he refused the last sacraments. She felt that he was in real trouble. The consequence of these problems with her husband's spirit was that she could not sleep at night and that any men she liked, his spirit would push away. I tried to solve the problem very simply by sprinkling Luisa and her son with holy water and agua de florida (from the botánica) but that did not help.

One afternoon, the boy was very sick and Luisa requested my spiritual advice to clean him. I told her that I needed to work with my cuadro espiritual [spiritual fields]. She asked me not to invite anybody else to the spiritual mass. We dressed all in white, covered our heads and prepared a spiritual table with six glasses of water and a large glass in the center for the "Espiritu Santo." We Espiritistas believe strongly in the power of the Espiritu Santo and in the power of the santos.

"How many of your spirits had to come to solve Luisa's problems?" I asked María del Carmen.

> Luisa did not want anybody present in a session and that was a problem because her husband's spirit still thought of himself as materia [as being in the material world]. She, Luisa, was concerned that she would be publicly identified with Espiritismo which she thought was bad, but it was my spirits who were doing the work. At that time I had just inherited from my sister a gypsy spirit that worked brujeria [witchcraft], but Luisa did not have a brujería problem. To get rid of brujería, all my forces would have made an alliance and between them they could have destroyed the black forces falling upon Luisa and her child (if that were the problem). Our goal was firstly to make her husband realize that he was a spirit and not a man. Secondly, we had to start the process by which he could be transformed from a spirit de no luz [spirit of no light] to a espirito de luz. When her husband became a espirito de luz, he would protect his family from any misfortune and illness rather than bring them harm.
>
> Jose, a Lucumí spirit, is my strongest spiritual guide. He had been a prince in his Yoruba homeland. After he had been brought to Cuba by the slave traders, he was set free by his master because he saved one of his master's children from a fire. When he comes down, we have to salute him as a prince by throwing ourselves on the floor in front of him. Such a greeting is similar to the way that Lucumís greet a priest or priestess when they meet one who is higher in the hierarchy than themselves. Jose told Luisa that she needed to make a fruit offering in the ilé de Obatalá [The Church of the Saint of Mercedes] in Cuba. She needed to have a spiritual table dedicated to her spirits. Every mòrning, she needed to pray at that table for her husband's angel de la guardia [guardian angel] and all her ancestors. This would help her husband to gain light.

María del Carmen informed me that she also worked with a female Lucumí spirit that specialized in brujeria. María's cuadro (framework of spiritual forces) was at that time too weak to solve the problem of a spirit without light. In order to work with spirits ranked low among the hierarchy of spirits, spiritual mediums need to have a

cuadro made up of spirits that are in the higher levels of evolution.

> I only had one such spirit, Jose. My other spirits that work with me only work on what they have specialized in, like how to defend themselves from brujeria. My spirits did the best they could. We met for several months. Her son's health improved and Luisa left for Cuba and married there a man who was a babalao. She did not return to the United States until sometime after the Cuban revolution in 1965.

I asked María del Carmen if she had ever been involved with any other religion other than traditions of spirit belief. She answered, "I have enough to protect myself from others with my spiritual guides but I am glad that the Virgen de Regla comes down through me."

"But, María del Carmen," I said, "how can the Virgin come down? She is not a spirit but a saint. Please, explain the difference between a spirit and a saint." She looked at me as if I was out of my mind. Later, she said that I needed to see more experienced spiritual mediums to answer my questions. Her concern was not to solve these "bookish" questions but to develop her spirits to become a great spiritual medium.

María del Carmen has a considerable reputation among the network of spiritual mediums in New York. Her clients told me that she solved every problem with glasses of water and rum. Moreover, she did not charge high prices, working mainly with Espiritismo de Carida (charitable traditions of spirit belief). In this variant, mediums give spiritual advice without expecting a return, although they usually

accept cash donations as well as gifts. María del Carmen opened one of the first botánicas in the Bronx and performed healing from there. Today, she is one of the few Afro-Cuban spiritual mediums who has not entered the priesthood of either the Lucumí or Palo Mayombe religions.

Most of María del Carmen's clientele were Catholics to whom she gave opportunities to communicate directly with the saints as well as with dead relatives. Thus, she represents a typical case of Afro-Cuban religious specialists in the early phase, during which the rituals being practiced by the majority of religious specialists combined Catholicism and traditions of spirit belief. One important characteristic of this early stage was the relative absence of orichas, the Lucumís' most powerful divinities. During the decade of the 40s some individuals, like Silvio, were initiated into the Lucumí priesthood but their House was not transformed into an ilé de Ocha (House of the Orichas), or House-temple, where offerings, ceremonies and rituals take place in honor of an oricha and where individuals go to have a registro (a religious investigation in order to find out the ritual and sacrifice needed to keep evil away).

Most of my Afro-Cuban group and individual informants report that at the time there was only the initial blending of Catholic folk beliefs with traditions of spirit belief and that the rituals that were practiced were simple and inexpensive. For example, individuals would visit occasionally and light a candle at the spiritual medium

altar. My informants have shown me pictures of early shines which show that these were simple Catholic altars, devoted to a particular saint, with a large cross and a single glass of water. Even the tradition of spirit belief appeared to be organized at a very simple level.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RISE OF THE Lucumí RELIGION IN NEW YORK

The Lucumí religion developed in New York in the 1950s under the leadership of three Ifá priests. The number of such priests was small--between three and four--according to inevitably questionable estimates. In Cuba, persecution at times has forced the Lucumí religion underground. It is very common to discover new carriers who never openly participated in any religious activities but who were priests or priestesses nevertheless. Since there is no formal registration of Houses or members, and the exclusivity of the group makes it difficult to collect demographic data, there is no way to be sure that everyone has been accounted for. Most people agree, however, that the first Ifá priest of New York's Lucumí religion arrived in 1946. His wife and daughter became Ocha priestesses during the 1950s.

The central focus of religious activities is the House-temple. The priest or priestess lives in the ilé de Ocha and organizes his or her life around the service of the shrine to the house members. The three oldest ilés de Ocha in New York were located in Puerto Rican and Hispanic neighborhoods. The first recruits were females in their child bearing years because they were expected to provide a

ritual birth to other priests and priestesses. It is important that priests and priestesses are ritually born from the Ocha of a priestess to establish permanent fictive kin bonds. In the late 1950s, these six women, who were Afro-Cuban, were sent to Cuba to be initiated in the ilé de Ocha of the Ifá priest of the household, thus extending the fictive kin ties to Cuba.

The newly created female priesthoods in New York worshipped the deities of Ochún and Yemayá. The control of these priesthoods by male Ifá priests was given legitimacy by the sacred Lucumí text known as the patakí. The patakí explains that the Orula, the oricha of Ifá priests, takes Ochún as his wife. She assists him in his role as mediator between the Supreme deity Olofi and the rest of the orichas and humans. It also discusses how Orula punished Yemayá for trying to learn to divine with the epekule (the Ifá divination chain) -- a privilege reserved only for male Ifá priests. Due to the fact that the Yemayá and Ochún ceremonies were less complex than those of other orichas, an increasing number of people began to join these two priesthoods. Carmelina, one of my informants, stressed this distinction.

In the 1950s, powerful feminine aspects of both the Ochún and Yemayá priesthoods were not emphasized to avoid challenging the domination of the male Ifá priesthood. Ifá principles establishing male control guaranteed that Ifá priests were always called to officiate at Kari Ocha

ceremonies. According to several Afro-Cuban informants, this pattern of Ifá dominance was beginning to disappear in Cuba in the fifties as many Ocha House-temples called in an Ocha diviner (oriaté) to perform the rituals usually performed by Ifá priests. In New York, by contrast, the Ifá priests were able to maintain control of the hierarchy for a time, subordinating the female Ocha House-temple. Because of this and because of her dissatisfaction with the way that things were being done under an leadership of the elder Ifá priest, one of the early priestesses broke away from the highest ranking Ifá house and began providing ritual services to the community on her own. Helena, whom I interviewed in 1988, described this process to me.

For example, this break-away priestess blessed four necklaces (collares) identified, respectively, with the deities Obatalá, Changó, Yemayá and Ochún. She continued to respect Ifá authority, however, by not "giving the Elegua," that is, not calling in the oricha that accompanies the powerful Ifá divination ceremony. She developed a middle-class Afro-Cuban clientele, and also sponsored her husband's travel to Cuba for training there as an Ifá priest -- a story told by Lazaro in an interview in 1980.

This man, whom I will call Rafael, became the most respected Ifá priest in the early Lucumí House-temples because he never used the orichas to make a profit. The last time I went to visit him in the summer and fall of 1988, he was still charging $1.25, the mark of Orula, for

divination. In contrast, other Ifá priests were charging from $25.00 to $75.00. One informant told me that Rafael's wife had become a great iyalocha (female Ocha elder in the Lucumí religion) and that she directed him for many years in religious knowledge. Some women also said that he had extensive training in Cuba under a group of Ifá elders who pressed upon him the ethics of the Ifá priesthood.

As we have seen, in the Lucumí religion, the Ifá priest is the carrier of Yoruba intellectual traditions. He is trained to interpret the secret symbols of all the other Lucumí priesthoods. Called babalao, the Ifá priest is the organizer of Lucumí; without him, the other priesthoods can not communicate with the Yoruba supreme God. Because of this, the babalaos were able to monopolize the development of the Lucumí religion in New York. One sees this in the differentiation between the Ifá priest and the Ocha priestess or priest; only the former, as intellectuals, are legitimate carriers of the Yoruba tradition. In addition, only the Ifá priesthood has been trained in the "odun verses of Ifá." The traditions of Ifá odun consist of verses that contain most of the Yoruba arts and sciences and their theological justification. The Ifá priest is the only priest in Lucumí who knows the forms of worship that need to be performed by each of the oricha priesthoods and who, as we have seen, can perform the highest level of divination (epekule). In Redfield's terms, the Ifá priesthood is the carrier of a "Great Tradition" since they are trained in the

philosophical traditions of the Yoruba culture.

During the 1960s, Ifá priests continued as leaders of the Lucumí religion in New York City. A small number of them controlled many Ocha House-temples which were operated by their female kin. They were extremely selective about who outside of the Afro-Cuban network was allowed to be a full member. More generally, Ifá priests in New York City had an impact on the local scene among Afro-Cuban immigrants and, later, Puerto Ricans and African-Americans as well. Of special interest is the tension that developed with the spiritual mediums, both Puerto Rican and Afro-Cuban, who challenged the Ifá priest to deal with the spirits that caused so much mental stress in the community. Ifá priests are prohibited by the Ifá reglas (rules) to practice traditions of spirit belief once they are initiated into Ifá. Yet although the Ifá priests could not work with spirits as did the New York spiritual mediums, they soon became extremely popular among the Spanish speaking population who were constantly trying to tap into the hidden power of Lucumí.

Among the issues to divide the Ifá priests from the spirit mediums was the Catholic-influenced transformation of the orichas into lower-ranking spirits. Many spiritual mediums began to challenge the divination of the Ifá priest in which he communicated with the orichas. Without having been consecrated an oricha priestess or priest, Afro-Cuban spiritual mediums opened themselves up to possession by the

spirits of Ochún and Yemayá. The spiritual mediums were not priestesses or priests in the Lucumí religion and, according to the Patakí, only members of an oricha priesthood can be possessed by the orichas. The crucial problem between Ifá priests and spiritual mediums was that the Ifá priests had created a Lucumí religion in the United States in which there was less emphasis on the respect due to the spirits, than had been true of past practice in Cuba.

According to two of the founding babalaos whom I interviewed, the eguns (collective spirits of the ancestors) must not have been making their way from Cuba to the United States in the 1940s because their presence was not being felt in the new context. These Ifá priests stated that when they divined, the eguns did not speak to the people, only the orichas would do so. For example, one man told me that when he visited the Ifá priest, he went to talk to the orichas, but when he needed the spirits of dead relatives, he visited the spiritual mediums.

In Cuba, the Ifá priests had also been in conflict with the spiritual mediums over territory. The spiritual mediums, communicating with the spirits of their relatives, also interacted with spirits of the dead Lucumí priests and priestesses, derived from the colonial period. Some even claimed to be communicating with an entire Lucumí rama (lineage). These eguns of the priests and priestesses began to give the spiritual mediums information that only persons initiated in the religion were allowed to hear. In other

words, the eguns had been important to the Lucumí religion during its emergence in Cuba. A person became an egun because of the high position he or she had occupied in the Lucumí hierarchy, being, for example, a senior priest or priestess. The eguns were a collective group that protected all the members of the rama. As ancestors, they continued to be as powerful as they had been when they were alive.

In Cuban Lucumí, the Ifá priest held the privilege of cleansing people of evil spirits ever since colonial times. These priests were also trained in special ceremonies and dances dedicated to the eguns of their lineage. The Ifá priests felt that the eguns were not regular spirits with whom spiritual mediums could communicate. In New York, by contrast, the spirit medium subculture appeared to be more open to such spirits, and its practitioners more equipped than the Lucumí priestess and priest, who had dealt very little with them. Spirit mediums communicated with ancestral Lucumí spirits and some of them said that they were also communicating with Lucumí divinities.

By communicating with Lucumí ancestors in the New York context of the 1960s, the spirit mediums began to tap the secret knowledge of the Lucumí priesthood. A new development also played a role in these events: the publication of sacred notebooks containing much of the information that senior priests and priestesses passed down to younger members of the priesthood. These notebooks had always been kept among senior Lucumí Houses in Cuba. Now

some of them were being sold in New York on the open market, in botánicas. Although they were very expensive, the notebooks were selling fast. The spirit mediums began to read about Lucumí rituals and ceremonies for themselves.

The spirit mediums also learned about the Lucumí religion by reading the books of Lydia Cabrera, the folklorist who had for years recorded ceremonies and secret rituals of the Lucumí people in Cuba. Using the Cabrera books to prepare Lucumí rituals, they made the orichas have an identity consistent with the traditions of spirit belief. Altars of spirit beliefs became much more elaborate than before because, incorporating the spirits of Lucumí orichas, they called for more religious items.

Overall, the Lucumí religion made very little headway in the local community during the 1950s and 1960s because the spirit mediums raised a successful challenge. The Lucumí priests had to wait before they could build a clientele among followers of the spirit mediums. The Lucumí priesthood mainly made its livelihood from the few Afro-Cubans who were aware of the practical role of the Lucumí religion as well as its power. The aim of this priesthood was to put an end to the pretensions of spirits attempting to pass themselves off as orichas. However, the Ifá priests did not gain any advantages by raising the issue of boundaries between traditions of spirit belief and traditions of Lucumí.

I tried to find out from Silvio at what particular

point in his life he had made a shift from the spirits to the orichas by asking: "Silvio, can you tell me specifically at what point did you change from belief in spirits to Lucumí?" He laughed at me for a while. Then he turned to his wife, Ana María, who was cooking dinner, and said, "Pero bueno de donde saca esta muchacha estas preguntas?" (But from where does this young woman get these questions?). At that point I felt very embarrassed; he had made me feel that I was being too academic and that the discussion was getting boring for him. Ana María looked at Silvio and said "I can answer your questions," but I knew that Silvio had too much machismo to let her go on:

> Bueno, I can't believe that Beatriz can ask tantas tonterias [so many stupidities]. But muchacha, don't you know anything? Everybody knows that you can depend on the spirits while your situation is not critical. "Pero cuando la soga aprieta la Ocha solo te puede salvar" [But when the rope is tight, you can only be saved by Ocha].

