

Cuba, Santería & The Dances of The Orichas



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Introduction

A few years ago while walking down the streets of Havana, I stumbled across odd things in unusual places. Sometimes I found eggs cracked open on a corner of a crossroad, other times branches with clusters of bananas or slices of cake were abandoned in the gutters. Walking on the beach after New Year, I saw more interesting “messiness”; hens and roosters washed up on the beach and blue cloth bags filled with fruits and other items floating on the water’s edge. Due to my lack of knowledge about Santería and other Afro-Cuban religions at the time, I regarded these out of place things as odd objects, or as Mary Douglas would have said, “matter out of place”. I regarded them initially as just trash lying around.

After noticing them repeatedly, my curiosity grew. Why were the same sorts of things repeatedly left lying around in the sea and in the streets of Havana? These questions awakened a fascination and later a hunger for more knowledge about what I increasingly understood as the source of these discarded objects. Gradually I came to focus on them in an anthropological way as truly “matter out of place” with all the powers to decompose and recreate reality that Douglas gives to that which is marginal or in-between categories, spaces and times. For this is a crucial aspect of Afro-Cuban religions, that are part of popular religion in Havana. More especially while visiting Cuba’s capital, I developed an interest in the strong rhythmic music and dances that are part of Afro-Cuban religions, and the dense meanings contained in ritual performances. This is what motivated me to return to Havana to conduct my eight-and-a-half month fieldwork on the religious dances of Santería, which is the largest and most popular of the Cuban-African religions. I attended different types of “*Toques de Santo*”, religious celebrations for the deities of Santería, all over Havana.

Before entering the field, I had read about my topic, and quickly recognized similar patterns. I tried to keep my mind open to what I found, not using or discarding theories during fieldwork (similar to O’Reilly’s inductive approach to fieldwork (O’Reilly, 2012,29-30)). Daily use of the language was no problem upon arriving in the field, as I was fluent in Spanish due to already having spent nine months over three extended periods in Havana. Nevertheless, as Spanish is not my mother tongue, I don’t exclude the possibility of misinterpretations. The main language barrier that I did experience was in connection to the Afro-Cuban ritual languages which originate in Africa. I had to learn their vocabulary so as to understand what was referred to at particular times.

Throughout the fieldwork I had a local cohabitant, a factor which eased my acceptance. I chose deliberately not to use him or his circle of friends and networks as informants. I found informants and did networking within my own established webs. My roles with my informants varied. I became one of “us” when joining and participating in performances with informants, and a co-student in other contexts and times when being educated and initiated into key terms, gestures and performances. To the hosts who sponsored the rites, I was, more often than not, a stranger who happened to be there, or a friend of their friend. At the outset, I was frequently a stranger who did not fit in. Nonetheless, as I furthered my understanding of the religion, the practices, the songs and the dances, I became more and more one of them, not just an outsider. I joined the dancing and singing, doing as the other participants did, trying to stay in the background without attracting attention, although at times, people were curious as to whether I was a Cuban or a foreigner.

In January I started my fieldwork by attending a two-week course on Cuba’s cultural heritage dances at the *Cojunta* Folklórico Nacional (the *Cojunta*)¹. The knowledge I gained at this introductory course was invaluable throughout my fieldwork, enabling me to recognize deities’ songs and dance steps at *toques* I attended later. Further enabling me to consistently identify the steps at *toques*, I took private lessons with Alex. There were always visitors coming and people popping by during and after our lessons which were held in the house of her cousin Maria. As part of all anthropological fieldwork, “hanging around” with informants and other locals, was the setting where the learning of the dances and its significances took place creating a social field where chatter, experience sharing and storytelling came into focus, and where believers of all kinds shared their views with me. Rapidly Maria became an important figure in my research, as she introduced me to interesting friends and brought me to *toques*.

My main method of documentation involved making detailed descriptions and field notes of *toques* and their rhythm. Since they often lasted 4-6 intensive hours, were physically tiring and often finished late, it was challenging to complete documentation the same day. Even so, my notes reflected that which I noticed: actions, comments, gestures, movements, timings, gadgets, etc. At some of the *toques* I used a tape recorder to record the sound and to dictate my observations. Sometimes I was permitted to film, but not to take pictures, other

¹ They are a group perceived to have preserved Cuba’s folklore due to the quest to make Afro-Cuban traditions part of the National heritage.

times the opposite. I also filmed additional public material on the dances, for example, in the street, theaters and dance classes in which I partook. These situations did not show the dances in the natural context of the *toques*, but represented situations and places where these dances are seen and practiced in contemporary Cuba. It also gave an indication as to where some Cubans teach and transmit the dances.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I was able to record interviews with professors and researchers of Afro-Cuban music and dance and some religious specialists in Havana and Matanzas. They all had dissimilar backgrounds and diverse points of view. In trying to map some general views amongst the Capital's devotees, I walked the streets randomly asking locals about their relation to Santería and their dances. Through this, I attained opinions from a general random mass, which helped to verify some of the trends I had already picked up.

For me, as a young woman and foreigner, many of the topics within Santería were categorically out of reach. They are kept solely for men, or are shared with devotees as they acquire experience and rank within the religion over a lifetime. Thus my access to knowledge had a natural limit. My focus deals with publically exposed dances, as these are understood by the majority of the population, who are also excluded from many of the esoteric privileged realms of meanings. I do not consider the inner secrets an issue for my findings, but regard the culture of secrets as part of meanings, creating relationships of hierarchy and debt within the movement, between different performers and participants, and also between the movement and its audience, followers and observers.

Santería and other affiliated Afro-Cuban related religions are practiced in many different ways within and outside of Havana. Once, while initiating my fieldwork, I was told by an audience member "*You will find more contradictions and disagreements within Santeria than answers to your questions*". Witnessing rituals and talking to audience members, practitioners, *babalawos* (high priests of Santeria), and academic professors, they confirmed this claim that there were diverse understandings about how things should be done and why things were as they were. The knowledge I achieved during my fieldwork is most likely and absolutely a product of an insight of the religious world of those with whom I talked to and with whom I spent most of my time. My thesis does not try to explain what happens in Santería all over Cuba, but serves to uncover consistent similarities and differences in the meaning of the rituals producing trance and possession in which I participated.

The main focus of this paper is the dances of the Orichas. I will explore their uses and significances for the practitioners of Santeria, but also for Cubans in general. I will look at Santeria's creation and sociocultural factors affecting both the religion and its dances. Further I will go into the dances' use in modern day Cuba and compare it to how they are perceived to have been in the past. Have they changed under Cuba's Communist period of religious prohibition? Has the teaching of the dances and their music outside of religious families affected them in any way? And has the increasing stream of tourists had an impact on them?

In the first chapter I will start by introducing music and dance and its importance in different societies. Further, the religion Santeria, key terms and concepts crucial in understanding this religion, the community of the healers and followers and their diversity as a social group will be introduced. Chapter 2 looks at the ethnographic context of the paper including Cuba, religious presence in Havana's streets, the context of the religious rites where the dances are used and at last it looks at how I approached the field. Chapter 3 exemplifies the use of the Orichas' dances by leading you into a *toque de santo*. Subsequently, to gain an understanding of the complexity of the religion's roots, Chapter 4 looks at Santeria's creation. Moving into the artistic elements of the dances, Chapter 5 introduces the uses of Santeria's dances in modern Cuba. It looks at their transmission between generations, how this religion and its arts have become part of middle class popular culture- perceiving it as part of Cuban national heritage and the effects of dance groups staging the dances outside of the religious spheres. Chapter 6 focuses on the dances possessive forces when used in their religious context and how this enables communication with the Orichas. Further it looks at music and the energies created in group performances that lead to these possessions and trances. Chapter 7 explores changes within the religion and the effects of poverty and a growing tourist sector on a new generation of initiates. Further, we see how the commoditisation of ritual performances makes them part of an international flow of cultural products. Reactions to this development will be discussed, as there are discrepancies within this diverse world of thought and practice.