As we have seen, Ana María came from a long line of female spirit mediums, and the tradition of spirit belief was really more part of her culture than it was of Silvio's. This is the explanation that Ana María gave me afterwards:

> First of all you need to understand that the spirits had helped Silvio to improve his economic situation because it is a practice that helps the individual to progress. The spirits need to evolucinar [to evolve]; as you push the spirit to move and to advance in the spiritual sessions, it helps you in return to improve your situation. As the individual helps los hermanos del espacio [the brothers of space] to evolve so they can reach other planets where they can be reincarnated and begin new lives, the spirits reciprocate by helping the person on earth to make progress to a better life.

Silvio, now a businessman, owns real estate, a grocery store (bodega), and two travel agencies. Ana María told me that he became a businessman before they both adopted Lucumí. Silvio's economic progress was a reward of their spiritual guides for their spiritual labor among needy people. The daughter, also named Ana María, told me that she and her mother charge no money for their spiritual services because their mediumship is a gift from God to the women in her family.

But, Silvio's economic prosperity had been the cause of much envy among relatives and friends. Ana María, the wife, relates the following concerning problems they encountered because of their good fortune:

> One of Silvio's partners in the travel business had a problem and he was forced to sell his side of the business to Silvio. When Silvio's partner's economic situation improved, he informed Silvio that he wanted to buy back his part of the travel agency. Silvio and I told him that it was not for sale. The man first made many threats to convince Silvio to sell him back a part of the business. Later, the man decided to attack with Congolese spiritual forces. He hired a brujo [sorcerer--a term used to refer to religious specialists who practice Palo Mayombe] to take the business away from us. We began to lose important business with many social and professional clubs. Our guias espirituales [spiritual guides] began not to respond in the same manner that they had in the past. My own mother's Amerindian guides that had won so many battles against evil spirits were not strong enough to battle with a brujo's brujería [witchcraft]. Silvio started to get very sick and spent much of his time in bed. My mother gave him a Spiritual Cleaning [despojo, Sp.], done with flowers, perfume and holy water. The flowers are passed over the person's body cleaning him or her of all negative influences) every Friday, but it was not helping him. Silvio decided to go to Cuba to see his family because he believed that his death was near. He wanted to see his mother and the rest of his family for the last time. His aunt was a Lucumí

> priestess, and she took him to her Babalao (high priest in the Lucumí religion). The Babalao discovered that Silvio had been sent a water spirit to kill him. My mother and I had little knowledge of how to get rid of this spirit that the brujo had sent. We could not understand what was going on and there was no way, apparently, to get rid of all the misfortune coming into our lives. We had tried to get rid of the spirit by offering him a spiritual mass, candles, glasses of water, perfume and flowers. That is the way that we treat the spirits that are in space with no light. We were treating the spirit as a spirit del espacio (space). The Babalao told Silvio that he needed to enter Ocha because Obatalá would then protect his head.
>
> The priest or Babalao told Silvio that to save his life he needed to be initiated into the priesthood of Obatalá [referred to as "making" Obatalá] before returning to the United States. Silvio got initiated in the next three days, and my mother and I were also called by Obatalá into the priesthood. I was seven months pregnant with Ana María and entered the priesthood of Yemayá. The fact that Ana María was in my stomach at the time of my initiation, made her already a priestess when she was born. Since we made Ocha, our family has been protected. We never have had any problems with the brujos. As Ana María says, "Ocha es muy grande ni los brujos pueden con ella." [Ocha is too great for the sorcerers to mess with].

Silvio continues to depend on his mother-in-law's Amerindian spirits to protect his family and their health and to secure his business. His Ocha House-temple is there in his house for his personal protection and he simply prays to this divinity in the privacy of his home. Ana María says the Ocha religion is their defense against the cruelties of evil brujos who are all to happy to hurt people.

The Re-Emergence of a Lucumí Elite Ideology: Las Ramas

A rama was a religious network based on fictive kinship that originated in Cuba during colonial times. In the context of the tension with the spirit mediums, and

especially in the context of the Black Power movement of the 1970s, the ideology of rama began to be re-emerge among Afro-Cuban religious specialists. The goal of those individuals and groups, who began to identify themselves as part of a particular lineage, was to assert an African identity. The rama ideology became an effective tool in the 1970s as African-Americans, using their African identity, struggled to gain a place in the United States. The absence of African culture in the centros of spirit belief now began to push them to the social periphery. Within this re-emergence of rama, Ifá and Ocha priests and priestesses began to dominate the Afro-Cuban religious scene as never before.

Already in the 1960s, the Lucumí priesthood had become organized around the ideology of ramas. The Lucumí priest or priestess in a line that descended from one of the Afro-Cuban cabildos (ethnic associations of colonial times) was automatically considered a follower of the traditional religion of the early Yoruba slaves, known as Lucumí. In New York, many of the Afro-Cuban Lucumí religious specialists claimed a relationship with some of these cabildos to show that they had descended directly from a Lucumí lineage.

Consistent with the rise of rama ideology, the Lucumí priests attacked the spirit mediums by pointing out that they had no philosophical training in the Yoruba verses (odun) or in the histories of the Yoruba divinities (patakí)

and also lacked the secret knowledge of the ritual and curative properties of plants. Knowledge of the Lucumí language became another tool that the Lucumí priesthood used to prove that the spirit mediums did not have the intellectual training to experience spiritual possession by the orichas. All this proved their inferiority and lack of proper ancestry of spirit mediums.

In the past, many among the Afro-Cuban middle class had viewed Afro-Cuban religious forms as a legacy from slavery days and rejected them. As a result, the Lucumí priests and priestesses who were members of middle class clubs remained quiet about their religion. Now, however, one of the members of a House-temple who was elected an officer in the club slowly began to introduce the Lucumí religion in the guise of cultural expression. An example was the transplantation of the Afro-Cuban carnival which started in colonial Cuba. By the late 1970s in New York, the carnivals were enjoyed by the Cuban community, especially the children. One of my informants who participated for years in carnival dances at social clubs told me the following:

> I danced with my brother and sister from when I was fifteen until I was twenty-five. You said that you would like to know what I got from dancing so many years. Well, I will tell you. When you are un negro Cubano, that is something special and I did not know that. When the lady taught us the carnival dances, she would say You need to dance with dignity and pride. I knew that the forms and the style that we were learning convey those types of emotions and values but to appear that you feel dignity and pride, you need to really feel it. We learned to feel the power of our ancestors

> through the dance of carnival. No one had to tell us directly that there was another world next to the world, and some of us began to attend Lucumí bembes [drum music played in honor of the orichas]. My parents did not appreciate my attraction to the Lucumí religion; they thought that it was a backward religion. They did not like my hair in an Afro and they especially hated that I played the drums with my friends in the park.

Once re-established, rama was used in the United States by the Lucumí priesthood to increase their prestige and their status in the Afro-Cuban community. This lineage ideology helped create a niche for those who were to become the leaders of the social clubs. As mentioned earlier, these clubs in Cuba and in Tampa had a membership that was involved with traditions of spirit belief. Now, however, Lucumí was developing as a challenge to the context of white America, where African-Americans had been forced to assimilate as a "cultureless" group. This development paralleled the time of the cabildos in Western Cuba. It also took advantage of the African cultural revolution among American Blacks, deriving from this an alternate definition for the Afro-Cuban community. In doing so, Lucumí attracted African-Americans and Puerto-Ricans as well as Afro-Cubans.

Lucumí reached its florescence by the 1970s with the full organization of the Ifá and the Ocha priesthoods in New York City. The Ifá priesthood was by then very private and elite, however, to the point that the number of new initiations into the priesthood was low. Whenever a new initiation was going to take place, a large number of priests and priestesses needed to be hired to work in the

seven-day ritual. There was a strong preference that Ifá priests be hired to perform the early ceremonies. If the three most important Ifá priests were all unavailable, the day had to be changed. Sometimes these Ifá priests refused to go to a house on the grounds that it was not following the Lucumí reglas. There were other times during an initiation that the Ifá priest saw something that was not right--for example if devotees were careless with their godchildren's ritual and attempted to substitute some item of inferior value. The Ifá priest, citing violations of the reglas, would refuse to finish the event. Once when an Ifá priest left an initiation ceremony due to these shortcomings, the oriaté who came next in the ceremony would not go near the house. In this way, the Ifás ensured that everything had to be done in the proper way, and there was considerable pressure on the priests and priestesses to perform the ritual in a Lucumí style without incorporating elements of Catholicism or traditions of spirit belief.

At the same time, the Ocha priesthood had also become more restrictive than in the past. For example, most of the odun (verses) were in the libretas, the ritual notebooks. But these notebooks were mainly in the hands of the elder priests. Elder Ocha priests in control of libretas would only lend them to men whom they chose to become priests, the Italeros or Oriatés. The effect of this was that few priests were trained under the existing specialists. Italero and Oriaté priests who enjoyed their privileged

position in the city in turn refused to train anybody unless they were pressured by the elders.

Finally, notwithstanding the florescence of Lucumí in the context of the Black Power movement of the 1970s, the divisive tension between the Lucumí priests and the spirit mediums continued. To the former, it was still important to maintain the distinction. As Miguel, an Ifá priest who opposed the interaction of Lucumí religion with traditions of spirit belief, explains it:

> One of the reasons that Lucumí and spirit belief should be maintained separately is that they operate in different spheres. Lucumí deals with the material and concrete aspects of religion, while the Espiritista tradition deals with non-concrete aspects of life. The best way to understand this difference is to point out that the orichas deal with material things. For example, we sacrifice to the orichas chickens, ducks, pigeons and goats. The orichas become vitalized by the offering of these animals to them. They receive the blood of these live animals which are part of the material world through the process of sacrifice. The orichas are revitalized by the blood of live animals. As long as the orichas are given sacrifice they can continue to have the power to struggle against the forces that bring us poverty, misfortunes, infertility, sickness and wars. Since orichas are the ones that can fight these evil forces the Lucumís offer sacrifices to have some harmony in the world. The Espiritista does not offer her spirits any sacrifice because the spirits are not part of the material world like the orichas. The spirits of the Espiritista are abstract and not part of the material world. The Espiritista does not offer the spirits animal sacrifice because the spirits are not material. The spirit is given water, candles, flowers and perfume and these items do not give the spirit life, strength or power. The spirits are not even like our eguns because these receive sacrifices when it is recommended by Ifá. These are very difficult matters to be explained to someone who is not a priest or priestess. I have explained to you as far as you have the ability to comprehend since you are not a priestess. When you enter the priesthood you will be able to penetrate these differences in the actual ritual practices.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE Ocha PRIESTHOOD

The emergence of the Ifá priesthood in New York served to organize the other, Ocha, priesthood, which followed the tradition of Regla Ocha (the rules of the orichas). As mentioned previously, the Lucumí priesthood in the United States during the early 1960s came from three Ifá house-temples. At this time the majority of Ocha specialists were priestesses who had been initiated as priestesses to Ochún or Yemayá. According to an informant, Ida, who specializes in making initiation clothes for initiates or iyawos, Ochún and Yemayá predominated in this early period, but she also remembers making ritual clothes for women in the Obatalá and Changó priesthoods.

An Ocha priesthood is responsible for the direct worship of its particular oricha. The Ifá priest trains the Ocha priestess to follow the reglas of Ifá, especially those rules preventing the incorporation of traditions of spirit belief into a Lucumí ceremony. We have already noted how the distinction between Ifá and traditions of spirit belief is very carefully observed in the Lucumí religion. When an individual has been chosen for the Ifá priesthood, he is told that as an Ifá priest he should never be possessed by the spirits of the dead (muerto). Moreover, it is important

to remember that Ifá priests are not even possessed by the Ifá divinity, Orula. Whereas the Ifá priesthood is not characterized by spiritual possession, however, in the Ocha priesthood, possession is one of the most common ways to communicate with the orichas.

Emilia, an Ochún priestess from one of the original Ifá house-temples in the United States, comments on this point:

> I came from Cuba in 1953 with my husband who had gotten a contract for his band to come to play at the Cuban social club. My husband got a job playing with another Latin band and we never went back to Cuba. After we became legal residents, I went to Cuba to be initiated. I had decided to go to Cuba to be initiated because the Ifá priest whose house I was connected with did not perform initiations in New York. He had sent his wife and her comadre [co-parent, Sp.] to be initiated in Cuba in one of the oldest cabildos in Havana. The Ifá priest, who was my Padrino of Guerreros [warriors] made the connection for me to go to Cuba and I was initiated as an priestess of Ochún in one of Havana's most distinguished ramas, Tomasa Lucumí. The time was 1968.
>
> The elders in this rama were able to teach me the basic Lucumí prayers, and many of the different "roads" [caminos, Sp.] of Ochún. I was taught how to prepare charms and baths to protect individuals. The elders of my rama, however, did not know that I had inherited the two guias spirituales [spiritual guides] of my mother. A special ritual for the muertos [dead] needed to be performed before my initiation, but during that time Ocha priests and priestesses in the ramas did not enjoy dealing with the Muertos as the Espiritistas did.
>
> Nonetheless my mother's spirit decided to make an issue of my double connection with Espiritismo and Ocha. I even remember that my mother's spirit wanted to talk to me before I left for Cuba. An espiritista friend of mine from Puerto Rico sent me a message that my mother had given her during an Espiritismo session. It was that I should set a spiritual table like she had when I was a child. My mother had been a follower of Espiritismo and her spirits had done a great deal to help me.
>
> In preparation for my initiation, each priestess had begun to crush with her hands the sacred plants of her oricha. The priestesses were preparing the sacred liquid called Omiero which is used in all Lucumí

> initiations. One priestess fell back from her kneeling position, and someone told me that she had been possessed with my mother's spirit. The person who sponsored my initiation [oyugbona] took the priestess (Iyalocha) out of the initiation room.
>
> An argument began in the Ocha room that was sort of scary because I could feel the tensions building in the room. My oyugbona (the assistant of the Madrina and Iyawo) argued that they should not deal with spirits. The oyugbona, therefore, took the Iyalocha, or priestess, to another room, placed a scarf on top of her head and began to blow into her ears. Everyone was highly emotional about the problem but I was prohibited from talking or asking what was going on. Some of the Iyalocha agreed that the spirit should not be allowed to come down in an Ocha initiation. There were some Iyalochas who were both Ocha priestess and Espiritistas and they agreed with my oyugbona and the other Ocha priestess that my mother should not be allowed to come down.
>
> But my madrina (godmother), herself an espiritista (medium), told this last one that it was the spirit of my mother and she had to be allowed to pass through the Iyalocha. What was interesting was that the Iyalocha who became possessed by my mother's spirit was a daughter of Oya, who is responsible for the muertos (dead) but she had never before been possessed by a spirit in a Ocha ceremony. The spirit of my mother said that I must never forget to take care of her spiritual guides and that one day I was going to be an espiritista like herself.
>
> When I came back to New York and told Padrino (my godfather) that one of the Iyalochas had became possessed by my mother's spirit, he was very angry that they allowed my mother's spirit to possess someone during the initiation ceremony. I had then to tell him that my mother's spirit wanted me to set up an Espiritista shrine in my house before setting up the Ocha House-temple! I became aware that at that time in Cuba, priests and priestesses of Lucumí had more understanding of Espiritismo than many Lucumí priests and priestesses in New York.

Emilia's padrino argued that setting a up a table for the spirits when she was just a child (iyawo) in the religion was going to make life very difficult for her. He told her that such tables were like antennae that call and attract different kinds of spirits, both good and evil. The

Ifá priest further told Emilia that he followed the reglas of the Ifá cabildo in Cuba where he had obtained all his training. Emilia tried to tell him that the rama where she had been initiated allowed the setting up of spiritual-guide temples in the House-temples. That night, according to Emilia, her American padrino called his senior Ifá House in Cuba and asked the highest babalaow priest in the hierarchy to send his second in command to the senior House of her rama where she had been initiated.

Emilia showed me a letter that she received from her madrina in Ocha eight months after her initiation in Cuba. In it the madrina explained the nature of the visit of the Ifá priest to her house. The letter is very interesting because it is written in Spanish with an introduction in Lucumí. It begins with the Lucumí prayer used during her initiation. The prayer asks Olofi, the Lucumí Supreme God, for his blessing and that her communication with Him and the Ocha priest and priestess be allowed to take place. This prayer is also used to enlist the Lucumí muertos in helping the community achieve peace and harmony. An Ocha priestess who translated the prayer into Spanish informed me that the prayer is used to ask the muertos for their assistance in making life less disorganized. The prayer ends with a salute to her rama. Here is the letter:

> Mo yuba oluo moni oyugbona, mo yuba mi akoda. Mo yuba oluo bi ten beleso Olodumare. Mo yuba oluo bi Olodumare. mo yuba oluo bi tenbelese Olodumare bita Changó Tola, gbogbo kanile Ocha ilé mo puiko ilé mopuiko apeye omo apeye awo, aberiju Babawa.

Havana, mayo 4, 1973

Querida Iyawo:

Quiero que cuando esta te llegue te encuentres en union de tu padrinos y tus hermanos de Ocha. Nosotros estamos bien preparandonos para la Ocha de tu hermana que va hacer en noviembre. Tu hermana me dijo que le mandates con Lourdes dos chales de seda preciosos. Imaginate que linda se va a ver tu hermana de Iyawo cuando salga con su chales. Nosotros esperamos que tambien le puedas mandar sus caracoles. Estos no se encuentran en Cuba. Por favor, mira a ver si encuentras tela brocadas para adornar el trono. Yo tuve que de emergencia usar las que tu dejaste para un santo que hicimos de emergencia para un sobrino de mi vecina que se fue para Angola.

Tu padrino me escribio de Miami por que fue a visitar a mi madrina que le dieron un permiso de tres meses a visitar a su hija. El se quedo sorprendido come madrina tan viejita recuerdad todos los viejos cantos y rezos. Cuando madrina regreso me conto que hasta puso dos collares y que la religion esta cogiendo mucho impulsos entres la gente de gran alcunia. Tambien me dijo madrina que hay gente que se esta asiendo rico con la religion eso me sorprendio muchisimo. madrina me recomendo de los peligros que es tener una iyawo tan lejos en el Norte donde to se trata de dinero. Pedro, un hermano de la Rama de Babalaos de tu padrino, vino a traerme la carta de tu padrino. El cree que hasta que tu no cumplas tu ano de Iyaworaje no debes poner tu mesa espiritual. Yo personalmente si tu estuvieras en Cuba te diria que la pusieras pero estamos muy lejos y sin ninguna esperanza de yo poder ir al norte o de tu venir a Cuba. Cualquier problema tu tengas de todas maneras tendras que ir a tu padrino por que yo estoy muy lejos. No te olvides tan poco que tu padrino es el Babalao mas grande de alla y que save por que dice las cosas. Nosotros estamos muy contentos de tener una ahijada como tu en la Rama por que vas a llevar al norte la manera en que esta Rama se le reza a los Orichas. Tu vas a hacer la maestra de los Rama de Tomasa Lucumí en el norte y le vas ensenar como nosotros adoramos a los Orichas.

[Havana, May 4, 1973
Dear Iyawo:

I hope that when you receive this letter, you and the rest of the family are in the best of health.

We are doing fine, preparing your sister's initiation which will be in November. Your sister told me that you sent her two beautiful silk shawls with Lourdes. Imagine how pretty your sister will look when she goes out with her shawl [needed by Iyawos to cover

> their shoulders]. We also hope that you can send her cowry shells. These cannot be found in Cuba. Please see if you can find a brocaded cloth to drape the "throne." I had to use the cloth that you left for your sister's initiation for a neighbor's nephew who left for Angola.
>
> Your Godfather [Ifá priest] wrote to me from Miami. He went to Miami to visit my Godmother who got permission to go to the United States for three months to visit her daughter. He was surprised that madrina was so old yet remembered all the old songs and prayers. When madrina came back to Cuba, she told me that she did two initiations of necklaces and that the religion has become very popular with the "upper crust." She also told me that in the United States, many people are using religion to get rich. That surprised me so much. Madrina reminded me how dangerous it is to have a godchild so far away in the North where people are so concerned with money. Pedro, a brother in the lineage of the Ifá priests of your Godfather, brought me the letter. He feels strongly that Iyawos should not handle the spirits or set an altar for them until they have finished the year of initiation. If you were in Cuba, I personally would tell you to set the spiritual table. But we are very far apart without much hope of my being able to go North or your coming to Cuba. Any problem you have you will have to go to your padrino because I am very far. Don't forget that he is one of the most knowledgeable Ifá priests in the North and that he knows what he's talking about. We are very happy to have a Godchild like you in the rama because you will take to the north the tradition of Tomasa Lucumí. You will teach them how we worship the orichas.]

Some of the most important data that I collected to construct the history of the early Lucumí House-temples in the United States came from the correspondence between Cuban ramas and a New York Ifá house. Most of the early letters describe the process by which individuals went to Cuba to be initiated. The Cuban Lucumí shrines that were chosen, in most cases, followed the most rigid forms of Ifá and Ocha reglas. One of the most common characteristics of these Lucumí shrines in Cuba was that they conformed to the Ifá

belief that changing any Regla was an offense to the ancestors of the rama.

Likewise, Emilia's madrina had clearly told her that she had to follow the Ifá house reglas. She should obey the babalao because she was going to need his support to establish her own House-temple in the United States. Moreover, Emilia stated that in her Ita divination it was disclosed that she could become an Ifá priest. However, women were not allowed to enter the Ifá priesthoods. One way that women could associate themselves with the Ifá priesthood was by receiving the Kofa de Orula. The Kofa was given by Ifá priests only to women who, upon reading the Ita divination during Ocha initiations, received a letra or odun stating that she had been chosen to pass to the Ifá priesthood. Although Emilia had received an odun to pass to Ifá, she waited for fifteen years before she was given an opportunity to have the Kofa. She thought her padrino did not like to give the Kofa of Orula to anyone unless he was sure that her House-temple was going to follow the Ifá traditions strictly. This meant obeying the Regla against an Ocha priest or priestess communicating with the spirits. In other words, this rule was becoming an important issue among American Lucumí religious specialists as well as between them and the spirit mediums.

As we have seen, another configuration had taken shape in Cuba, however. Individuals who were not able to be initiated into the elite cabildos, the traditional ramas of

the Lucumí religion, were able to enter another Afro-Cuban religion known as Santería. The way that the priesthood prays to divinities in Santería, as well as its rituals and ceremonies in their honor, reflect the long historical interaction of Ocha, Catholicism and traditions of spirit belief in Cuba. In the United States, spirit medium traditions were too spread out among the New York Puerto Rican population, and too denigrated by the Lucumí elite, for this kind of interaction to occur, until a new migration carried the Santería synthesis from Cuba. Then the struggle between Ifá houses and the spirit mediums was transformed: newly arriving priests and priestesses of Ocha challenged the American Lucumí view that Ifá houses must remain basically Yoruba or lose their spiritual power.

The arrival of new Ocha priests and priestesses from Cuba occurred during the "freedom flights" of 1965 to 1973, Many were elders in Ocha, who possessed considerable knowledge and who had, because of their seniority in the religion, very high prestige. Having their own ideas how to practice the religion in the United States, they were soon involved in the conflicts between the Ifá priesthood and the spirit mediums. Many established their own House-temple without being directly connected with an Ifá priest. Five such newly arrived elders became especially important in shaping the Ocha tradition in New York. Establishing their own <u>reglas</u> of Ocha, they showed that the religion could be practiced without the Ifá priest. Indeed, they criticized

Lucumí in New York for benefitting only the Ifá priesthood.

Old conflicts between the Ifá and the Ocha priesthoods reappeared in the context of the freedom-flight migration to the United States. One conflict concerned the ritual privileges that the Ifá priesthood claimed of having the sole right of access to the Warriors, who consist of the Lucumí divinities Elegua, Ogún, Ochosi, and Osun. The Warriors' shrines are used at the first level of initiation to begin preparation for entering the Ocha or Ifá priesthoods. The Warriors provide an individual with his first tools for communicating with the Lucumí orichas. The divination system that accompanies the Warriors is called obi for coconut in Lucumí. The person who receives the Warriors is taught to interpret the pattern of fallen coconut shells. Many of the newly arrived Ocha priests and priestesses began to give their godchildren the Warriors, but the Ifá priests in the United States wanted to maintain the monopoly of giving Warriors at initiation.

Among the elders who immigrated in the "freedom flights" was a priest who had a tremendous influence because he belonged to one of the powerful ramas of Matanzas. Another group of "freedom flight" Ocha priests consisted of ritual specialists, oriatés, who directed the ritual of Ocha initiation. The "freedom flight" Oriatés were specialists in reading the Ocha divination system--a simpler system than Ifá divination, and known as dilogún. Moreover, these Oriatés had also received pinaldo, the right to receive the

sacred tools for performance of animal sacrifice. On the basis of their special skills they presented a particular challenge to the power of the Ifá priests in New York. The Ifá priest Houses were very exclusive, however, and maintained the Ocha elders and the newly arrived Oriatés on the periphery of their religious activities. Most clients wanted the services of an Ifá priest and only requested to see an Ocha priest or priestess when they were so advised by an Ifá priest.

The divination of the Ocha priesthood is similar to Ifá in that it provides the individual with a way to connect the material world to the world of the orichas. Like the reading of Ifá, the dilogún tells the individual how to enter into a reciprocal relationship with the deities. Problems are solved by a ritual exchange such as animal sacrifice, fruit offering, ritual feast with songs, or drumming and dances to honor the orichas. However, although the dilogún, the second kind of Lucumí oracle, can be performed by all Ocha priests and priestesses, most of the Lucumí divinations done in New York before the arrival of the "freedom flight" specialists were done by the Ifá priesthood. In the early history of the Lucumí religion in New York there were no Ocha priests or priestesses who could divine with the dilogún. According to Helena, an owner of a new Botánica in Brooklyn, most Ocha priests at that time were so busy running the House-temples that they could not interpret the dilogún. Among the Ocha priests who

immigrated in the 1970s were Italeros -- specialists in dilogún divination.

One of the problems the Ifá priesthood had been having with the spirit mediums was their claim to be able to find out through spirit possession the will of the orichas. This bypassed the Ifá priesthood which considered itself the only link between the individual and the orichas, including Olofi (the supreme God) as well as the lesser divinities. In addition, the spirit mediums were available to clients any time that a crisis developed whereas the Ifá priest was not accessible to the Hispanic community at large. The Ifá priest provided divination to a very elite group from certain House-temples. Individual Afro-Cubans who were not connected with a House-temple, or to an Ocha priest or priestess who followed Ifá, waited for months before getting a visit to the Ifá-shrine.

I have been told several stories from those early days in which many who were finally able to get an appointment through a madrina to see a babalao never saw him. Because Orula had ordered him not to divine on that day. The individual had to leave without his Ifá divination. This situation turned many Afro-Cubans against the Ifá priesthood, but they always came back to consult Ifá. Whenever crises arose in the lives of Afro-Cubans they sought a consultation with Ifá, whose divination could reveal which oricha was relevant for the particular crisis and what rituals were necessary to gain the favor of that

oricha.

The Italeros and Oriatés who arrived in New York with the "freedom flight" were soon incorporated into the new House-temple that were autonomous of the Ifá priests. The Italeros, or dilogún diviners, had to be omo-oricha -- the son or daughter of an oricha. This means they had to be initiated and trained in the divination techniques and memorize the Yoruba verses needed to interpret the oduns. Although this training resembled that of an Ifá priest, soon, elders at the top of the Ocha priesthood began to tell their clients that they did not need to go to the Ifá shrines to get it. As elders of Ocha, these men were highly respected, and they claimed their knowledge to be as great as that of the Ifá priests. Through this claim, the Ocha elders helped the newly arrived Italeros become established in New York's Afro-Cuban religious scene. Once the loyalty of the newly arrived Italeros was guaranteed, the elders introduced them as the Ifá priesthood in the Regla Ocha (oricha tradition). The elders would say that, like the Ifá priests, Italeros could help a person communicate with his or her oricha. The senior Ocha priests and priestesses began to call the Oriatés and Italeros to perform some of the rituals that before the mid-1960s were performed only by the Ifá priest.

The reading of the dilogún by the Italeros and Oriatés provided the Afro-Cuban community with new information on the life history of the orichas. As before, the reading was

done by using the Ifá verses, each of which describes a situation or a problem faced by one of the orichas and how the oricha solved the problem. The situation described in the reading of Ifá or the dilogún is compared to the situation of the client in order to show parallels between his life and that of the oricha. The diviner shows how the oricha was able to manipulate the forces of the universe to reduce the risk of death, illness, or misfortune. Each of the odun has a ritual that the Ifá priest or the Italero priest recommends the individual perform. Most of the prescribed rituals include the sacrifice of an animal that will be cooked and eaten during a communal dinner.

Interpreting the meanings of the oricha symbols for their clients and indicating to them the appropriate rituals to gain the favor of the divinities, the Italeros made divination knowledge more available to those who had been learning on their own. Yet the senior babalocha (Ocha priest) and the newly arrived Oriatés and Italeros still followed the Ifá priests in rejecting the claim of the spirit mediums that the orichas were part of the world of the spirits. The new Ocha priests and priestesses also agreed that traditions of spirit belief and Lucumí should not be mixed since they involved distinct forms of spiritual power. In contrast, the spirit mediums still viewed the spirits and the orichas as part of the same spiritual hierarchy. In fact, during the 1970s, several spirit mediums became initiated into the Ocha priesthood. In their

House, they kept the orichas and spirits separate, maintaining harmony and peace between them.

Helena, one of my informants, is a spirit medium who became a Yemayá priestess. She expresses well the negative view of the priesthood towards the spirits. According to Helena, the botánicas were being bought by individuals who had no interest in religion but just in making money. She relates the following:

> The Espiritistas had no idea of the dilogún divination which was only performed by an Italero who is like a babalao. Listen closely; Lydia Cabrera would have been dead if she had dared to publish all the secrets of initiations in those books in Cuba. You know, these men who own the botánicas make lots of money selling our secrets in the botánicas. The botánica's owner sometimes would hire Espiritistas claiming that they were priestesses or priests and pretended that were real priests or priestesses but they really didn't know what was sacred to use. Imagine it! The botánicas sell the dilogún as a way to find who is putting brujeria on someone. I must tell you that I too bought my shells to the botánica in the Bronx; they were being sold with a notebook. I tried to teach myself how to use the dilogún but it was too difficult.
>
> Well, you know me! I am not a slow person to learn things. Since I migrated from Cuba in 1964, I studied English while working on my high-school diploma. I became a teacher's assistant in the public schools and next year I will be an official teacher. But the dilogún was impossible for me to learn. I could not remember the verses of each odu (sign) and the ebos (purification offering) performed to gain the favor of the orichas which accompanies each odu. Once I went to a botánica in New Jersey because they had a workshop on how to read the dilogún. I attended one class only. The teacher did not know how to read the dilogún either and she kept looking at the pictures in a book that showed the shells in the different positions in which they could fall. She was reading all the steps from the notebook and took too long to figure out how to interpret the reading.

Helena wanted to know if I knew how to read the

dilogún, since anthropologists always want to know secrets. Helena asked, "Beatriz, have you ever had to explain to your professors how to read the dilogún?" I responded, "Well, Helena, there is no way that a person who is not initiated into the mysteries of the Ocha could ever be able to learn how to read the dilogún." Helena, who was twenty years my senior, answered me in a very low and caring voice, "Si, mi hijita. Los secretos del Santo solo pueden saber los Omo-Orichas. [Yes, my child, only the children of the orichas can know the secrets of Ocha.]"