Chapter 1 Music, Dance and Santeria

The academic claim that music provokes emotion can be traced back to Greek philosophers. Susan Langer who is a contemporary philosopher of art and aesthetics sees its influence in tribal music, such as the African drum, but also in the baby-soothing lullabies sung all over the world (Langer, 1960,211). She notes that music may affect the body's concentration and excite or relax it. Music may also affect pulse-rate and respiration (Langer, 1960,213) and as dance, music expresses what language cannot say (Langer, 1960,233).

Dance and music have played significant roles for Afro-derived religions and peoples from early times in Africa to the present-day Americas. They are important cultural phenomena in both Cuba and in Africa where rituals involving dance mark essential passages in life, such as birth and death. These may overlap with other uses of dance in contexts where dance may be more for entertainment and having fun. Balbuena² explained that dance is one of the first artistic manifestations of humankind and was the first method of communicating with nature. The first recognition of the great powers surrounding the humanity was through the feeling of personal power and will in the body. The first representation of this was through a realm of mystic forces where dancing showed images of powers which were bodiless. Dance is the first visualization of life beyond the moment of one's existence, where life is part of a whole, the nature and the superpersonal life (Langer, 1953',190). In early societies dance was used as worship (Langer, 1957,11). Balbuena stated that dance is a corporal symbolic language of everything the humankind feels and what humans think about life.

In Cuba, dance has become part of the aesthetics of the national culture, where pain, sadness and happiness are expressed through dance. A party, religious or secular, always includes dance and music. In the Afro-Cuban rites, different dances correspond to not only different music, but also spirits and their control over life and the cosmos. Guanचे³ explained that the dances are given a series of symbolic elements where they historically signify gratefulness and invocation linked to particular deities, but where they also signify festivity. As traditional folk dance, the fundamental motivation is enjoyment of the dancers in a festive context, of a recreational, social and profane character (Balbuena Gutiérrez,

² Professor Bárbara Balbuena is one of the few professionals who has focused on the Cuban folkloric dances. She has an intellectual approach to popular national culture which may also be part of transforming it.

³ Professor Guanचे is a widely recognized ethnomusicologist in Cuba who works on Afro-Cuban music and religions.

2003',16). It is a disruption in the habitus as it differs from every day practice (Jackson, 1983',334). Dance, movement and music within communal rites may let us recognize ourselves as part of a community and a common body, blurring differences in quotidian life (Jackson, 1983',338). Its fundamental function is to strengthen collective solidarity and social relations, without distinguishing social class, age, gender, and race (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003',16). The different elements of the rites have become patterned styles established by tradition. These elements include the dances' choreographic forms, the musical settings, the ritual characters, the symbolic attributes, the clothing and the rites' structure and organisation. Due to both individual and collective spontaneity and creative liberty, and to socio-historic factors these rites permit certain variations (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003',16). The first priority of the rites is the religious, not the recreational aspect (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003',22), where the rites seek to invoke the deities or the dead through trance. The ritual does seek to have fun, in that it seeks to make orison (plea) to the deities to keep them happy. Balbuena notes how very few in Cuba have paid direct attention to a cultural analysis of dance and music and their close interrelationship. The rites I attended in Cuba were all centered on these artistic elements, showing dance and music playing a crucial organising and mediating role in Cuban Santería.

Yoruba and Slavery

Santería is an Afro-Cuban religion, which is believed to have its main roots in the African religion *Yoruba* which came from the Oyo Empire. Today this lies in the Nigeria area. This was home for most of the Yoruba people and the cradle of Oricha-deities. The belief systems in this general area⁴ were similar (De La Torre, 2004,159, Brandon, 1993,10). Despite having distinct religions and languages, there was a shared overarching mythological structure that looked to the creator of earth, Oddudúa or Olodumare, who is also the origin of the Yoruba people (De La Torre, 2004,160).

The different local Yoruba religions were never static, but constantly altered. It was common to treat other religions as partial extensions of one's belief and not as threatening rivals (Brandon, 1993,11). Over time, the deities would change, some would be kept and modified, whilst others were added or erased from the memory of worshippers. The religion was not the same all over Oyo, but had different local aspects (Fernández Olmos and

⁴ Including the Bini from Benin and the Fon from Dahomey.

Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,24). When the Oyo Empire expanded, conquering other villages, they incorporated the local deities into the new temples⁵ that were built in the newly obtained territories. The Oyo Empire borrowed local myths and rites, expanding itself through processes of assimilation and accommodation (Brandon, 1993,30). A model of religious adaptability had already been developed in Africa, which later helped slaves in their struggles to adapt their previous religions to their new circumstances, so as to incorporate Christianity, slavery, and other aspects of western society and culture.

African religions were introduced to Cuba with the arrival of the first ship of African slaves in 1517 (De La Torre, 2004,164). The religions were adapted to new socio-cultural circumstances and this led to the incorporation of new elements and the loss of others.

Until 1761, approximately 60,000 slaves, 250 per year, were transported to Cuba. Between 1774 and 1861 Cuba's population multiplied from 171,620 to 1,396,531 inhabitants (Knight, 1977,1). An economic change increased slave importation and 400,000 slaves were imported between 1762 and 1838 (circa 5,000 slaves per year) (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,18). In 1804, Haiti became an independent state after a successful slave revolution which led to freedom for those indentured to slave labour. After this, Haiti's sugar production, which had been two-fifths of the world's production, fell as land was now devoted not to plantation monoculture but to small-scale self-sufficient producers (Knight, 2000',104-7). This increased the demand for Cuban sugar. Streams of rich white Haitians moved to Cuba with their slaves, capital, knowledge and experience in sugar and coffee production. Increased trade with USA after the American Revolution and greater mechanization of sugar production led to Cuba becoming the world's largest sugar producer (Martinez-Alier, 1989,2, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,17). To meet the soaring demand for sugar, production had to increase. Coercive plantation work regimes were intensified and the importation of African slaves was increased⁶ (Fernández Olmos and

⁵ The Yoruba temples were only made for one deity at the time and had priesthoods attached to them. Most importantly, the temples were places for the religion's symbolic empowered objects. As long as these emblems were present, it was a temple, whether in the nature, in a dedicated house, along a road or in a family's house (Brandon 1993, 12).

⁶ In 1838, when Madden visited sugar estates near Havana he discovered that in order to produce as much as possible with the resources available, slaves were allowed only 3 hours of sleep during harvest time (Madden, 1849,164-5). During the mid-nineteenth-century, outside of the harvest, slaves on coffee estates laboured 15-16 hours daily. This was less than at sugar estates, where slaves were worked even harder (Hall, 1971,18). Economically slaves

Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,18). In 1847, there were 80,000 slaves in Cuba. To maintain this number, it was necessary to continually import 8,000 new slaves each year because 10 % of slaves died yearly due to hard labour and the birth rate was low (Hall, 1971,19). Life expectancy of a slave arriving in Cuba was seven years. It was cheaper to work them to death than to spend resources on slave health care (De La Torre, 2004,162). These work demands affected the possibility for leisure activities such as drumming and dancing and also the transmission of traditional and Christian culture.