Helena walked me to the front door of her Bronx house and invited me to return. She had given me a test on the reglas of the Lucumí religion just as any other Lucumí priest or priestess would do. Many of the Lucumí priests and priestesses tested me constantly to keep me in line and to make sure that I knew the boundaries between the reglas and my inquiry into the religion.

From Lucumí to Santería in New York

The Ocha priests of one particular rama, the Changó Teddun Rama, were controlled by elders who were considered to have much aché (spiritual force). Three of these elders were especially popular in the Afro-Cuban community in New York. These elders attended the social clubs and used them as a base to publicize past triumphs, their adventures constituting proof that they had aché. Individual Afro-Cubans went to see them for advice in solving the problems

that they faced as immigrants--for example in getting jobs or housing, or curing illness.

One of the elders was a political refugee named Gonzales, an Ocha priest from the famous Changó Cabildo in Cuba. This Changó priest who came to New York in 1968 had been involved in the Batista government. Plotting against the revolution, he had been sent to work in the countryside. In New York he joined with other Ocha priests who viewed Lucumí as a means to economic power. He also performed rituals for people working with political immigrants. One of the many individuals whom he helped did all the paperwork to have him recognized in the United States as a political refugee.

Gonzales was not the only Ocha priest who had come to the United States after being a political prisoner. He told me that five Ocha priests and one Ifá priest who came with him had also been imprisoned. Most of the immigrants who came with Gonzales were older males; their refugee status helped them to receive funds without having to join the labor market. They dedicated themselves to building the membership of the religion by performing divinations and recruiting Afro-Cubans who were flowing in from the "freedom flights." They initiated many Afro-Cubans who were involved in the religion but had no need to enter the priesthood.

One of the ways that Gonzales established his legitimacy was by claiming that the center of religious power was in Cuba; there was a connection between Ocha and

the original cabildos, he asserted, and he constantly reminded people of the principle of seniority; they had to salute a priest like a king or a noble. Gonzales showed the elders of the religion that they had more aché than some of the Ifá priests. He taught the priests in his network that they were more knowledgeable than Ifá priests. Finally, Gonzales liked to spread the image of himself as an elder from the Terddun Rama. He and the others were educated elders of the "famous cabildos" of Changó Terddun. They perceived themselves as the holders of aché because they had unique knowledge of oricha rituals, songs, and dance. The oricha priests who worked with Gonzales were able to attract many Afro-Cubans who had not been interested in the Lucumí religion as it had hitherto existed. In particular, Gonzales took away clientele from the Afro-Cuban spirit mediums. Making plans to rebuild the Great Cabildo of Changó Terddun in the United States, he recruited especially Afro-Cuban women to attend rituals at his House.

Eventually, many of these women entered the different Ocha priesthoods where they were instructed by the elders how to perform the ceremony of collares, placing necklaces on a Godchild to officially connect him or her to that House, and how to prepare the omiero to receive the aché of the orichas. Once these women finished the one year of training, they spent another six months attending ceremonies and learning the basic crisis rituals whose purpose is to heal the individual or family.

These new priestesses, and priests too, specialized in different kinds of rituals of crisis. The first, called the ebos, is performed when an individual faces danger and requests special protection from external forces impinging on him. The second type, called rogacion de cabeza, is a special ritual used for intellectuals to keep them away from mental disturbance. This ritual is also used to keep iku (death) at bay.

The highest priests of the Rama of Gonzales, his House-temple, like the high priests of the American Ifá ramas that preceded it, did not initiate the new priests and priestesses into the highest levels of the ritual hierarchy. However, Gonzales was particularly helpful to these new priests and priestesses, sending them to Miami in order to be initiated into progressively higher levels of spiritual development. Many priests who were connected with Gonzales' rama broke off from their former lineages and a new type of ilé de Ocha began to emerge in which the social organization was more egalitarian and more flexible with regard to the rules.

This new ilé de Ocha (headed by the newly developed priesthood) had a closer interaction with the local population than was ever true of Ifá and did not depend for clientele on referral by the Ifá priests via the Afro-Cuban social clubs. On the contrary, the new ilés de Ocha had priests and priestesses who operated very much like the early spirit mediums in that they were open for consultation

for the entire community. Indeed the spirit mediums began to go for consultation to the new House-temples. The new Ocha priestesses, in particular, knew the language of the spirit mediums and also understood how to manipulate spirits and orichas simultaneously to gain favor.

The House-temples of the new Ocha priestesses provided a sanctuary for the "freedom flight" migrants who had to cope with the prospect of not returning to Cuba. These Afro-Cuban families were experiencing the stress of racism in the new environment and the suffering and guilt resulting from being separated from sons, daughters, mothers, or fathers at home. Such anxieties drew many working class Afro-Cuban immigrants towards the Lucumí religion, but in combination with traditions of spirit belief and various Catholic saints. The new, more "syncretic" version of Lucumí offered the immigrants a system that explained their situation. The priestesses were experts in Lucumí rituals but they reinforced them by recommending a relationship, as well, with a statue of the Virgin de Cobre (Ochún) or any other Catholic saint, and by maintaining a cult of flowers and candles reminiscent of interactions with spirits. The new priestesses asked their clients to place a Lucumí dish in front of the statue of the saint; and would send clients to a spirit medium center if they had spirits as guides. In sum, the new priests and priestesses manipulated the Lucumí tradition to incorporate Catholic and spirit medium elements, moving from one to another as required to solve a

client's problems.

The new Ocha priesthood established calendrical rituals in which each House-temple under its control was responsible for organizing two kinds of public festival every year: the first to celebrate the day of their oricha, the second to celebrate the new group of initiations for the year. The celebration of the oricha's day coincided with the celebration of a particular saint in the Catholic calender and was usually combined with it. In this way the new priesthood publicly displayed to Afro-Cubans who were not involved in African traditions that the House-temple was part of the dominant society. Communal rituals, similar to the ones devoted to the orichas of Babalúayé and Olukun, stressed the idea of reciprocity among the "family" of a House-temple. The rituals conducted by the oricha priesthoods in general were rites of passage such as the placing of collars on new followers who had begun to learn the way of oricha worship. The ritual of the collars allowed the individual to officially enter the Ocha House-temple as a Godchild of the head priest or priestess of the House-temple.

So long as the Lucumí religion in New York was dominated by the Ifá priests, Ocha priests and priestesses had little to do with the eguns (the spirits). Indeed, many Ocha priests and priestesses went to the Ifá priests for the removal of spirits more or less defined as "evil." As the Lucumí religion became centralized under the Ifá priests, it

established the notion that only these priests had knowledge to deal with the eguns as well as the orichas. Under the influence of Gonzales and the other Ocha priests, however, Lucumí became more popular, and at the same time more flexible about rules concerning the eguns. This was first manifested in the increased elaboration of egun or spirit shrines in the houses of Ocha priests. Among the new Ocha priests and priestesses it was common to set up a household shrine for the eguns in a permanent space in the bathroom. One Obatalá priest who is hostile to the presence of spirit medium ideas in the Lucumí religion, observes the change as follows:

> My padrino in collares was initiated into one of the first Ifá houses in the city. He told me that his rama in Cuba believed that the egun shrines were too dangerous for anybody to have one in their house. People were not aware of the difficulty in maintaining an egun shrine. Everyone has one today, because you don't need to be a priest or to be initiated into the egun. But I tell you I only deal with them when Ifá orders me to put a service in them. Otherwise I leave the eguns alone.

Notwithstanding such concerns, many of the Ocha priests and priestesses whom I interviewed told me that when they opened their House temples in the 1970s, they created a space for the eguns' shrine. According to other informants, egun shrines were first shown openly in New York by the new Ocha priestesses who, as we have seen, combined elements of Catholicism, traditions of spirit belief, and Lucumí in order to increase their aché.

The practice of several traditions within one religion

is commonly known as Santería and the priests or priestesses are called santeros. The terms derive from the Spanish word santo (saint); santeros refers to those individuals who have in their house the altars of different saints. During colonial times, it was customary for the lady of the house to have a room where she retired to pray to the saints. The idea of having a room with Catholic saints to whom to pray was adapted by the Lucumí at the end of the colonial period. The Lucumí religion has a pantheon of African divinities which was equated with the saints during the time that Afro-Cubans were forced to convert to Catholicism. For one thing, the Catholic saints could be equated with African divinities, and practitioners could protect themselves from the authorities by pretending to be worshipping the master's saints. The Lucumís used different Catholic saints according to how many orichas they were honoring. In their house the Lucumí priest placed as many Catholic pictures as it took to correspond to their particular orichas.

There are major differences between the Lucumí priests and the santeros. The Lucumí priesthood is dedicated to the service of African divinities. The role of a Lucumí priest or priestess is to communicate in the Lucumí language with the orichas and to maintain religious activities focused on the Yoruba religion. The new priests, the santeros, did not see the learning of the Lucumí language as a requirement for speaking to the orichas. They believed that powerful spirits like the orichas could understand any language, and

they spoke to the orichas in Spanish. The Lucumí priesthoods also saw their function to preserve the rituals and divination practices of the early Lucumís. In contrast, the new priesthood sought to make the Lucumí religion more acceptable to whites and also more powerful by equating the Catholic and the African divinities. Many of the santeros began to worship the orichas and the Catholic saints as equals. Rituals that had been only for the Lucumí divinities were used to worship the Catholic saints and the rituals of folk Catholicism were used to honor the orichas.

The santeros also brought traditions of spirit belief into the Lucumí religion, here incorporating not a dominant tradition but a tradition that opposed domination. The fear of the Lucumí priesthood was that the language and the rituals were going to be lost. As we have seen, the interaction between Lucumí and traditions of spirit belief created many conflicts in Cuba, whereas Cuban Santería integrated these traditions. This was a serious matter for the Lucumí ramas in Cuba where Santería had become more popular than the Lucumí religion. The result was many conflicts between the new Ocha priesthood and the old elite of the Lucumí religion. The problem was transplanted to the United States with the "freedom flight" immigration of Afro-Cuban priests and priestesses.

The emergence of santero House-temples in New York influenced the Ocha priesthood, formerly controlled by the group of Lucumí elders. These elders rebuilt their egun

shrines as a way to recognize the spirits of the ancestors, at the same time reaffirming that the Lucumí ancestor of the rama was observing the actions of all those who did not follow the Regla Ocha. The priests and priestesses of the Ifá priesthood also displayed a shrine to the eguns, but in their House-temples, the eguns' shrines were placed in a corner of the bathroom or outside in the back yard, in the case of a private house. The House-temples slowly began to put their egun shrines closer to the oricha shrines, although always in a separate room in a corner. This showed their interest in building a line of communication with traditions of spirit belief. Other changes were adding physical objects, such as a picture of a dead relative with a simple glass of water in an elevated place. The glass of water was clearly an indication that the spirit medium tradition was beginning to influence the House-temple.

According to one of the elders in a House-temple, the early priests of the Lucumí religion in the United States had made a great mistake by forgetting that in Lucumí rituals "eguns need to be treated with respect." The old man then looked at me very seriously and with eyes that indicated great danger. He asked me if I had learned to speak the ritual language of the Lucumí religion. I answered that it was a secret language, only used in the rituals of the Ifá and oricha priesthoods. Since I had not been initiated into the priesthood, it had not been taught to me. "Well," he said, "Since you are like a granddaughter

to me, I want to teach you an important saying in Lucumí: Iku lo bi Ocha. [There is no Ocha without the Dead]."

A Note on Palo Mayombe

The conflict between traditions of spirit belief and Lucumí underwent yet another change with the rise of the Afro-Cuban tradition known as Palo Mayombe, which had been practiced in Cuba by Africans of Congolese descent. In my research the name of Tata Vrillumbri Siete Rayos was always mentioned as the Afro-Cuban who, in the 1970s, first transplanted Palo Mayombe House-temples to the United States. The spirit mediums were attracted to these shrines because they ultimately found in them a niche in which to practice traditions of spirit belief.

The conflict between the spirit mediums and Ifá priests concerned the former's right to claim that they could be possessed by the orichas as spirits. Among the religious forces that contributed to the peace between the Ifá priests and spirit mediums was the arrival in the Mariel freedom flights of Palo Mayombe priests and priestesses known as Madre Nganga and Padre Nganga. According to Palo Mayombe belief, a Padre or Madre Nganga controls a very powerful spirit or muerto that obeys him or her without question. The spirit mediums were attracted to the idea that the Padre and Madre Nganga worked with powerful spirits of the dead that needed fewer rituals, prayers and sacrifices than the Lucumí religion required, and that worked faster than the

orichas.

Palo Mayombe religious ideas spread rapidly in New York's spirit medium communities during the 1970s. Many of the spirit mediums were beginning to be possessed by Palo Mayombe spirits known as Ngangas. Some spirit mediums became Madre Nganga by undergoing the Palo Mayombe initiation known as rayarse en Palo, during which the individual acquires the power of a spirit by visiting the world of the spirits; by living among them he becomes another of the powerful dead.

The Palo Mayombe priesthood has always been a defender of the rights of the muerto over the orichas. The arrival of Padre Ngangas and Madre Ngangas in the time of the conflict between spirit mediums and Lucumí priests gave the spirit mediums support in their fight for the legitimacy of the tradition of spirit belief. The Ocha priest and priestess were tolerant of spirit mediums and had also helped by putting the egun shrines in their ilés de Ocha.

The spirit mediums' interaction with the Palo Mayombe religion was clear to anyone who attended centers where their spiritual sessions were held during the 1980s. The mediums were being possessed by Congolese spirits who were rayado (initiated in Palo Mayombe). Palo Mayombe priests and priestesses had no rules like the Ifá or Ocha reglas about which spirits were accessible to the spirit mediums. The Padre Ngangas and Madre Ngangas who had immigrated from Cuba were willing to share their Palo spirits with the

spirit mediums, although they knew that the mediums would need their knowledge to learn how to deal with them. Many of the spirit mediums made visits to the Paleros to learn how to prepare an Nganga (an iron pot where the Nganga spirits are believed to concentrate their power).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined religious transformations in Cuba and the United States. In the historical data I have tried to demonstrate that in situations of cultural contact, religious syncretism is a complex political process. I have also attempted to show the linkages between political empowerment and religion. The historical data indicate that individuals and groups that were on the periphery of Cuban colonial society were constantly reworking and creating new cultural forms to free themselves from oppression. Religion in colonial Cuba provided a wide field for groups to construct symbolic models for manipulating the social order. Christianity as the dominant religion was unable to bind all the different Cuban groups. Catholicism depended on the African religions to incorporate the Afro-Cuban groups into the Catholic church. Also demonstrated is how free blacks and slaves accommodated themselves within the Catholic religion while at the same time reworking their African religious institutions.

The historical data provide an image of the Afro-Cuban individuals and groups that brings into question a common conceptual framework used in anthropology to describe and analyze religions that emerged in plantation societies. Lucumí, Santería and traditions of spirit belief need first

to be understood in their historical context. By placing Afro-Cuban religions in the history of Afro-Cuban groups, it is clear that these religious traditions are more than the result of Christian influences upon Afro-Cubans. I have moved away from this type of interpretation because it presents an image of women and men outside their structural positions in the society. One important theme of this thesis is how cultural forms emerge as the result of men and women manipulating the symbolic order in order to increase their life chances. Each of the Afro-Cuban religious forms that emerged in Cuba during the process of cultural contact shows that these religious ideas were closely linked to the liberation struggles of black Cubans. The traditional model of syncretism has failed to discover the political dimension in the religion of Afro-Cubans.