A former runaway slave, Montejo, described the slave barracks as containing magic and religious practices,⁷ Sundays were characterised by drumming all day from noon, children playing and slaves dancing to the drums. His descriptions are from his childhood memories from the period 1865-70, before he ran away from the barracks (Montejo and Barnet, 1968). This indicates that towards the abolition of slavery in 1886, conditions for slaves may have become better, allowing for religion and other leisure activities on Sundays, reproducing their culture.

Today's Santeria

Today, Santería is one of the biggest Afro-Cuban religions in Cuba. It was and still is an oral tradition, though today, much is written down in booklets⁸, making the religion a written-oral tradition transmitting knowledge and symbolic power. Shared religious activities include ancestor worship, offerings, drumming and the performance of deities' dances where each deity is represented by particular *cantos* (songs), dances and *toques* (rhythmic melodies played on drums). These are used in ritual celebrations to honour and communicate with the deities and can be used to invoke a special communication between the devotees and the deities when they come down to earth manifesting through a devotee's body. It is said that the deity mounts the devotee as a rider mounts his horse. Through this, they partake in the happenings, giving messages and prophecies to other devotees present. The *toques* in which I participated often bore this two-way communication between the devotee and the deities. This form of communication, as if between two mortals, a parent and a child, is hierarchical. It

were compared to plantation equipment. They represented a purchase expense and a fixed price to maintain alive, whether working or not. Every hour of a slave's rest time was a loss of possible earnings (Hall, 1971,17).

⁷ He did not mention any prohibitions of African religious practices.

⁸ These booklets were heretic before, a tradition which dates back to the 1920s.

materialises the deity in ways that are not achieved through other forms of communication with the deities (Wirtz, 2007,101), like systems of divination that use pieces of coconut, the African sixteen-cowry system called *dilogún*, the *Ifá* divination that uses a special chain (Ayorinde, 2004,14), or a divination-tray to acquire information about the future and problems in daily life.

The deities within Santería are called both *Orichas* and *santos* (saints): the former originating from Yoruba, while the latter derives from the religion's syncretic tendencies with Catholicism. Both terms may be used equally. Each specific deity has both a Yoruba- and a saint's name, though the Yoruba names seemed to be more frequently used throughout my fieldwork. Visiting a "*santo*" would refer to the Oricha with whom it was associated with. Religious phenomena in Santeria often have multiple forms or identities and this is part of the encompassing and syncretising nature of the religion.

The Orichas are lords and owners of natural elements, objects and different aspects of life. They are looked upon as managers of destinies, human guardians and are personifications of various aspects of reality with a supreme being at the top of the hierarchy. The Orichas are perceived as helpers, mediating between *Olofi*, the supreme divine, and humans. They may help when in distress or they may castigate when unhappy with devotees' actions. Whenever devotees need help, advice or aid in their daily or life problems, they turn to the Orichas. The Orichas may ask for *ebbós* in return. These are rituals to please or thank an Oricha involving a sacrifice. These can be small, as giving candy to Elegua (the Oricha who opens and closes paths, see Figure 1), or they can be big, entailing animal sacrifice like roosters or goats, when there is something serious going on.

Each Oricha has *patakís*, mythical stories from when they lived on earth. These represent their numerous paths and identities which refer to different manifestations of the Oricha, different stages in their lives and relations between each other. The stories articulate the Orichas' personalities and tastes. The stories are also often moral tales that provide ethical guidelines which often relate to modern life situations. The stories only give meaning in the context they are used and are not taken literally, as everyone can interpret the stories differently depending on their circumstances. Through this system the *patakís* preserve collective memory as they pass cultural norms, traditions and customs from generation to generation (De La Torre, 2004,32).

Characteristics of the Orichas⁹

Olofi is also known as Olodumare and Olorun. He is the supreme divine, creator of earth, who distributed his powers to the other Orichas on earth who more directly control human fate (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003, 216). He is the highest embodiment of *aché*, a spiritual and mystical energy-power existing all over the universe in diverse degrees (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003, 30). The Orichas are intermediary messengers between him and humans and they take specific form in terms of their personality, human emotions and control over different parts of the universe. Orichas have certain physical characteristics and preferences in food and beverages. Certain numbers, colours, dates and days of the week are associated with particular Orichas. For example, **Elegua** is the Oricha for gaiety and cheerfulness and likes pranks and mischief. He controls good- and bad luck, destiny, unforeseen events, tragedy and success. He can give and take through opening and closing the paths of life, for he is the deity controlling them. He has a privileged position, for he has to be consulted or asked permission before starting a ceremony to other Orichas and before any big life decisions are made. He may punish those who ignore him or do not fulfill his intentions and obligations. Devotees receive plural Orichas for their protection and aid in life and Elegua is the first to be received by a devotee. Followed by Oggún and Ochosi, Elegua is the first of the “warrior trio”, who are together seen as the protectors of a domestic house and are often placed behind the entrance door (Barnet, 2001, 41). The number in the cosmos that he is associated with is 3 and he is most often represented in black and red¹⁰ which symbolise life and death. He often carries his attribute, a *garabato* which is a stick with a natural hook at the end. It is made of the guava tree and Elegua uses it to open and close the pathways of life. When he dances, it is in such a way as to portray playfulness. It is through comedy that he opens and closes the paths of life. Elegua is syncretized with both the lonely soul St. Anthony of Padua and with the miraculous powers of St. Martin de Porres.

⁹ Most of the information about the orichas gathered here comes from my lessons with Rene (see page 41 – Approaching the field) and corresponds mostly with what is written about the Orichas elsewhere.

¹⁰ He may also be represented with deep purple and white, green and white, green and black and white and black. The different colours represent the different *patakís* and paths of his life, though red and black are his most common colours.



Figure 1. An Elegua with candy offerings

Oggún is the Oricha associated with iron and indeed inhabits all iron goods. He used his machete to chop paths for the other Orichas when they first descended onto earth. He is cunning and sly but more headstrong than Elegua. He is a warrior and a hunter which goes with association with iron and metal objects, like machetes, shovels, chains, hammers etc. His ritual number is 7 and he wears the colours green, purple and black. His belt is made of dried palm leaves. In Catholicism he is represented as St. Peter due to him holding the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. His dance may be violent and involves mimicking the activities of either work or war, for example his dance may depict him using a machete to cut down bush or forest. As a metal worker, he protects blacksmiths and all those who drive vehicles that contain metal parts, as trucks, buses and trains (Barnet, 2001,46).

Ochosi is a warrior known for his hunting and with his always accurate arrows. His dance mimics the hunt where the dancer's fingers pull on bow and arrow with which he is often depicted. As he spent much time in the forest hunting, he is also known for his herbal knowledge in medicine. In mythology, he accidentally killed his mother which in turn lead him to work for justice. He is the Oricha patron saint of those in jail and is therefore often prayed to by those who have problems with the justice system. His number is 3, and his

colours are violet, green and black¹¹. His Catholic counterpart is St. Norbert. Some of his food offerings consist of milk, honey and cornmeal.

Shangó is one of the most popular Orichas in Cuba. He is perceived as king of the Orichas and is lord of fire, thunder and lightning, virility and strength. He is deity of music and the owner of the *batá* drums¹². This is why his 'children' play the *batá* drum. Myths and legends describe him as a hard drinker, brave and fearless, adventurous and conscious of his strength and virile beauty (Barnet, 2001,47). The *Palma Royal*, the Royal palm tree, represents him and it is said that he can blow fire from his mouth. He mounts his horses (those he possesses) with a lot of energy and makes them spin. He is patron of hunters, warriors and fishermen (Barnet, 2001,48). He wears red with white fringes, which are his colours, and he has dried palm tree leaves hanging from his belt. Symbolizing his warrior aspect, his attribute is a double-bladed axe. War and eroticism are mimicked in his dances. Representing virility, love and the essence of life itself. His dances are full of beautiful erotic movements making women fall in love with him. This is the Oricha who has the most *toques* and *cantos* (songs) and has the ability to brighten up any party with his presence. Shangó is associated with the number 6. His most common counterpoint in Catholicism is St. Barbara, saint of lightening.

Yemayá is Queen of the sea and salt water, mother of fish and represents the universal mother and motherhood, intelligence, common sense and reason. She is a peacemaker, but may punish harshly. She dresses in her colours navy blue with white fringes which represent water and the white foam from waves. She is identified with the number 7 which is represented in her necklaces which repeat seven blue and seven white beads after another. Yemayá is the oldest of the female Orichas. Her songs refer to her beauty, intelligence and power. When dancing she spins around, her skirt representing waves and sea's movement, while the tempo and energy in its execution describes the sea which may be calm and easy or agitated and wild. Yemayá's attributes are everything found in the sea. Living in the mountains, one of her paths, that is, one of her manifestations is known as Yemayá Okute, who lives in the mountains. This Yemayá includes a sombrero hat and a machete as attributes, and when she appears in this form she dances differently using a machete. Those who receive Yemayá as mother, tend to have balanced and harmonious personalities. Some of her foods

¹¹ His colours vary from his different paths. Some also say his colours are blue and purple.

¹² See *Toque de santo*, page 31.

are melon, tropical fruits, fried fish, and goat. Yemayá's Catholic counterpoint is the Virgin of Regla who looks out over Havana's bay and into the sea. The Virgin of Regla is negra¹³ as is Yemayá, are part of the localisation of the sacred that re-empowers and revalues what it means to be negro. For as Douglas and Turner note, that which is lowly can often be associated with the sacred, with the creative powers of that which is luminal and marginal, outside of dominant categories or betwixt and between them (Turner, 1969, Douglas, 1979).

Oyá is owner of the square or plaza where she lives. Some say that she is owner of the cemetery. She is seen as its gatekeeper and is related to death. Oyá has a strong character and is respected and feared for her powers. She is a warrior and can beat anyone. She is represented as wind, storms and lightening. These can all be manifestations of her. As Shangó, she can breathe a multi coloured fire. Her messenger is the wind. Her vestments are multicoloured, never black, where a wine-red is the most prevalent. Nine is her number. If she comes down, which she rarely does, she takes her horses with forceful energy and violent gestures. For she dances like the wind, shaking her black *iruke*¹⁴ attribute (Barnet, 2001,55). She has infinite *cantos* referring to her life living with Shangó and Oggún. Her Catholic counterpoint is Our Lady of Candelaria and St. Therese of Lisieux¹⁵. Some of her foods are purple plums, coloured beans, sweet honey and red wine.

Ochún has different female qualities; coquettishness, obedience, hard-working, beautiful, a flatterer. She dances well and is sensual and musical (Barnet, 2001,56). She is the symbol of Cuban womanhood and is represented with sensual grace and creole mischievousness (Barnet, 2001,58). Ochún was the last Oricha to be born. Olofi did not have a colour for her and gave her therefore a white outfit. She went to live on the edge of the river and washed her outfit so much that it turned yellow. Ochún is queen of beauty and love and

¹³ Throughout the text I will use the words blanco/a, mulato/a and negro/a to refer to different groups of people. I have chosen to do this due to the Cuban common form of describing people through appearance such as colour. The colours "blanco" and "negro" means respectively "white" and "black" and are commonly used in daily speech to describe people. Mulato refers to racial mixes as black and white and sometimes also mixed with "Chinese" as they say. Even though Cuban daily speech differentiates between shades of colour when describing people, I do not see this necessity in this paper.

¹⁴ A horsetail whisk used by some Orichas.

¹⁵ I was told many times that the Yoruba wanted to hide her as she was not a calm and nice Oricha, therefore she was placed alongside a very innocent quiet saint, namely St. Therese. The association of Orichas with Saints is complex and is just one of a compatibility of similar qualities, dispositions and activities, though these are important. It can also be associations that here work as disguises to protect and preserve.

represents the river, money and gold. She is a sensual Oricha, and has the power of persuasion, achieving what she wants. Her number is 5 and she is equated with the Virgin of Charity, Cuba's national patron saint. She is summoned and saluted with a brass bell. She had relations with Shangó, Oggún and Ochosi. She dresses in golden yellow and can also be white. She dances with her bracelets, shawl and fan and has the most dances of all the Orichas. She is owner of bellies, and is the patron of pregnant women. Ochún loves honey.



Figure 2. Oricha dolls (distinguished by their colours) and statues of saints sold outside the Church of Regla on Yemayá and La Virgen de Regla's day.

Obatala is an androgynous deity with both feminine and masculine paths and is associated with white and the number 8. Obatala is Oricha of wisdom, goodness and patience to make good decisions, justice and purity. It is said that he has two faces, a young and an old. Obatala is the great Oricha who created mankind and was dedicated to lead them on earth by Olofi. He is saluted with a metal bell, and is associated with rainbows, doves, elephants and deer. Obatala dances with an *iruke* and a sable. As he is king of the world and head of the Orichas, his devotees have to behave well, not get drunk or quarrel. This Oricha is adored as both mother and father, and all the Orichas are beneath him. His *toques* sound slow. Some of

his foods are pears, honey, aniseed, and white grapes. Our Lady of Ranson is his catholic counterpart.

Babalú Ayé is equated with St. Lazaro of the crutches and the dogs¹⁶. He is deity of diseases and especially smallpox. He does miracles, but is strict to those who have made him promises as he expects them to be fulfilled (Barnet, 2001,58). He punishes and kills by sicknesses like leprosy and smallpox. He advises women in love, deals with death and is as wise as Obatala and Orula (Barnet, 2001,60). He was a womanizer, but caught leprosy when old. Therefore he preaches respectability and walks on crutches, always accompanied by his faithful dogs. He cleanses and purifies the sick with a cluster of special sticks (Barnet, 2001,59). His numbers are 13 and 17.

Orula is also called *Orunla*, *Orúnmila* and *Ifá*. He is Oricha of divining and gives therefore guidance as he knows and sees everyone's destiny. He knows the past, future and present. It is he who decides if a devotee should be a *babalawo*, the highest priest, or not, and is seen as the *babalawos'* Oricha. Literally, Orula means "Heaven knows who we are". If someone does something bad against him, he kills swiftly. He is owner of the Ifá divination tray and the *ekuelé* chain¹⁷. His number is 16 and he is associated with St. Francis of Assisi. Orula does not mount devotees and has therefore no dances. His colours are green and yellow. Offerings to him are often doves and chicken. He likes water, honey, shrimps, rum, fish, corn and beer.

The dead, *eggún*, are spirits, not Orichas, but they have central religious roles. One should not do anything without first consulting them. Singing to the *eggún* one refers to heaven as it is the place where the spirits pass by. One reaffirms that death is the biggest thing existing and has power over mankind. One invokes songs of prayer to the Orichas who have relation to the spirits. The *eggún's* colour is yellow and their number is 9. They eat fruit, yellow rice, beans, and all types of food Orichas consume.