One of the most interesting aspects of the thesis is that it describes and explains the religious similarities and differences among the different groups of Afro-Cubans. Most of the previous studies of Afro-Cuban religions have only compared them to Christianity. Instead, this research describes and analyzes two Afro-Cuban religions, Lucumí and Afro-Cuban traditions of spirit belief, bringing into focus their interrelationships with each other and with the dominant society. The development of this new framework has provided a better understanding of religious transformations in situations of cultural contact. It has demonstrated how marginal groups that are denied a position in the social

order respond creatively to increase their life chances. This can be seen in the case of the free Afro-Cuban artisan and military classes who decided to undergo a process of `Lucumínization' and adapted an African way of life. The Lucumí slaves discovered that by allowing the Afro-Creoles to become Lucumí they could take control of the religious environment in Havana. The accommodation of these groups to one another allowed for the growth of the great Yoruba movement in Cuba which eventually became a motivating force of the independence movement.

The study of Afro-Cuban religious traditions in the United States provides a more detailed account of religious transformation. I have attempted to move from the syncretism model in order to describe and analyze how religious variants emerged as the result of internal conflicts among different priesthoods and interactions with outside groups. An example is the conflict between the Ifá priests and the spiritual mediums in New York City. No doubt, the women's movement in the United States influenced women in the Lucumí religion to challenge the exclusively male Ifá priesthood. More to the point, African-Americans' struggling for justice in the 1960's and 1970's became attracted to the Lucumí form because of its clearly Yoruba roots, reinforcing the African elements in the House-temples. On the other hand, the form of spirit belief, whose roots can be traced to nineteenth-century rebel communities in eastern Cuba, incorporated certain elements

Puerto Rican belief and practice.

Lucumí religion provided the African-Americans a direct link to Africa and a new role for African-American males within the Ifá priesthood that was powerful and prestigious. The two traditions conflicted, however, and this influenced the emergence of a new variant known as Santería which accommodated both Lucumí and spirit beliefs, as well as Catholic elements. Its social organization gave women a greater leadership role by moving away from notions of elitism typical of the Lucumí religion, and organizing themselves not in lineages (ramas) but as egocentric networks that operated independently from one another. However, these networks were also able to come together during times of crisis.

The cases studies of individual priests and priestess demonstrate the variability and complexity of human life. They show how individuals facing economic and political exploitation manipulate religious systems. Unlike Christianity, Afro-Cuban religion served to enhance the power of marginal groups. The Lucumí religion helped these individuals become more aware of their oppression. I have tried to show the dynamic interplay among different Afro-Cuban groups by discussing and analyzing the conflicts, and showing when religious variants were united or divided.

In conclusion, the empirical data presented in this dissertation is evidence of the dynamics of cultural building. Religion is an aspect of culture that illustrates

especially well how culture can be built and re-built, and how ideas play a role in the struggle for power by groups that are forced to survive on the periphery. As the case studies show, human beings deprived of their natural rights will create solutions to their problems. At least some religious systems can provide humans with solutions to their material problems by empowering them with the belief that they can be victorious in their struggle for a more just world.

APPENDIX A

Discussion

These case studies are composed of individual priestesses and priests who I met during participant observations in Lucumí Ocha temples. I selected these informants because they possessed an understanding of my anthropological perspective. In other words, these individuals were able to learn the mode of thought that I used to talk about the religion. Other priests or priestesses thought the questions were rather silly or too personal. I met the individuals in the case studies during many of the ceremonies in the five Ocha temples where I was doing participant observation. The interviewees came to these House-temples to work as specialists. I observed that they had a unique ability to discuss the Lucumí ritual. They explained the problems of their own Ocha temples from a perspective very akin to anthropology. This led me to believe they would be able to discuss their own lives in a similar way.

I have decided to cite the interviews verbatim. This is reminiscent of Bosian anthropology in which the anthropologist took lengthy interview session with a few key informants in order to capture an way of life that was disssappearing. This verbatim citation of material allows

the reader to immerse into the lives of the individuals, and leads to a better understanding of how these individuals used the religion to solve problems creatively. It also may help make a link between the solving of personal problems and the struggles of subordinated groups against oppression.

This data provides information about how religious ideas influence individuals' way of thinking, and shows how an individual's position in the labor market influences how he or she relates to the religious world.

Interviews

Note: All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English.

Olofi, the Supreme God

1. Manolo Rodriguez, 60 years old. Changó priest and oriaté in Havana, Cuba; 25 years in the priesthood. Migrated from Cuba in 1965. Owner of taxi company. Profession: musician. Taken July 17, 1980, in New York City.

> God was too old and tired to be troubled with mundane problems. The orichas complained that Olofi was sleeping on the job and that he did not answer their prayers. The orichas began to plot against Olofi to take control of the universe from him. Obatalá was the only oricha that knew the path to Olofi, and he went to warn Olofi that the orichas were planning a rebellion. When Obatalá arrived in heaven, he found Olofi sleeping and he advised Olofi to distribute his Power among the orichas. Olofi gave each of the orichas their individual Powers, but he told them that he did not want to be disturbed, except only for final decisions. Otherwise, the orichas must respond to Obatalá, as his representative on earth. Olofi made Obatalá the head of all the orichas and responsible for the consciences of all humans.

Obatalá

2. Gladiz Lopez, 56 years old. Obatalá priestess in Havana, Cuba; 18 years in the priesthood. Migrated from Cuba in 1954. Profession: bilingual librarian. Taken May 19, 1978, in New York City.

I made Obatalá due to my illness eighteen years ago. My life needed a change at that time, but I was not aware of it. I had to run to the doctor every week with bleeding ulcers. I felt that I worked too hard and did not have much fun with my friends. I did not have a husband or any children to prevent me from doing what I wanted. One day I went for a reading with an Ifa priest [padrino] and Obatalá told me that he did not want me to keep on working. Padrino told me that I needed to save my money for my initiation. I thought that with all my expenses, it would be difficult; but everyone helped me.

I was going to become a priestess of Obatalá. He is the most important oricha and the controller of all the eledá that are on the earth. He is present at the time of the birth of a child because he has the power to control all the heads. That is the reason that Obatalá priests and priestesses are allowed to perform initiation ceremonies for all the orichas. Obatalá is the only oricha that can descend into the head of an Ocha priest or priestess. For me, Obatalá is the oricha that represents Olofi, and his words are the law for me. My life changed because Obatalá did not like my big weekend parties. He did not want people drinking in his house and making loud noises. I had to do with just one job because Obatalá wanted me to spend more time at home with him. Obatalá forced me to change to a more simple and peaceful lifestyle. He told me that he wanted me to stop working to pay for fancy house, clothes and parties. He did not like disorder in his house [ilé]. My life began to change because of Obatalá. As a result, my daughter came to live with me. Obatalá demanded peace and silence and not the wild party life that I had led. My daughter's father had felt good about my change of lifestyle, and permitted my daughter to come live with me. As a priestess of Obatalá, I had the peace of mind and the right atmosphere for her to grow up in.

Yemayá

3. Maritza Roble, 40 years old. Adept in the cult of Yemayá. Migrated from Cuba in 1973. Profession: schoolteacher in Cuba. Owner of grocery store. Taken December 3, 1988, in New Orleans.

Three years ago my daughter was accused by the wife of my husband's friend of dating her husband. The woman waited for my daughter in front of her high school and insulted her in front of all her friends. The woman's husband came to excuse his wife saying that she was under a lot of pressure. He told us that the woman's father and mother had left Cuba to go to Panama and she was having trouble bringing them to the United States. He promised us that his wife was not going to bother my daughter any more. However, one morning we opened the front door and someone had spread a pack of black beans in our steps. This woman had hired a Palero (Palo Mayombe priest), according to an Espiritista, to destroy my daughter. The Espiritista told me that my daughter was protected by Yemayá, and she sent me to a priestess of Yemayá to help us. This priestess was also initiated in Palo Mayombe and understood the dangers that we were facing. The Yemayá priestess told us that Yemayá was very angry with my daughter because she had not made offerings in her honor. The priestess ordered us to bring the money to offer Yemayá fruit, and to sacrifice a duck in her honor. Yemayá is a very good mother with her children and she stands by her children all the time. Yemayá was pacified with the fruit and the duck. After that ritual, we did not have to worry any more about the beans that in front of our house every morning. Finally, the woman got tired of "throwing witchcraft" because it did not have any effect on us. We heard that the Palero told her that he could no longer work for her because Yemayá was protecting us. Every month we paid our respect to Yemayá. My daughter buys fruit and takes it to the Yemayá shrine. Yemayá says that she does not want to claim my daughter's head. But she wants for us to honor and respect her as the queen of all the Lucumís.

4. Carmen Alfonso, 46 years old. Yemayá priestess for 7 years. Born in Havana; migrated from Cuba in 1975. Profession: seamstress at Macy's; professional singer at Lucumí festivals. Taken April 3, 1988, New York City.

> I am very happy that I have been crowned [initiated] Yemayá because she is an _oricha_ that never forgets her duties to her children. She always listens to your prayers and makes sure that your needs are met. Yemayá likes her children to pay tribute to her in her shrine. One time I was trying to buy a house in the Bronx because I had promised Yemayá a bigger house to celebrate Yemayá festivals. I had been saving money in the bank for three years. One day my oldest son asked my husband for money because he wanted to get married. My husband, without consulting with me, gave my son the money that I had been saving to buy Yemayá's house. An Espiritista had told him that he was sure to hit a number in the _bolita_ [numbers]. My husband is a fanatic with Espiritistas and he uses them to find what number to play or what horse to bet on. He is a gambler who is always at the Espiritista's searching for good luck to hit the numbers. My husband has tried to find out from Yemayá which lucky number to play because he was told that he was destined to hit the numbers one day. However, I will never use my religion to get rich. What would the people of my _rama_ think in Cuba when they learn that I am using Ocha to make money? I told him clearly that he would never use my _oricha_ to make money. I am not crazy, and will not turn Yemayá against me by using her _aché_ to make my husband rich. One day a Yemayá priestess told him that the religion was not to be used to make money and that he was going to anger her. Yemayá's money was secretly kept in a small altar that I had for the Virgin of Regla [the Catholic saint with whom Yemayá has been identified in Cuba]. But one day I realized that the money was gone. My husband told me that he had been told by a Brazilian spiritualist that he was going to win in the dog race in Miami. We went to Florida and he went to the races every day, except one, when his brother-in-law convinced him to go fishing with him. One day my husband left early one morning to go fishing with his brother-in-law. While fishing in the boat my husband fell in the water; and once in the water, Yemayá took him to the bottom of the sea. By the time he was pulled out of the water he was almost dead. My mother-in-law and I ran to

the hospital with the babalao. There he performed a ritual to try to save his life, but Yemayá responded that she was going to take him. The babalao tried to offer Yemayá a sacrifice in return for my husband's life. When my son arrived from New York, he told me that his father had taken Yemayá's money for my son's wedding. I knew that this was a serious offense to Yemayá and I called the babalao and explained to him that my husband had angered Yemayá by taking the money that was for her house. The babalao told me that he had done a divination that same morning, but there was nothing that could be done because Yemayá had refused to accept any sacrifice or ritual on behalf of my husband. Then I was very scared because the babalao could not do anything to prevent Yemayá from taking my husband.

I found out that there was a seventy-five year old priestess of Yemayá visiting from Cuba. This older woman had been a priestess of Yemayá for forty years and knew many more rituals for Yemayá than the babalao. My sister-in-law and I ran to see the woman immediately since she was going back to Cuba in three days. However, we had heard that she was asking the Cuban government for an extension on her visa. My sister-in-law promised to help her get the extension. Once we met the old priestess there was no doubt that she knew many of the rituals that even many babalaos did not know. She told us that Yemayá had many different roads by which her children could approach her in order to pacify the oricha. Her father had been a babalao from Havana who had shared with her many of the rituals of her oricha. The Yemayá Priestess said that whenever Yemayá turns away from her children, the only way to get her attention is by reaching her through Olukun road. She told us to go to the sea to talk to Yemayá-Olokun and ask her to forgive my husband. The older priestess came with my sister-in-law and me to pray. We sang songs to Yemayá-Olukun in the middle of the sea. Once at the sea the old priestess dropped a little doll house with pennies in the water.

The Yemayá priestess told us that there was no need for my sister-in-law to get her an extension on her visa. She had to return to Cuba soon. The ritual for Yemayá-Olukun tends to weaken the spiritual side of the mediator and since she was old, her family was concerned that this ritual could lead to her death. In Cuba, the Yemayá priestess told us, people do the rituals not for money because they have too much respect

for the Lucumí rules. Cubans would be very much afraid of people gossiping that an individual was using the religion for money. But in Miami there was no longer any respect for the tradition and the elders had lost the control of the religion. She told us about the many babalaos who knew how to handle problems and could perform the proper rituals to give back her strength.

The priestess told me that I had no time to waste and that I needed to go to New York to buy Yemayá her house in order to save my husband's life. She gave Yemayá a little house as symbolic gesture but Yemayá needed to see that our intentions were real. The next day I left my husband in intensive care and returned to New York to buy the house for Yemayá. Finally, after many months of praying to her new shrine at the house I bought, my husband's life was spared. A year later, Yemayá asked for my head and I will be crowned Yemayá in Cuba. I am going to make Ocha in the same rama of the priestess that helped me save my husband's life.

Ogún

5. Victor Castillo, 88 years old. Priest of Ogún, oriaté; 60 years in priesthood. Born in Matanzas, Cuba; migrated from Cuba in 1973. Profession: mechanic. Taken June 3, 1980, in New York City.

Victor was initiated into the priesthood of Ogún in a small rural village that had been a rebel village during the colonial period. According to Victor, everyone in that village was devoted to Ogún. He explains the reasons for the great devotion:

My family and I were living in a small community near a sugar mill that was named Las Mercedes. The mill was sold to an American businessman who was very rich. Most everyone in the village cultivated small crops and raised chickens and pigs that we sold to nearby haciendas. The sugar mill brought economic progress to our little community. I remember that before the American had bought the mill, the economic situation in the country was very bad. Our family had enough to eat, but we needed money for clothes and shoes.

Many of the young people, like myself, wanted to leave the community and go to Havana. However, the American had given us an opportunity

for employment, and he paid us well. We began to work part of the time in the sugar mill. The American man, as well as the community, was very happy with the money that was being made. The American decided to expand the sugar mill, but he needed to buy more of our land. Many of our friends sold their land to the American and moved to Havana. It made lots of sense since they could have better medical services and schools. My family decided to keep our land, since it was the place where my grandparents were buried. We chose to continue to raise animals and work part-time in the mill rather than to take the American's money and go to Havana.

Everyone that stayed in the community was very content that for the first time we had money for clothes and shoes. Most of us, with the exception of Manuel, an Ocha priest, were convinced that progress was coming our way. While the sugar mills were in operation, we were very happy because we had the money necessary to buy in the grocery store and even to pay for medical services. When the sugar mill was not in operation, we continued to survive from the cultivation and the sale of chicks and goats. The economic situation improved when a project began to build the tracks for the railroads. They hired many people to work in building construction because they expected more people to arrive in the community. Especially, many Spanish businessmen opened grocery stores [bodegas] and other types of stores. We also heard that the American had talked with the governor to build a small clinic in the area. We strongly believed that progress was arriving with the development of the railroad.

We were happy until we heard from people in other communities where the railroad had been built that the development of the railroad had broken up their community. The news was very serious for us because those people had lived in that community since the days of slavery. All of their family had been buried in the community, and the railroad had destroyed all the burial sites. People who had lived together as family for almost two hundred years were spread all over the place with no roots. Even the dead had lost their place, and that is the worst offense that anybody can commit against a dead relative. Many of the persons in that community began to suffer from mental problems caused by the spirits of their dead relatives for having allowed them to be disturbed in that manner.