Ritual families

When initiated into the religion, one also initiates into a religious family, gaining both a *madrina* and a *padrino*, a religious mother and father, who function as godmother and godfather. Symbolically, these become new parents and are the heads of the religious family

¹⁶ Babalú Ayé stems originally from the Arará Afro-Cuban religion, making his appearance a little mythologically confusing.

¹⁷ A chain used by *babalawos* to communicate with Orula to divine.

one becomes part of. Always their child (*ahijado/a*), their other children become siblings of religion. By implication, when initiated into the religion, a devotee is born again, and given a new mother, father and kin. Identity is ritualised and expanded into a new cosmological terrain that harkens back in time to the pre-colonial roots of Cuba. The self becomes re-grounded in a new kinship network, but also in space and time which become cosmological reaching back to Africa and a primordial creative power.

Initiation rituals exist in a hierarchy that can ultimately lead a devotee to become a *babalawo*¹⁸ or *santero*. The latter indicates that the devotee has been *crowned with-*, and has thereby *received* his Oricha through the initiation rituals. Every devotee has a “mother Oricha” and a “father Oricha”, making him a spiritual child of these Orichas. They are often referred to by *santeros* as “mother” or “father”. The “main” Oricha with which a devotee is crowned becomes his guardian (angel) Oricha. It is mostly agreed upon that the revelation of parental Orichas, or the conferral of the status of a *babalawo* or a *santero* may only be determined through a ritual asking Orula, *mano de Orula*, who decides the devotees parental Orichas¹⁹. Those who are the sons/daughters of an Oricha are thought to have certain characteristics associated with this specific Oricha. People may guess your Oricha by the energies and characteristics you display. You become a personified extension of your Oricha who is also a personified extension of you.

The first year after being crowned with an Oricha and thereby becoming initiated into Santería, devotees are called *Iyawó*. The initiation is seen as a new birth. The *Iyawó* is thought of as a newborn baby to be nurtured and taken care of. Initiation has many steps and rituals. Some rituals can only be seen by those initiating the *Iyawó*, while others, like the presentation of the *Iyawó* to the sacred *batá* drums during a *toque de santo*, are public and not as secretive.

The *Iyawós* have to follow specific religious restrictions and regulations concerning foods and activities. These restrictions are individual and depend upon what the Orichas decide for each person. Some restrictions last a lifetime, while others are restricted only to the *Iyawó* period, like dressing solely in white for the first year (see Figure 3) and not walking

¹⁸ Most agree that only men may be *babalawos*.

¹⁹ I was told in Matanzas that there are some who find the Oricha by using the dowry shells, but according to my informants, this will not make a 100% sure result. Doing the *mano de Orula* is said to be the only sure method to find which Oricha is your guardian Oricha.

outside in the sun or after sunset. The restrictions are said to help the individual in life and in part they help avoid negative events²⁰.

A *santera* at a *toque* told me that receiving a saint should always be done for a motive.

“There are those who have to receive a santo for something which is going to happen, but everyone who arrives on earth is not meant to receive a santo. There are those who do it because they want to. If they have the money there is no problem. Or if they have a family tradition.”



*Figure 3.
An Iyawó. The blue and white bracelet and the longest blue and white collar identifies her as child of Yemayá*

²⁰ Other examples may be smoking restrictions which are imposed for better health and catching buses may be prohibited because a foreseen exit from life may result from a bus accident.

Chapter 2 Introduction to Ethnographic Context

Cuba

Cuba, with its population of 11.2 million, is the largest island in the Caribbean and has a humid, temperate climate. During winter months from November to February, the temperature makes it comfortable to wear a T-shirt so as to avoid sweating or freezing. Sometimes it may go as low as 10-20°C, which is perceived as cold. During July and August, the high temperature and humidity create a desperate need for a refreshing bath after simply sitting at home or walking a block.

Cuba has a multicultural atmosphere, shown by the diversity of its regions and provinces which all have unique characteristics, music and religions that prevail in different zones and in different classes with diverse racial components. The eastern part of Cuba is racially darker than the west due to plantations and Haitian settlers coming with the Haitian revolution in 1804. Here *Voodoo* and *Palo Monte* are strong prevailing religions. Guantanamo has a reputation for strong, effective sorcery, Santiago is known for their delicious fruits, the town of Holguin is known for its whiteness, clean streets, and wealth, Isla de Juventud has its green-eyed mulatos, Matanzas is known for fair skinned mulatos with straight hair and is perceived as the Cuban origin of Santeria, while Havana, the capital, is known as Cuba's melting pot, where people from all provinces come to seek their fortune.

The Communist revolution, was supposed to ensure equality and balance for everyone. Health care and medication are almost free, as is education. The majority of Cubans are poor, making do with what they have. Even so, differences exist within the Cuban population. Due to remittances and other forms of economic help from abroad, those with family and contacts outside the country usually live a wealthier life. They have less necessity to participate in the black market to make ends meet. Others enjoy greater opportunity and higher salaries including those working in foreign companies and those in higher state positions. Some of these may live extremely well compared to their fellow countrymen.

Havana

During my fieldwork I observed that many Cubans survive by careful maintenance of the monthly salary (equivalent to 15-30 USD) and by using government allocated ration

cards²¹. Most do not have the option of purchasing luxury goods such as Olive oil, a can of tuna fish, a good shampoo and perfume, flat-screen televisions or modern “western” stoves for cooking. They are forced to find methods of earning extra money. As a young man in his late twenties once said, “*If you use your salary very carefully, maybe it will last two weeks. And after that, you have to fend for yourself the rest of the month.*” Due to this, many are used to living on a day-to-day basis, continuously looking to make a few coins. This activates ingenuity and feeds the black market with providers of all kinds of goods and services. It is possible to earn a great deal by using one’s creativity to “invent”. A popular Cuban saying is: “*hay que inventar*” (it is necessary to invent), describing the necessity to find alternative ways to make ends meet. Examples of this may be personally selling products in the city which are bought in the countryside, walking the streets selling tickets for clubs, phones or vegetables, or privately selling products taken illegally from their state owned job²², selling fruit, vegetables and cheese along highways. Talking to people and observing the streets, school recesses, people at work and in homes, the Cuban informal economy seems to be more widespread than the legal state economy.

Due to growing urbanization towards the capital, Havana is Cuba’s melting pot. With more than 2.1 million inhabitants, it is filled with life and music is heard at all times. Even though the racial structure of Havana is mixed, there are trends within areas corresponding somewhat to economic statuses, and to the strength of Afro-Cuban religiosity. Miramar has huge houses surrounded with fences and is the area where foreign embassies and the houses of high ranking military officials and politicians there can be found. Here some have large expensive modern cars and gated security. This contrasts with most Cubans who cannot afford a run-down car. The streets are wide and have trees dividing the road and the sidewalks. Along the main roads, parks divide opposite lanes where many residents can take their daily run. The population in this zone is largely fair-skinned. There are of course some negroes and mulatos, but they are not as prevalent in number. The area is perceived as an area for the elite, the rich and those who are sponsored from abroad.

²¹ Today these provide necessary goods as chicken, sugar, rice, oil and bread. Cubans told that before they provided more things such as cigars. The rations are portioned from the number of individuals in a household and suffice usually for 8-10 days a month, providing something every week.

²² Many Cubans have different views upon theft. Stealing from the state is not as negatively viewed as stealing from fellow Cubans and from one’s own neighbourhood. Many see this as a legitimate strategy for surviving.