My father, who had a godchild that was a

chauffeur for the mayor of the town, discovered that the railroad was going to pass through the middle of our community. This meant that many people would have to move their farms so the railroad could pass. One of the people who tried to talk to the government and to the American was Manuel, a son of Ogún. He was very much respected in the town for his sense of justice. Whenever there was a problem in the community about land or money, Manuel was the mediator. None in the community dared to break a pact that was reached in any dispute through Manuel's intervention. He had a piece of iron that represented his Ogún. He had inherited it from his Lucumí father, who was a son of Lucumí slaves.

One story that I will never forget was a situation that emerged when one of our neighbors had accused another neighbor of stealing a pig from his farm. Everyone told the man whose pig was stolen to go to Ogún's shrine and not to take the law into his own hands. He went to Manuel and told him his problem. Manual asked the fellow who was being accused to swear on this piece of iron. The man refused. He did not want problems with Ogún, who is so correct about his things. Ogún hates those who are cowards and who are afraid to face the truth. The man knew that from past experience. He was forced to pay for the pig that he had stolen.

Since we had no police department, Manuel, as a son of Ogún, was the person who everyone went to see when we had a conflict with another person. He was the community judge, police, and marriage advisor who settled all types of problems between us. The problem with the development of the railroad was not between ourselves, but between us and the government. For months we experienced many problems because the rural guards began to raid the houses of many of the Ocha priests and priestesses. They accused them of sacrificing white children, and of witchcraft, but they never arrested anyone. The rural guards had been told by Manuel that Ogún was watching them and their abuse toward his children. One day they came to arrest Manuel during a festival for Ogún in which the whole town participated. The arrest was not possible because one of the guards became possessed with Changó. It was difficult to believe how that white man started jumping high and dancing all the way to the office. No one in the community told the whites how to deal with the possession. We heard later that they took the possessed man to Havana to a babalao [Ifa priest].

However, the babalao told them that Changó was going to leave the Spanish man when he [Changó] was ready. Changó left his body a week later and the Spanish man went back to Spain. After that, no one dared to ever come to interrupt any of Manuel's religious festivals. Manuel was also very well connected with the people outside of our community, and rural guards knew not to harrass him or his godchildren. The chief of the regional rural guards was also a son of Ogún, and when Manuel felt it necessary he called upon him for help. The chief responded not so much for Manuel, but for Ogún. The chief of the rural guards called the American and told him that he should look for another space for his mill. The American was married to a young Cuban woman whose father had owned much land in the same area. She told her husband that Manuel was a brujo who drank blood and that Manuel could stop the railroad project. The American had no fear because he had no idea what she was talking about. To him, it was just stories of the Negroes who were very ignorant and stupid. However, his Cuban wife knew that Manuel was a great priest and that her grandfather had gone to Manuel's family many times to solve their problems. Everyone in Cuba knows the way of the orichas, especially the white Cubans.

The American continued to push the government for the development of the railroad line, although it was going to cut through the middle of the community. He paid enough money to individuals in the government so we were ordered to move our house to the worse section in the area, where the soil was very bad. Manuel had gone to the monte for weeks and was not aware that we were being forced to move by the rural guards. However, it was difficult to reach Manuel in the forest. We knew two rural guards had been hunting brujos because it was said that the sacrifice of white children would bring self-empowerment. Manuel was accused of such sacrifices, but they never found him. We never heard from the guards again. People said that the forces had swallowed them because they forgot to pay Ogún their tribute. Only a son of Ogún could penetrate the forest and come out alive.

I was a son of Ogún since birth and our friends told my father to send me to look for Manuel. My father told me not to be afraid, that a son of Ogún should never be afraid. Ogún, he told me, was going to be next to me and I was going to have the courage necessary to come out

victorious. My mother made Ogún's herbal medicine to protect me from all harm. My father took me to an Ogún priest in a nearby town, and he taught me the ritual which I needed to perform before entering the forest. He told me that as a son of Ogún, I had to sacrifice a goat before entering the forest. My father told the priest that he would go with me because I was only ten years old. The Ogún priest told my father that he was not the son of Ogún and he could not perform the ceremony. Ogún would only receive from his own son. It was at that time that I received a knife, and was also taught the ritual songs to sing while I was sacrificing the goat. I told my father that I was not going to be able to do it because I was a small and skinny guy. The priest told me how the goat was going to behave when I sang the sacrificial song, and I must do it the same way that he had taught me. The Ogún priest told my father that I would need to be initiated after I came out of the forest.

Everything went as we had planned. The goat just stood still as I cut her head and placed it outside the community at the entrance of the forest. When I located Manuel, he was not surprised to see me. It was as if he was waiting for someone to find him to bring him out.

I was very pleased to find out that Manuel would bring me into initiation, because usually he did not like to initiate anybody into Ogún's priesthood. We took three days to come out of the forest because Manuel wanted to teach me everything that was in the forest. I did not dare tell him to hurry because you should know better than to give orders to an omo-oricha [son of the orichas]. He did not seem concerned that the rural guards were in the community. I thought that we had lost our battle with the American. I expected to find everyone in the town dead. Most of the men and women were ready to confront the rural guards with stones and sticks; they were not going to leave their land.

When we arrived, the first news we heard was that the American's private plane had crashed in one of the mountains in the eastern part of the island. It was at that moment that I realized that the orichas were very powerful and not to be ignored. The American's wife had decided to abandon the sugar mill, and the project of developing of the railroad had been stopped completely by the chief of police. We had no more problems from the developers and the rural guards never bothered us again.

Many people whom I have met in the United States bring me news about the community. They have told me that Fidel knows the story about this area and has ordered that the revolution be very respectful towards the religion. At the beginning of the revolution, many of the communists were ready to make changes in the community in order to bring progress to the area. I must tell you that the community still looks very much like some African villages and there are many old people who can still speak Lucumí. The revolution was concerned with changing the economic conditions of the blacks in Cuba, but I think they have been very careful not to disturb the dead that are buried in people's yards. Manuel's spirits still guard the area and protect the people in the community. The Lucumí are more powerful after they are dead and every Cuban person knows that.

6. Enrique Octavio, 71 years old. Priest of Ogún for 51 years, makes sacrifices. Migrated from Cuba in 1961. Profession: military officer in Cuba, artist. Taken March 3, 1981.

Enrique was initiated in Cuba in the 1930's and came to the United States in the early 1960's. He lived in Florida for seven years, working in one of Miami's most famous restaurants as a doorman. According to Enrique, Ogún forced him to go north because as a son of Ogún, he was not supposed to work as a doorman. One day during a reading with a Miami babalao, Ogún informed him that he had to leave Florida and to travel to a more industrialized city.

Enrique told me that as a son of Ogún, he is the owner of the sacrificial knife used in animal offering. The Ogún priesthood is the only group in the Lucumí hierarchy that is allowed to perform the sacrificial ceremonies without having been initiated to the rank of priest with pinaldo. Ordinarily, those priests who desire to have the privilege of making sacrifices of goats and sheep must receive a knife during a sacred ceremony called pinaldo. However, as an Ogún priest, Enrique had obtained permission to make offerings of a sacrificial goat or sheep to the orichas in the absence of such a ceremony.

Enrique searched for a job in a car factory in New Jersey, where he had a brother in the male secret society known as Abakua, and to which he once belonged. When he became a priest in the Lucumí religious

tradition, he dropped his Abakua association, but never lost contact with his brothers in the male society. Enrique began to work on an assembly line, but he encountered problems because he was the first Afro-Cuban to be hired during that time. His supervisor did not like the fact that Enrique spoke Spanish with the other workers and told Enrique not to communicate with them in this language. The supervisor was afraid that they were using Spanish to plot against him. He finally made a rule that prohibited the use of Spanish in Enrique's section. No one could speak any other language but English.

Enrique became a member of the union. His involvement was also very disturbing to all the supervisors who had identified him as arrogant and a trouble maker. In the union, Enrique had also been one of the persons trying to force the company to hire more Hispanics. This had contributed to African-American workers becoming isolated from Enrique. He was considered a bad influence on other workers. The company used the fact that African-Americans disliked Enrique to pit Hispanic and African- American workers against each other. However, Enrique was so involved in African religion that before long, African-Americans began to support him in his campaign not to lose the right to speak Spanish.

Enrique's wife, Maria, is a Yemayá priestess. Enrique had received many threats from whites in the company. According to Maria, Enrique had made many powerful enemies who wanted to eliminate him, but Ogún, who was his father, cut all his enemies with his machete. Enrique's involvement in the union forced the company and the supervisors to allow Hispanic workers to communicate in Spanish. Maria thought that Ogún gave Enrique the power to influence the Hispanics not to be intimidated into giving up Spanish among themselves. Enrique persuaded not only his co-workers but also other workers to express their Hispanic identity. One of Enrique's friends told me that he is a direct son of Ogún and shows no fear at all.

One of Enrique's co-workers, who is also a godchild of Enrique, told me that, like Ogún, his godfather fears nothing and meets force with force. Enrique told me that since the time of slavery, the sons of Ogún had faced death with courage. He said that as a son of Ogún he would lose his aché by not standing up for what is correct and right. As a son of Ogún he said that he encouraged people to fight for their rights. He said the following:

> I tell my godchildren to meet fire with fire and force with force because Ogún will only accompany those that don't even fear death. Ogún is the oricha that fights for justice for those who are being denied an opportunity.

Enrique has moved from assembly line worker to supervisor. He told me that the company has never been successful in establishing a rule that would prevent the Hispanic workers from speaking in Spanish. He remembers that the supervisor used all types of strategies on particular individuals to force them not to speak Spanish to each other. Many of his co-workers, though, told Enrique that they were only going to reach a supervisory position by using only English. He told me that during those days many of the new Hispanic workers felt ashamed of their Spanish language. According to Enrique, the fact that many of the workers felt pressured to speak only English became a motivating force for him to reach the top position without losing his identity and language. He became a role model for the Hispanic workers in the company and encouraged them to follow him and to be proud of their Hispanic heritage.

Enrique now works for his union and is honored and respected by the union members. They said that Enrique is always brave and has never forgotten the workers at the bottom. In a union newsletter, Enrique was mentioned as a man with a great sense of justice. Enrique has a shop in the Bronx in which he makes miniature metal emblems for Ogún shrines. Enrique has been very successful in his shop, since Ogún emblems are the ones used by Ifa priests when preparing the Warriors Shrine. Enrique makes the iron tools for the warrior shrines -- miniature tools used by peasants and industrial workers, such as hammers, anvils, machetes, rakes, pick axes, shovels, spikes, knives, hoes, and railroad nails. These miniature tools are placed in an iron pot called the cauldron of Ogún. Enrique sells them to the Ifa priests who prepare the Warrior Shrine. In the Lucumí tradition, the Ifa priests were the only ones who knew the ritual to prepare the Elegua as well as the rest of the warriors. Enrique follows the rules of the orichas [Regla Ocha] and has refused to sell the warriors to Ocha priests who can also give an Ocha Elegun. The warrior prepared by the Ifa priest had personal, more powerful aché.

The Warriors

7. Celia Almedia, 48 years old. Lucumí adept. Migrated from Cuba in 1952. Profession: seamstress, specialization in Lucumí clothes. Taken February 11, 1983, in New York City.

Celia told me that having the Warrior shrine in her house was a means of eradicating the old and opening a new way:

> I came from Cuba during the 1950s because my husband's family was living in Tampa and they had opened a restaurant. We came to help build up the business. They put us to work there for almost nothing and took all our money to pay the rent and food. They said that our teenage boy ate too much and worked too little. My husband began to drink too much because he could not adapt to our new way of life. I was working twelve hours a day so I had no time to be bored. We lived in a tiny room that his family had built for us in the back of the house. His family felt that we needed to be thankful that they had taken us out of Cuba. We were treated very badly by them and I just got tired and left with my son one day. My mother-in-law told me that I was going to beg her to come back to them.
>
> I went to New York where a friend found me a job cleaning house at night. During the day I worked in a factory. I joined a Cuban club in the Bronx and there I met many other Cubans who were involved in the Lucumí religion. My mother was an Espiritista but she had never liked any of the African religions. She said that the black people had a bad name.
>
> My life was so difficult trying to make it alone with my son. A friend from the club suggested that I go with him to visit his godfather in the Bronx who was an Ifa priest. I went for a divination with the Ifa and I was told to receive my Warriors in order to be able to confront the wars that I was about to face as a single mother.
>
> Elegua, Ogún Ochosi, and Ozun became my partners. The Ifa priest told me that the Warriors were going to be next to me in every battle. I should not have any fear as long as I offered them tobacco, aguardiente, and a chick as a reward after each battle was won.
>
> There are twenty-one different Elegguás, and so he gave me the secret name of my Elegua. It is important to call your Elegua by its particular

name. The Elegua was especially designed for me, according to the information that was given by the orichas to the Ifa priest. While I was there waiting in the living room to go to the basement to see the Ifa priest, I saw several persons from the Cuban club there and each of them had different Elegguás. The variation of these different Elegguás proved, my friend told me, the great knowledge of the Ifa priest, because he must know how to prepare each one differently.

The Osun, which represents the eledá of the person, was also part of what I received with my Warrior. The Osun was symbolized by a metal rooster in an iron cup with bells all around. The rooster must be placed high up and it must be protected so that it does not fall. If the Osun falls down, I must bring it to the priest, because it means that my life was in danger and I needed to sacrifice a pigeon to protect myself from death.

To make a long story short, the Ifa priest was correct. I had a hard time raising my son alone in the Bronx. But with the help of my Warriors I found the strength to force my son to take the proper way of life. When I could not keep him from the streets, I forced him to join the Air Force. After his four years were up, he came back and he registered in City College to study business. Every time that he had a battle to face he came to me and told me, "vieja [old lady], tell Elegua that I need to win a battle against this person who is putting an obstacle in my way." I would go to my shrine to begin to tell my Warriors that they had to help my son. He also came home to the Elegua shrine and blew tobacco and rum in his face and placed the name of the person in the Warrior Shrines. After he left the house, he was ready for a fight because he knew that the Warriors were right there fighting with him.

I never had to be initiated and I have been able to solve all my problems with my Warriors. However, the Ifa priest that gave me the Warriors prepared them especially for me. He knew that a woman alone needed special protection to keep her son out of jail and off of drugs. I have a yellow and green necklace and an beaded bracelet called the ide that every person receives when the Elegua is given by the Ifa priest.

My son does not have his own Warriors because the Ifa priest that gave me the Warriors moved back to Cuba after the revolution. He got used to praying to my Elegua and he will inherit my Elegua

when I die. My necklace broke during my son's wedding ten years ago and I waited to go to Cuba to have it purified by my padrino. That is the rule, a person cannot fix a broken necklace herself nor give it to a priest who is not their padrino to purify.

8. Kati Alfonso, 31 years old. Lucumí adept, dances in Lucumí ritual bembes. Migrated from Cuba in 1962. Profession: social worker. Taken April 8, 1989, in New York City.