Looking at more marginal poorer areas like La Habana Vieja, Old Havana, most of the buildings are decrepit and in desperate need of maintenance. Some empty buildings and balconies even have trees growing out of them. As numerous Cubans relocate to Havana to seek a better life, a number of illegal Cubans reside in this part of town²³(Rother, 1997). In this populous area some entire families live in single rooms or in the remains of half-collapsed houses. People die yearly due to houses and balconies collapsing upon them²⁴.

The narrow streets of the old town are lively and full of people. Many work while walking the streets, shouting in their special selling voices what they want to buy or sell. Some sell groceries, or house utensils like brooms, others buy gold or sharpen knives. There are some areas, like Jesus Maria, which are thought of as more religious than others. A *babalawo* confirmed what an older man once told me, that many of the slaves who came to Cuba and who were too old to work on plantations settled in this neighbourhood. This area became a base for contemporary Afro-Cuban religiosity, especially Abakua²⁵ and Santería beliefs.

The old town tends to have stronger Afro-derived forms of religiosity, be economically poorer, and have a darker population than Miramar and other wealthier areas. The residents seem to be 50/50% blanco-to-negro ratio, where most are a mix between the two. Even so, this does not mean that Miramar has no form of Afro-Cuban religiosity. Throughout my fieldwork, I attended a few *toques* in this area, but the main number of *toques* was in the more marginal poorer areas. This might imply something about how religiosity is spread within Havana, but it also illustrates the networks of my informants, who introduced me to the *toques*.

The “special period” during the 1990’s bore the effects of the fall of the Soviet Union which had previously subsidised Cuba. Economic conditions worsened, and living conditions of many Cubans deteriorated significantly. Some authors believe that the deteriorating factors as the economic situation led individuals to seek for protection and hope for prosperity in

²³Cubans are not allowed to settle freely within the country. They need an address in Havana to move there. These measures have to some extent hindered the concentration of citizens in the capital.

²⁴It is therefore no joke to advice pedestrianism in how to walk around old Havana. This includes looking out for holes, racing bicycle-taxis, and importantly, looking up to ensure that the balcony you are walking under will not fall down.

²⁵ Abakuá is an Afro-Cuban religion stemming from present day Nigeria. It is a secret society only for men (Ayorinde, 2004,19).

religion and it led to a rise in religious activity within the population. This new religiosity was not identical to that which had existed previously (Calzadilla, 2003,14). In today's Havana, it is just as common to see a blanco wear Afro-Cuban religious attires as a negro.

When asking Cubans about racism, most said that it doesn't exist in Cuba, which reiterates the official belief that communism created equality and abolished the old slave derived system of racism. This was a typical answer by those grown up in marginal areas and reflected not so much their experiences as what they thought should be the case. In these marginal areas, there are few differences between blancos, negros and mulatos as they are all more or less economically poor and have to fight for survival. It is just as common to see a poor blanca selling peanuts as a poor negro selling newspapers or looking for cans to recycle to earn a few cents. Entering the richer and whiter areas, this equality often loses some weight as some blancos become wary when negros knock on the door. This I have witnessed, on occasion, and it might be due to a stereotype in which the negros are poorer and therefore more likely to be up to mischief.

Current studies have shown that racism does exist and there are correlations between skin colour, jobs and economic situations. The majority of accommodations with better conditions are inhabited by blancos who also receive more economic support from abroad²⁶. It is mostly negros and mulatos who reside in poverty and with the worst living conditions. They are not as prevalent in high ranking jobs in academia, the public service and private corporations as blancos (Eduardo, 2010).

Even though there is Afro-Cuban religiosity among blancos, in the schooling and performance of the Afro-Cuban dances, many of the dancers are still negro or mulato. This is evident both in the street, in theaters and in institutions teaching these dances. Due to perceptions of race, embodiment and "nature", people think of negros as categorically better dancers than blancos. Moreover Afro-Cuban dances are still thought of as negro dances. Descendants of African slaves are perceived to carry African music, dance and rhythm in their blood. "They carry it in their blood" is a common expression²⁷. Certain forms of primitivism, that is cultural perceptions of biology, race and identity, permeate everyday life. Moreover,

²⁶ This is linked to the many blanco upper and middleclass inhabitants who migrated during the revolutions start. They now send money home to their relatives who are still in Cuba.

²⁷ The view is opposite within Ballet, a dance of national prestige. This dance is seen as a blanco dance and it is rare to see a negro dancing a main role in a Cuban Ballet.

they create racial differences even in contexts where people deny the existence or importance of race. There is a reproduction of class differences, that is, inequalities in wealth and power that is very much organised along racial lines but which often cannot be acknowledged publicly or officially. I am interested in the transmissions of religious knowledge and how that is often organised by the practices and structures of class and race.

Religious presence in Havana's streets and homes

In Havana, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, religion is visible everywhere, if one knows what to look for. For some families, Afro-Cuban religions steer much of their lives, while for others religion is not in command. Others again, including some Christians, distance themselves from the Afro-Cuban religions, or may “just in case” go through with some Afro-Cuban customs.

It is common to find religious artefacts from a number of different religions in a household. Many have a big picture of Jesus Christ in their living room alongside statues of native Indians, seashells, Buddha, glasses of water on shelves with pictures of people placed nearby - where one of the glasses of water may have a rosary in and around it, old railway nails hammered into the floor, a dead turtle in an iron pot in the stairway leading up to the house²⁸ (see Figure 5), *Gitanas* – usually negro dolls in dresses who represent spirits who keeps watch over a person (see Figure 6), roundish figures placed in clay-bowls containing sweets and cabinets filled with the regalia of the Orichas. Some people will place their particular Orichas and their regalia in a room dedicated to them or just behind a door or in a little space available in their home. All of these objects are religious, carry a symbolic meaning and are believed to have an effect of some kind. What is found in Cuban homes may vary from house to house depending upon family faith, tradition, custom and to an extent, heritage. Outside private homes, entrances may have straw hanging by a thread on the outside-top part of the door, or maybe one has to step over a little chain lying in the doorway. Babies may often have small black and red beaded gadgets attached on their clothes for good luck and to divert “bad eyes”. Animal residues, flowers or other objects may be lying in street corners and gutters. Puddles from wash water may contain herbs used as part of cleansing rituals. Offerings are frequently found by the foot of trees like *la Palma Real* and *la Ceiba*

²⁸ These last two examples I only noticed twice, but are examples of actions done by believers to obtain something desired.

(see Figure 4). Cars may have saints or beaded jewellery in the front windows and a red ribbon at the back of the car for protection. Shops along the narrow roads of the old town sell religious regalia like colourful jewellery, figurines, and booklets with religious information, clothes, dolls, pots, and herbs; everything needed to perform various rituals and ceremonies.

Noticing peoples' actions and clothing is another way of spotting religiosity in Havana's streets. Women can be seen with their *Gitana* (see Figure 6) while using cards to consult the worries of street customers. Others, looking poor and shabby, may carry statues of Santa Barbara and San Lazaro with signs asking for money in the name of the saints.

Some devotees wear colourful religious hats, while others may wear brown and purple clothes made from potato sacks, either on a special occasion such as a saint's day or for individual reasons in daily life. One common form of religious devotion in Havana's streets, are the *Iyawó*, the newly initiated who dress completely in white from top to toe.