Kati told of her experiences when the Warriors are not prepared according to the Lucumí tradition:

> When I visited the babalao with my godmother, he told me that I needed to receive my Warriors. I was not ready for the responsibilities of having the Warriors because it involved offering a chicken to the Elegua, Ogún and Ochosi and a pigeon to Osun. I like the religion because it shows how powerful African culture is and it makes you proud to have your own sense of history. My parents had tried for years to keep me from assimilating into the African-American culture because they wanted me to be proud to be Cuban. I had no idea of what being Cuban was. So when I was fifteen, they took me to the Cuban club to meet other young black Cubans. There, a friend took me to his mother's house. His mother was a Lucumí priestess and she was also the dance instructor in the club who showed the teenagers the Afro-Cuban dances.
>
> Three times a year the club held Afro-Cuban dances for which they would bring in drummers and singers to sing to the orichas in Lucumí. I feel very proud to be Cuban because I realized that the Cubans have fought to keep their African culture. My parents talked to my friend's mother to take me as a godchild and teach me about the religion. My parents were involved with Spiritualism, but they had their Warriors from an Ifa priest in Cuba. They were very glad that I decided to have a relationship with my godmother [madrina].
>
> I particularly liked that I was going to meet a babalao, and he was going to give me my Warriors. My madrina would teach me Lucumí prayers and songs. The day that I finally received the Warriors, the babalao talked to me about animal sacrifice. I could not deal with the idea of offering blood to the orichas, but my

Warriors received candy, tobacco, and rum every Monday. My madrina had introduced me to a young Cuban man whom I liked very much and we started dating. One day I went to visit him without calling him first and I found him with another women. I was very upset. That is why I went to Central Park to get rid of the Warriors. I had heard in the church that I used to belong to that many people went to the park to drop them there. I started again to visit the Baptist Church that I used to attend before. My parents were very strict Catholics and hated the idea that I had joined a Protestant church. They told me that the Protestants hated black people because they had forced the blacks in the United States to forget about their eguns.

Two weeks later I lost my job, but I did not associate this with the throwing away of the Warriors. I attributed it to a financial crisis in the office. Many of my friends had been fired and there was no reason to believe the Elegua was associated with my losing my job. My apartment caught on fire and I had to move with my sister in Brooklyn. I said to myself that the poor conditions of the building caused the fire. Many times we had told the landlord that a fire was going to occur because of old electrical wires.

While I was living with my sister, she broke up with her boyfriend and believed that it was because he liked me. However, we both knew that he had been seeing another woman in New Jersey. As a result, my sister and I stopped talking to each other. She told me to move out of her house. My sister was under a lot of stress. She was finishing her masters at Hunter College and was working two jobs. Our parents told me to move back to their house in Queens, but I knew that they felt that my sister was tired of helping me financially. I believed that my parents were right; I had been having problems landing a real job since I had gotten rid of my Warriors. My mother drove me crazy telling me how irresponsible I was and that my sister had more together than I did.

I began to stay in the Bronx with an old boyfriend who was a cocaine dealer, and I had all the money I needed. When my parents found out about my association with this man, I had to move out of their house. And so I moved in with this guy. I started using cocaine while he was out doing his business. He told me that the cocaine was for him to sell and not for me to consume. Slowly I began to spend time with some crack

dealers and I began to sell bits of crack in order to support my habit.

By this time I was disconnected from my family and friends and I returned to my godmother's house. I had lost all interest in living. However, she was afraid to help, so she told me that she would take me to a mental health center near her house. Once I started to receive help in the mental health center, my godmother allowed me to re-enter the house. With the help of my godmother and the social workers at the mental center, I began to work on changing my self-image. My godmother said that the Warriors were the only thing that could help me to get rid of my defeatist attitude. She needed to take me to see the Ifa priest who had given me the Warriors. However, he was very busy traveling to many different places.

For months my madrina tried to take me to see the Ifa priest, but she was unable to get an appointment. Madrina had been told by other Ocha priestesses to go to another Ifa priest because the one she went to was losing his aché. My madrina told me that people were saying that this famous man had begun to commercialize the making of Warriors.

Finally, the Ifa priest who had given me my Warriors asked madrina to come to his house in the Bronx. As we entered the basement of his house I was alarmed at what I saw on the floor. There were about thirty Elegguás all lined up along the hall. There was no variation. They all looked like the one in the herbal store [botánica]. They were all about the same size and all had a small dome-shaped head made out of cement with cowrie shells for the eyes, ears and mouth. My madrina did not say a word; however, she did not take her eyes off that mass production of Elegguás all lined up on the floor ready to be sold like a pair of shoes. The Ifa priest's wife rapidly took us into the basement to see him. My madrina was very serious during my divination. He even asked her what was wrong with her, but she responded that everything was all right.

After my divination the priest told me that I needed to put on my necklaces and that Yemayá was my mother. He also said that I needed to receive my Warriors with him in two weeks. On the way home I asked madrina about the long lines of Elegguás on the floor. She responded that apparently he had been producing them for the Puerto Ricans who did not know that there were twenty-one different Elegguás. Madrina was very

sad because she loved the Puerto Ricans very much and hated the thought that the Ifa priest was exploiting their lack of knowledge about the Lucumí religion.

She told me that he was the only Cuban Ifa priest who would talk in public. Most of the Ifa priests kept to themselves away from any type of publicity. He was different because he had become part of a Puerto Rican cultural center that was appropriating the religion to make themselves famous. He had been written about in many magazines and he was becoming very popular in the Puerto Rican community. Since he was the only one that had opened his house to the public, most people wanted to receive Warriors from him. He claimed to be the Ifa priest with the most power among all the other Ifa priests. This is crazy. There is no way that one single person can be named to be the first person to bring the Lucumí tradition to the United States.

Madrina told me that she now understood why many of the Lucumí priestesses called the Ifa priest's house the Elegua factory. She had been told by other priestesses that he had been breaking away from other Ifa priests. He operates basically alone because other elders of Ifa in New York don't want to support him. According to Madrina, priestesses were saying that the Ifa priest's new fame has made him forget the responsibility of the Ifa priest to the community. He was being accused among the Lucumí priesthood of innovating and inventing new rules to benefit his position in the religion. My godmother could not get over the long line of Elegguás that looked just like the one in the botánicas. She could not believe that the new fame of this Ifa priest had left him with no time to follow the religious tradition of making individual Elegua for his future God-children.

When she arrived at her house she called several other priestesses and told them that she had just witnessed the transformation of an Ifa priest shrine into a factory that made Elegua. Madrina stayed on the phone about four hours. She called California, Miami, and Puerto Rico to discuss the mass production of Elegguás. That night she also called Cuba to inform them that she had discovered an Ifa priest from a Havana rama breaking the Ifa tradition. She spoke about how he was no longer preparing individual Elegguás for each person who receives Warriors.

My Godmother told me that was the reason why I had been having all those problems--the Ifa

priest who was breaking the rules of the tradition. He had lost his aché and he gave me an Elegua that did not meet my spiritual needs. My eledá, who is Ochún, protected me and that was the reason why I was still alive. They told my madrina that many Ifa priests who had been initiated in Havana were breaking contact with their senior houses. These Ifa priests wanted to be autonomous from their seniors in Havana. However, the Ifa priests from Matanzas have maintained their close relationships with their senior houses. Madrina was told to take me to another Ifa priest to find out the identity of my eledá. We had initial doubts about Yemayá being the one for me.

Since I was a baby in Cuba, Ochún had claimed my head and she had told me in a bembe [religious festival], she was always present to save me from personal crises. The Ifa priest in the Bronx had told me that I needed to wear my necklaces in the name of Yemayá, but my Godmother did not have much trust in him anymore. We went to Queens to see another Ifa priest and Ochún spoke right away to claim my head. After we left the Ifa priest, I told madrina that I felt something good was about to happen to me. She said that feeling came within me for having found out that Ochún was the true leader of my destiny.

Changó

9. Emilio Cial, 57 years old. Priest of Changó for 20 years, training to enter the priesthood. Migrated from Cuba in 1962. Profession: shoemaker. Taken January 17, 1983, in New York.

Changó is the force that refuses to submit in front of stronger forces. He was the force that pushed the mambises [liberating army , most of whom were Afro-Cubans] in the revolution against Spain or in any political struggle.

When he goes to war Changó is not thinking about family or friendship ties but only about winning the war. Changó does not respect the highest supreme power that is Olofi. Many times he has tried to plot against Olofi himself. Imagine, he is so terrible that he has tried to overthrow other orichas. It was Changó that convinced Oya, his warrior wife, to battle with Ozain for the sacred herbs that Oya controlled. Changó does not listen to reason at all and he

will encourage his children to use force to become victorious. He is the oricha that is constantly in wars with the other orichas.

10. Helena Ramirez, 57 years old. Changó priestess (Havana) for 28 years. Migrated from Cuba in 1971. Profession: seamstress, has her own shop. Taken March 10, 1979, in New York City.

Helena says that Changó refused to accept his role as a diviner because the role would have impinged on the freedom that he now enjoys. She states:

> Changó glorifies war. He is known to war against even his own family. Changó teaches us that not even your family has the right to dominate you. Individuals must resist being dominated by stronger forces. My mission as a Changó priestess is to encourage my God-children to have courage and to struggle against anything that wants to control them. Changó wants us to be our own masters and he teaches us that individuals often have to go against the established rules to stay in control. Changó is a natural diviner, although Olofi holds the official position as the diviner in the Lucumí religion.
>
> When Olofi gave each of the orichas their responsibilities, he gave Changó Ifa. Changó was upset that Olofi had given him the office of official diviner. He much preferred to be in battles conquering new territories. During peace time Changó wanted to spend his time drumming and making love with many women. He finally convinced Orula to exchange with him the drum for the table of Ifa. As you can see Changó is not at all concerned with the position of diviner. He much prefers the power that comes from being a great warrior and the best drummer. He does not need Ifa to divine because he was born with the gift to see the past, present and future. Ifa priests, on the other hand, need to divine to see what will happen. A child of Changó gets a revelation without having to depend on the Ifa.

11. Arturo Tejada, 60 years old. Changó priest (Havana) for 27 years. Migrated from Cuba in 1975. Profession: owns a dry-cleaning business. Taken December 14, 1988, in New York City.

Born in Matanzas at the turn of the century, Arturo talks about his experience with Changó:

> My father inherited his Changó shrine from his Lucumí father. I grew up with stories about the great power of the Lucumí people. In our house we were also very Catholic, but my father forced all of us to learn Lucumí so we could learn to talk to Changó. While I was no more than ten years old, my father was initiated into the Changó priesthood. It was during his divination that Changó also claimed my head. My father thought I was too young to accept those responsibilities. Every ritual that my father performed, he took me. I began to learn about Ocha very early.
>
> During that time I never met a Changó priestess and my father believed that women should not be initiated into Changó. He started a tradition in his rama of refusing the entry of women into the Changó priesthood. Of course, we did not tell anyone that this was the rule of the rama; we just did not give our oricha to any women. In situations of life and death we have initiated women into Changó priesthood but with the understanding that Changó would pass on to one of the male priests at her death. We have inherited three Changó shrines. These belonged to Changó priestesses, and on each occasion when the funeral initiation was performed [ituto], the diviner asked Changó if he wanted to be buried with the priestess or whether he should pass to a member of her family or Ocha family. On these three occasions, Changó enumerated that he wanted to remain on earth. Changó is a male oricha. I know that he does not want to be buried with a woman. However, these are all secrets of the religion that are no longer respected and before long we will see homosexuals becoming Changó priests. We know of a Changó priestess in Florida who is initiating homosexuals into Changó priesthood. I would never have dreamed that this could happen, but in the United States, there is no respect for the elders or the ramas.

12. Roberto Bermudez, 74 years old. Changó priest (Havana) for 40 years. Migrated from Cuba in 1963. Taken June 17, 1978, in New York City.

> One of the reasons that women should not be Changó priestesses is that Changó is the only oricha that can pass to Ifa naturally. Changó was

born a diviner and the position of diviner belongs to him. The reason that we initiate women into Yemayá and Ochún is because they can then become helpers of the Ifa priest. They cannot become Ifa priestesses. When you permit a woman to become a Changó priestess, she is closed to Ifa divination because you have given the Changó aché, a natural diviner.

Changó wants to be seen as a male and he desires that only male characteristics be associated with him. I have no knowledge of any homosexual Changó priests in the United States. In Cuba I knew of one who was a great diviner. Changó told him that he was going to turn his back on him if he did not leave that habit. He loved to dress like a woman and to go out dancing with other men. Changó gave plenty of warning because he did not want any of his sons dressed like women. One time, he was dancing in one of his favorite bars and Changó came down and the priest began to tear his clothes off like a mad man. His friends took him to the hospital and he never came out. Changó made him lose his mind. Changó does not like any of his males to be homosexuals, just as he does not like women to be involved in his priesthood. Any homosexual who wants to become a Lucumí priest should be initiated into the Yemayá priesthood because this oricha protects them. One of the patakis tells how Yemayá visited the land of the homosexuals and fell in love with one of them. She lived among them for a long time and she promised them her protection. Many people say that she is a homosexual herself. But I believe that she just protects them due to her lover being that way.

13. Luisa Noble, 68 years old. Changó priestess (Havana) for 30 years. Migrated from Cuba in 1970. Profession: schoolteacher. Taken July 10, 1985, in New York City.

I believe that Changó is the favorite oricha for all the Cubans. We, as Cubans, like people to think of us as possessing all the characteristics of Changó. My grandmother was a daughter of a slave woman and she told me stories about how the children of Changó fought during the war against Spain. Changó came from Africa, but he became a Cuban during the struggle against Spain. He was a dark-skin warrior in Africa and in Cuba he was reborn as a reddish black.

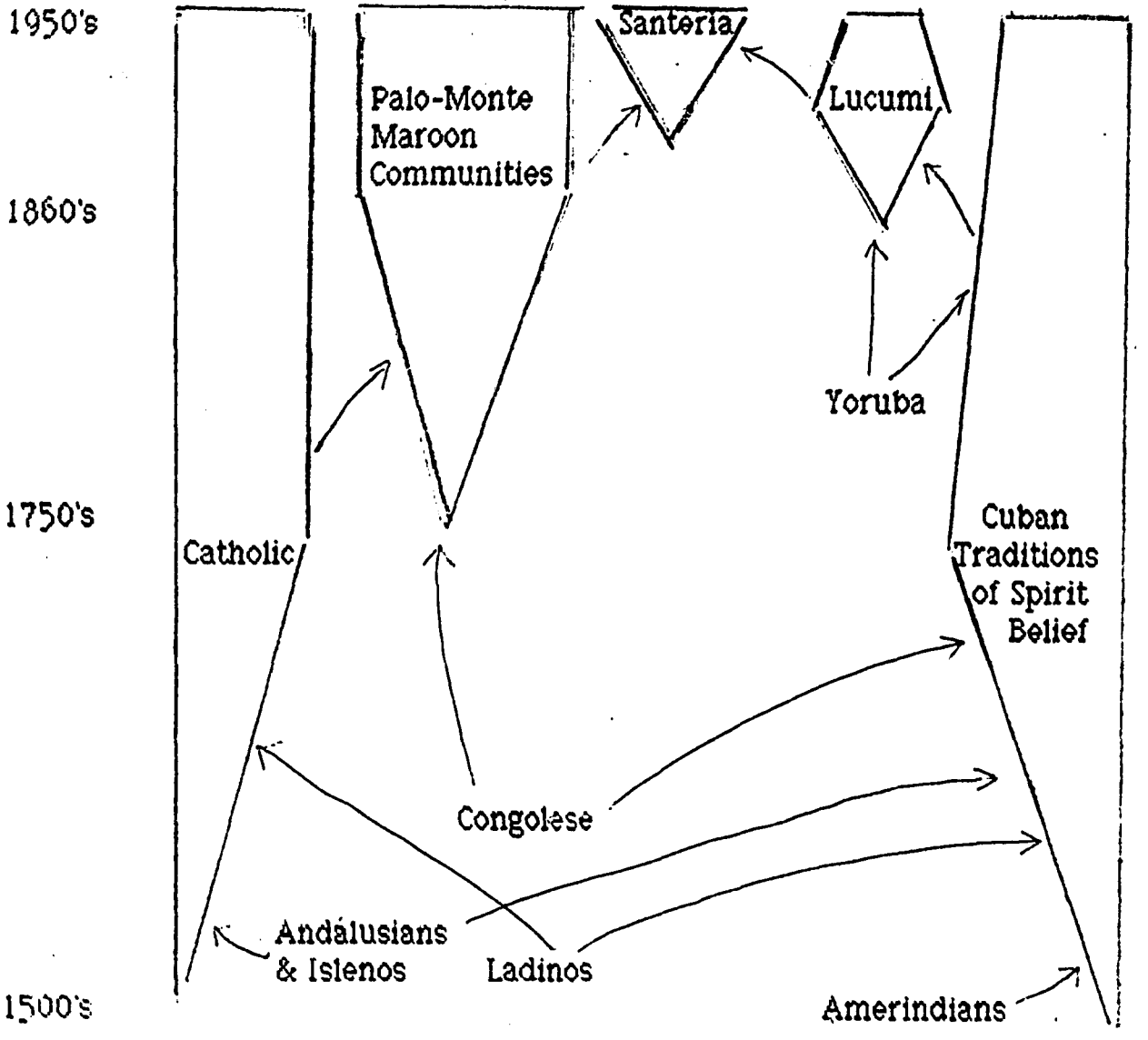
I had to work hard in Cuba because all the

opportunities were controlled by the whites. After we gained our independence, the Spanish did not return to Spain. They stayed in Cuba, running all the businesses. We could not get any jobs. When the Spanish did well economically and needed to hire more people, Cubans were not hired. Instead the Spanish sent for their relatives in Spain to help them with their businesses.

Many Changó priests encouraged their children to join labor unions and to fight in the unions to improve their economic situation. Unlike the United States, poverty in Cuba was never a situation of just blacks because whites were next to us trying to survive also. Many of the whites who lived next to us learned how we used the force of the orichas to fight for justice. Like I said, Changó hates injustice. And so whites and blacks together began to be devoted to Changó in order to change our oppressed conditions.

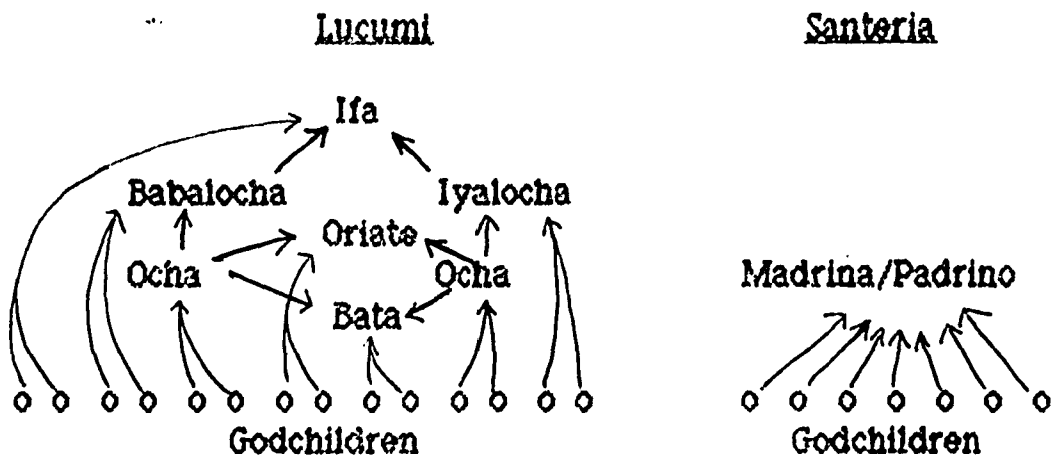
APPENDIX B

Figure 2: Historical perspective of religious development in Cuba.



Schematic: Thomas Burgess

Figure 1: Social Relations of Religion



Schematic: Thomas Burgess

GLOSSARY

Abakuá. Male secret society developed in Cuba in the mid-nineteenth century at the Havana docks.

Abanderados. The official persons who carried flags representing specific African nations for each mutual aid society in Cuba.

Aché. The spiritual gift that all humans are born with. A spiritual power that is passed down with the initiation of a Lucumí priest or priestess. Power of all orichas.

Addimú. An offering to orichas or santos.

Afro-Semite. A term developed by Carlos Moore. It refers to the fusion of Semitic cultural influences among Ladinos (Afro-Spanish) groups in Cuba.

Aguardiente. A Cuban alcoholic drink made from sugar-cane, used in the spirit tradition and the Egun rituals.

Alafin. A title to refer to Changó, the first king of Oyo. Used thereafter for all succeeding kings.

Apalencados. Rebels who lived in palenque communities and fought against the plantation system. Most were run-away slaves or free blacks.

Areitos. Pre-Columbian dances performed by the Arawak indians in the Caribbean. They served to glorify and re-tell stories of old battles.

Babalocha. A priest in the Lucumí religion who has sponsored the initiation and training of new priests or priestesses and accepts the obligations and responsibilities therein. See padrino.

Babalao. Ifá priest devoted to Orula. Occupies the highest position in the Lucumí religion. Has the power to control death, and is the final authority in all Lucumí rituals. Diviner and herbalist, a babalao is trained in the intellectual tradition of Ifá divination which contains the oral traditions of the Yoruba people. This knowledge is applied to healing physical and spiritual ailments.

Barrios. Urban enclaves.

Batá. Sacred drums used in the Lucumí religion to invoke the orichas. The batá drums belong to the oricha of Changó. Reconstructed in Cuba by West Africans of the Oyo Kingdom.

Bembé. A ritual celebration honoring the orichas.

Bodegas. A local grocery store that distributes ethnic foods, religious goods, and information within the barrio.

Bolita. Illegal number-running.

Botánica. A store that specializes in a broad range of religious items including herbs used in rituals, healing, and cooking.

Bozales. Newly-arrived Africans in Cuba.

Brujería. Witchcraft.

Brujería blanca. "White magic" performed by peasants on rural Cuba.

Brujo. A term used to describe practitioners of a Congolese religion in Cuba known as Palo Mayombe. Derogatory term used to describe Afro-Cuban religious traditions.

Cabildos. Local city councils of Spanish colonialists in the Caribbean. Also refers to the legal Afro-Cuban voluntary associations whose major function was mutual aid an d the preservation of ethnic identity.

Caciques. An Arawak chief or a dead chief considered to be a powerful spirit guide. Currently worshipped by persons practicing spiritual traditions.

Changó. A powerful Lucumí and Santería oricha.

Chola Anguenge. A Congolese divinity.

Cimarron. Escaped slave or Amerindian perceived as an individual who had rejected Christianity thus was severely punished when captured. The first rebels to stand against the plantation society. The creators of an alternative lifestyle to slavery in which African traditions were maintained without fusion with Christianity.

Cimarronage. The movement that developed in Spanish

colonial societies by the cimarrons in response to colonial oppression.

Coartación. An institution developed in Cuba that allowed a slave to buy his freedom at the same price his master paid to purchase him originally.

Collares. Beaded necklaces, denoting a step toward initiation into either Lucumí or Santería priesthood. Indicates a close association with the orichas. Different colors and color combinations are associated with specific orichas. Called eleke in Lucumí.

Compadrazgo. Fictive kinship.

Creole. Those persons of Spanish or African descent born in Cuba.

Cuadro espiritual. A spiritual framework composed of all the spiritual guides used by a spiritual medium.

Despojo. Spiritual cleaning given by a medium to heal or remove bad spirits.

Día del Medio. One of the ritual ceremonies performed for initiation into the oricha priesthood. The newly-crowned priest or priestess received court in the tradition of African kings and queens.

Dilogún. Divination performed by Ocha priests and priestesses using sixteen cowrie shells.

Ebó. Rituals performed to purify a person from bad influences.

Encomiendas. Spanish settlers in Cuba who were given grants of land and services by the crown. Also supposed to serve as agents of the crown in socializing the slaves into Christianity.

Egun. In the Lucumí religion, the collective spirits of deceased priests that established the lineage of rama. In Santería represents the combined dead of the biological family and the ritual family. In spirit tradition, the spirit of a deceased individual.

Eledá. The spiritual power of the supreme god that resides within each individual in the form of a protective spirit.

Elekes. See collares.

Elegguá. The oricha within the Lucumí pantheon that controls the pathway of communication from man to the orichas. Closely associated with Ifá priests and divination.

Epekule. A divining chain used by Ifá priests.

Espiritista. Persons who are trained in the European tradition of Alan Kardec spiritism. Developed in France in the nineteenth century.

Estancias. Farms operated by free blacks that surrounded the city of Havana. The crops were brought by women traders to Havana.

Guias espirituales. Spiritual guides of predominantly Amerindian and Congolese background. They orient the spirit medium in how to solve social and health problems.

Ifá. The divination system performed exclusively by male priests in the Lucumí religion. Also, the system of communication used to determine the wishes and desires of the orichas.

Ifá priest. Priest initiated into the Orula priesthood that specialized in Ifá divination with 16 cowrie shells.

Ile de Ocha. In Lucumí and Santería, refers to the house temple in which ceremonies are held.

Isleños. A group of immigrants from the Canary Islands who settled in the interior of colonial Cuba where they cultivated tobacco.

Ita. The dilogún divination performed in the initiation of Kari Ocha that tells the new initiate her responsibilities for life.

Italero. Ocha priests who perform dilogún divinations and are therefore only qualified to interpret odun one through twelve.

Ituto. Religious burial ceremony of the Lucumí and Santería religions that contributes to the transition of an ocha priest or priestess into a higher existence into the ancestral world.

Iyawo. (Iyabó) Newly consecrated priest or priestess in Lucumí and Santería.

Iyalocha. A priestess in the Lucumí religion who has sponsored the initiation and training of new priests or priestesses and accepts the obligations and responsibilities therein. See madrina.

Kari Ocha. The ceremony that consecrates Lucumí and Santería priests and priestesses by passing charisma consecutively from one person to the next in ritual ceremonies.

Kofe de Orula. Ifá initiation conferred only upon women by the babalao.

Ladinos. Christianized Africans and free men who came to Cuba from Spain.

Latikua Achiku Lattica. King of Cabildo Changó Teddun in Cuban, former prince in the Kingdom of Oyo.

Libretas. Sacred notebooks passed down in Lucumí and Santería lineages.

Los Guerreros. The Alliance of three powerful warrior orichas: Egun, Ogun, and Ochosi within one shrine.

Los Muertos. The spirits of the dead.

Lucumí. New ethnic identity describing all West African slaves arriving in Cuba. The origin of the name is associated with a particular port of departure for slaves from Africa. Also used to describe a religion reconstructed and practiced by the Lucumí slaves in the western region of colonial Cuba.

Madrina. A priestess of Santería who operates a house temple where Santería ceremonies, divination, and religious festivals are held. Also refers to the relationship linking the priestess to the house members in a fictive kinship of obligations and duties.

Mambises. Liberating army, most of whom were Afro-Cubans during the Cuban war of independence.

Monte. Forest. Held as sacred in all Afro-Cuban religious traditions. Believed to be the place from where these religions derive spiritual power in the form of plants, herbs, and wooden sticks. Also used to refer to the location in which the cimarrones found sanctuary to guild an African-style community in Cuba.

Maroons. The English term for cimarron.

Moreno. The term used by the Spanish to refer to blacks.

Muerto. The dead.

Mulattoes. The offspring from a black and white couple.

Nganga. A spirit of the dead that lives in the cauldron of a palero, a Congolese priest invoked to give the priest power to dominate others. Also the cauldron itself, representing the forces of nature. Transplanted from the Congo region and adapted by maroons in Eastern Cuba.

Obi. Divination system using coconuts to communicate with the Elegguá.

Ocha. The tradition of worshipping orichas in Yorubaland. Transplanted to Cuba in the eighteenth century. Refers to the actual practice and rituals that specialize in honoring the orichas.

Ocha priest or priestess. Priests and priestesses who follow the oricha tradition.

Odun. The pattern of the seashells during Ifá and dilogún divination interpreted by the diviner by reciting the corresponding patakí.

Omiero. Sacred liquid made of various herbs and plants. Used in initiation rites by Ocha priests or priestesses.

Omo. A Yoruba term used to describe the kinship ties between a specific oricha and an individual. Modeled after the parent-child kinship bond. This term does not apply to Ifá priests. It literally means "child" in Yoruba.

Oriaté. An official position occupied by Ocha priests who specialize in initiation ceremonies. Songmaster priest in Santería and Lucumí.

Orichas. The Divinities of the Yoruba pantheon. They are intermediaries between man and the supreme deity, Olofi. They descend and take possession of their priests and priestesses to provide guidance. Worshipped by the Lucumí and Santería religions. Arranged in a hierarchy, each controls a specific aspect of the universe.

Otán. The sacred stones that represent the different orichas which are consecrated during initiation of an Ocha priest or priestess.

Oyo. Powerful military Yoruba kingdom. In the eighteenth century was a major supplier of slaves to Cuba.

Oyugbona. The person that sponsors initiation rituals in Santería and Lucumí.

Padrino. A priest of Santería who operates a House temple where Santería ceremonies, divination, and religious festivals are held. Also refers to obligations and duties of the parent-child relationship between the priest and house members.

Palo Mayombe/Palo Monte. Religious tradition of the Congolese which focuses on powerful spirits of the dead with the use of herbs for healing and manipulation of emotions.

Pardo. A name used by the Spanish colonial government to refer to individuals of African or Spanish background. See mulattoes.

Patakí. The oral tradition of Yoruba divinities that describes how each oricha found creative solutions to their own problems. Recited during dilogún or Ifá divination to prescribe rituals to solve human problems.

Pinaldo. An official hierarchy within the Ocha priesthood which allows Ogun priests to perform sacrifice of four-legged animals, otherwise a practice once exclusively performed only by Ifá priests.

Palenque. Communities of cimarrones in the Cuban interior formed to protect against recapture. The became African-style villages. Leaders had military and religious qualifications.

Rama. Lucumí religious network based on fictive kinship established in the cabildos during the colonial period.

Ranchadores. Ranchers, paid slave masters to capture escaped slaves.

Rayado. An initiation in Palo Mayombe in which scarification of the initiate takes place.

Regla Ocha. The rules and norms established by the Lucumí during the colonial period which helped to centralize the Yoruba religion in Cuba therefore preventing its disintegration.

Santería. A popular Afro-Cuban religion centered on the worship of el santo, a divinity that is a fusion of Catholic saints and Yoruba orichas. A variant of the Lucumí tradition which is less hierarchical and more egalitarian, as well as more tolerant of spirit traditions.

Santero. A priest or priestess of the Santería religion who worships a particular santo, a divinity which has emerged from the fusion of a Catholic saint and a Yoruba oricha.

Santo. In the Catholic religion, the saints. In Lucumí, santo is an interpretation of the Catholic saints in Yoruba terms, but considered separate from the orichas. In Santería, the santo represents the fusion of the Catholic saints with Yoruba divinities called orichas.

Vegueros. Individuals that cultivated tobacco.

Virgin of Cobre. The patron saint of Cuba with whom Ochún has been identified.

Virgin of Regla. The Catholic saint whom Yemaya has been identified in Cuba.

Warrior. The Three orichas that help an individual overcome obstacles. The warrior is a religious invocation by Cuban Ifá priests. Lucumí considers the warrior the first step in the religion. In Santería the warrior does have to be given by Ifá priest and is usually obtained after the collares initiation. In Lucumí there is more concern with linking the adept to Ifá. In Santería the collares are first because it ties individuals to the madrina or padrino.

Yoruba. An ethnic group in West Africa organized into various kingdoms collectively called Yorubaland.

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