On the Orichas' days, or the days of the Catholic saints to which the Orichas are syncretized, religious activity becomes more visible in the street. Religious families may have *toques de santo* at home and devotees will dress in the Orichas' colours and wear their colourful beaded jewellery. Some gather to go to the churches of the different Orichas to visit "their saints", bringing flowers and lighting candles²⁹. Frequently, either in the neighbourhood, or in the far distance, drumming may be heard. These may be celebrations for the Orichas or even a *Cajón* for the deceased.

²⁹ Some informants explained that these candles were for the Orichas, not for the catholic saints.



Figure 4. Offerings by the foot of a Ceiba tree.



Figure 5. This was laying in the stairway leading to the entrance of a religious' house.

Figure 6. Santera with her Yemayá beside another woman's Ochún. She is seated counselling people in the street, as women may often do with their Gitanas. The difference between this Yemayá and a Gitana is that she is evidently dressed in Yemayá's colours.



Toque de Santo

Toques de Santo are celebrations for the Orichas, either birthdays, the day a devotee was initiated and *crowned* with an Oricha, or when a devotee seeks help to solve problems. Cubans use the word “*toque*” as an abbreviation for “*toque de santo*”. A *toque* is a song, a rhythmic melody played on *tambores* (drums) to an Oricha. When referring to celebrations and rituals within Santería, both “*toque*” and “*tambor*” are used. For many, these words are no longer distinguished orally. “Going to a *tambor*” or “heading for a *toque*”, implies that you are going to a religious celebration where drums and dancing will likely take place. Even so, my impression was that “*tambor*” is the term of widest use. People often used these terms if they were going to a *Guïro*, a *violin for Ochún* or even to a *Cajon de Muerto*³⁰.

³⁰These are other forms of celebrations using other instruments. The Guïro uses a guïro, which is a hollow guïro fruit with beads placed on a net that goes around it. It also has

The *toques* are organized within strict frames, where certain elements have to be preceded before others. There are patterns to the order in which the Orichas should be sung. While songs are sung and the *tambuleros* (drummers) are playing the *toques* on their drums, the devotees respond to the *Akpwong*'s (lead-singer) calls, fulfilling the call with a response as demanded by the song style. As this is done, the devotees dance the appropriate dances of the Orichas to whom the *cantos* and *toques* belong. If they succeed in creating the sufficient energies through participating in the dancing and music, making a union, a possession may take place. First a devotee may enter *transit*³¹ before eventually becoming possessed by an *eggun* or an Oricha.

The rich body of dances, *toques* (music) and *cantos* within Santería are difficult to distinguish for those who have not grown up with them. A large number of *toques* involve different dance movements for different Orichas, with the dances corresponding to the rhythms of particular *toques*. To know which Oricha the dance is performed for, it is necessary to identify a number of distinguishing dance steps and *toques*, thus, learning their “language”.

The structure of the dances is given a social function and embraces a larger radius than the movements in themselves. The environment, the social context, the food and the drinks etc., and not just the dance, are all factors which pull participants to dance festivities (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003,20). The ritual parties are collective socializing, pragmatic and sacred. They differ from daily activities and are fundamentally opposed to the ordinary activities of working days (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003,28, Jackson, 1983,334). The religious rites bear deep cultural symbolism and people gain pleasure also from the depth they find in the cultural liturgy (Balbuena Gutiérrez, 2003,28).

The *tambores* are done for different motives such as: health, gratefulness or as requests to do well in one's school or academic exams. Generally they are done to solve a problem. There are specific *toques* to make negative spirits and energies leave the house or a person. As Yoandri, a *babalawo* and *tambulero*, said:

many metal tools used as instruments which penetrate your head in a mind-boggling way. The Violin for Ochún uses Violins and may be the most syncretic ritual in Santería.

³¹ When using the word “*transit*” I will be referring to the state Cubans refer to as *transito*. This implies the state when leaving the normal state of mind and entering a possession trance. Usually this state may involve a lot of bodily shaking and uncontrolled gestures.

Many people go to tambores and think that it is a fiesta. “Ah! A tambor for Shangó!” As one does not know why the tambor is done, it may be done for a situation, a problem with law, a problem with cancer or a dying person. One should know why they are doing the tambor. If it is for completion, there is no problem, but if it is for a change in life, you can’t go, you will catch something bad.

The *tambores de batá* are the drums used during *toques*. They consist of three different drums carved from a single piece of wood. Their hourglass shape, where one side is larger than the other, represents the different social classes. The smallest side represents the people, the poor, the middle of the drum, the thinnest part, represents the middle class and the biggest side of the *tambor* represents the kings. The part on the top (*Enu*) represents the stars, the moon and the sun.

Okónkolo means *small* and is the smallest drum representing the head of the *tambor*. *Iyá* means *mother*³² in Yoruba and is the biggest drum. It represents the human body. The Oricha *Aña* is believed to reside within this drum. *Itótele* means *follower* and is the medium drum, representing the extremities of the body. All three drums are played together, and are understood as communicating or conversing with each other, as well with the spirit world. *Iyá* is the leader of all the melodies and maintains the conversation which *Itótele* follows. *Okónkolo* maintains the beat of this dialogue. Through *Aña* and the rhythmic conversations, communication between humans and saints is achieved. *Iyá* is placed in the middle of the three drums during a *toque*. *Okónkolo* is placed on the right-hand side of *Iyá* and *Itótele*, is placed on *Iyá*’s left. The *tambuleros* rest the bi-membranophone drums in their laps and beat on both leather surfaces with their hands. To be used at a *toque*, the *batá* drums must be ritually sacred, they must never touch the ground³³. They must also be fed by their owner, and undergo other preparatory rituals before a *toque*. Women may never touch them, for the pollution of women, especially menstruating women, contaminates their mediating purity. To keep the drums sacred, men also need to go through a rite, wash their hands before starting and abstain from sex the day before they play. The exception is if an initiated devotee is to salute the sacred *batá* drums while the *cantos* of the initiates’ Oricha are being played. The

³² This name brings with it ancestral organizations of a matriarchal respect and veneration of women.

³³ *Aña* and earth do not come along well, this is why the *tambores* may never touch the ground.

devotee then lays in front of *Iyá* in his *Oricha*'s saluting position before getting up and saluting each *batá* drum individually in order.



Figure 7. This is a trono at a toque for Ochún where St. Lazaro (Babaly-Ayé) and Shangó are also placed to the right in the trono, with Elegua in the front by the righthand candle.

Religiously the stories tell that the *tambores* were used as a way of communicating between the tribes where each Oricha was king of their separate land. If Shangó was to visit Oyá, they would use the drums to say so. Each Oricha has their own traditional *toque* which is their individual signature. Everything is communicated through the drums, initiation and death.

The Orichas' *cantos* sung at the *tambores* reflect the life of the saints and everything which happens including work, jealousy and other problems. The Orichas has lived the full range of human experiences and have therefore songs for all of its aspects. Through these songs, individuals, performers and audience reflect on their lives. Songs at the *tambores* are done in accordance to the demands of a particular situation. There are innumerable numbers of *cantos* reflecting every situation, like songs in respect of women's menstruation, a brother dying, etc.

The Orichas' dances at the rituals go together with the songs and the *toques*. They articulate mythological stories so as to produce the cohabitation of the individual and the Oricha. Sometimes the stories are about tragedy and other times about happiness. An example may be Elegua's Lumbanche. This dance depicts Elegua using his *garabato* stick to open and close paths. It reflects the rhythm of Iyá which makes calls to the other *tambores* and does "concoba-con, iba-o-iba, iba-o-iba, iba-o-i, con, concoba-con". The dancer dances his steps and does a different step indicating to the singer to start singing. Both the singer and the *tambores* can tell the Oricha which dance to dance. The Oricha too, may decide a dance to dance. They work together. Another example is Oyá where "conconcon-ba, iii, coba" reflects the wind, the cemetery in Oyá's house, Ile-Okú, (Ile means house and Okú death).

The correct dances are danced solely when the Oricha dances while mounting a devotee. Through the dance, everything offered on the *trono* (throne or alter) is transmitted. Devotees make sacrifices³⁴ to the Orichas as embodied spirits, before the Oricha descends and transmits. As a *babalawo* explained it "*Often one gives them food before a party (a toque). It is similar for everyone: before going to a party, you eat first, drink a little and then you can party*".

At these celebrations the Orichas are adorned and presented to devotees in a *trono*, which may vary in size and content (see Figures 7 and 8). Here, the Orichas are placed in their glory, with regalia, food and offerings to be revered by adoring subservient devotees. The

³⁴ These are usually eatable.

food-offerings are shared with all participants at the end of the *toque*. The *trono* is usually dedicated to the same Oricha as the *toque*. Although colours and adornments make it obvious which Oricha has the main dedication in the *trono*, several other Orichas may be adorned and presented in the same *trono* (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 8. This is a *trono* at a *toque* presenting many different Orichas. The red and the axe attribute in the middle of the picture is Shangó, the blue is Yemayá, the silver furthest back and highest up is Obatalá, the sunflowers are for Ochún, Ogun is the cauldron behind the yellow cake, etc. There are cakes for many of the Orichas, all presented with their corresponding colours. Surrounding the blue cake are more and different Elegua figures as in Figure 1.

There are many *toques* within Santería but not all are held for the Orichas. One of these is the “*Cajon de muerto*”³⁵ which originates from the Afro-Cuban religion Palo Monte and is a rite for the deceased. In these celebrations, history is being resurrected as they play for the Cuban historic ancestors’ spirits, amongst them the Indians, the Congo and more. This rite has been incorporated into Santería to show respect, honour and communication with

³⁵ The *Cajon de Muerto* uses wooden boxes as instruments, which is indicated in its name (cajón means box and muerto means dead). This stems from when the *tambores* were prohibited and the devotees used what they had available to conduct their rites.

ancestors. These ceremonies are often done before a *toque de santo* as one should honour the dead before honouring the Orichas. Ancestor adoration was one of the Yoruba elements to lose strength after arrival in Cuba. Today many *santeros* have adapted this ceremony and Spiritism for ancestor veneration.

Ritual Language – understanding song texts

I found it difficult to find *santeros* who understood the totality of the meanings of the song texts sung at the *toques*. Living the experience of music and the act of making, singing and dancing it together was what was important at the *toques* I attended. Friedson's ethnography and analyses bear many similarities to these findings³⁶. *Santería* song texts have meaning that most of my informants were unaware of, as they did not understand the special language of the *cantos* sung at the *toques*. Just as dance may be regarded as a social medicine, keeping societies together even though they consist of big differences (Daniel, 2005,271), singing together makes a Turnerian *communitas*³⁷ (Turner, 1969,96) where the act of performing together creates a sensation of unity. Those I met who did know the meaning of the song texts, were often old school *babalawos*, *madrinas*, *padrinos* or *tambuleros* who had lived long and learnt from their elders. Amongst the younger generation, many knew the songs, and were actively joining the singing at rites, but could not translate the songs themselves³⁸. The focus seemed to be on the act of singing and participating together in the rite. The foreignness of the song texts adds to the mystery and sacredness of the performance as accessing an alternative world of meaning and power. These performances' sacredness is perceived to lay in their connection to African tradition and the sense of their authenticity.

³⁶ Similarly Friedson experienced that the participants did not know the meaning of the song texts the woman sang at the rites. The focus was instead on the lived experience of making music together. Many of the songs were in chiNgoni, which is a language few participants understood (Friedson, 1996,16,131).

³⁷ When Turner talks about *communitas*, he describes social ties and relationships that emerge between people experiencing similar situations of liminality. He calls this *communitas* and not community as he distinguishes the difference between social relationships and an area of cooperate living and says that "it is rather a matter of giving a general recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society" (Turner, 1969,96).

³⁸ There must of course be exceptions to this, but this was the reality of those with whom I spoke.

Instead of explicit mythic narratives, the rites are full of nonverbal symbolism with mythical associations of an original creativity (Brandon, 1993,146).

Rene, a main *babalawo* informant I will come back to shortly, would sometimes translate the most common *cantos* for me. Even though he knew many Yoruba words, it didn't seem as though he could translate the word-for-word meaning of the *cantos* himself. His teacher had given him particular translations a long time ago. As Rene told me about his teacher who had known hundreds of *toques* and their corresponding *cantos*, I gained the impression that this was rare and exceptional in contemporary Cuba. He related that in the old days, *Iyawós* saluted each other in Yoruba, not in Spanish. Explaining why I hadn't witnessed this, he said that this tradition had been lost, as few present-day devotees mastered the Yoruba language. The ritual language of Santería is dying among the new generations of *santeros*, leaving few knowledgeable enough to converse in this special language, let alone, translate the meaning of the song texts. This produces a new hierarchy of knowledge, which renders the *babalawos* and those knowing the language more authoritative, as they are the only ones who understand some of what the Orishas say. However, increasingly the language of those possessed is changing towards Spanish, with many devotees disagreeing over whether this is legitimate.

Safety measures

Often, during *toques*, my body felt things that I seldom experienced at other times. Sometimes I would feel a tangible shiver and goosebumps starting at the top of my head, spreading down my legs. This happened especially when someone was entering transit, and on the verge of getting possessed/mounted. Other times I would feel strong beats and rhythms shake my body. The extreme heat produced by crowdedness and movement evoked an urge to go out for air. It was taxing and I felt exhausted by the heat, the rhythms, the people, the dancing, the noise volume and reverberations in the often-cramped locations where the *toques* were held.

After attending some *toques*, witnessing its effects on people present, and feeling the physical effects of the energies on my own body, I became wary as to my personal safety and

wellbeing. I didn't want to lose control of my body, enter a trance, or bring bad things home from the *toque*, as I did once, when I became ill after attending one³⁹.

When visiting and living in a society where *brujeria* (magic and sorcery) is part of the residents' daily concerns and reality, it is necessary to act appropriately and thus cautiously like others. As my body experienced uncustomary sensations at *toques*, I became more prescriptive about following people's advice and safety concerns. Friedson, an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist who worked among the Tumbuka in Malawi, wrote about his weakening scepticism about possession due to his exposure to a different culture and world view (Friedson, 1996,14). This was similar to what I experienced. By taking safety measures, I may have converted my reality or imported some of the reality of the locals into my own reality.

Although I was often warned to be careful about entering unfamiliar *toques*, I was told that they were open for those who wanted to participate. Participation also depended on the nature of the particular *toque*. I was told that generally there would be no problem attending *toques*, but since I was attending so many, I should take precautions. I was informed that *toques* could be hosted for many reasons, such as to find strength, luck, or good health, or to drive away bad things. I became aware that to enter a *toque* of the latter kind without some sort of conscious protection would be naive as it could cause bad luck to shift to you, which in turn would create the need for you to be cleansed.

People not strongly anchored into Santería told me repeatedly to be careful about attending *toques*. I believe these warnings also contained stereotypes and fear for the unknown. Nevertheless, these warnings did reinforce my uneasiness. Since some engaged in Santería were said to be "*Arriba del mal hecho*" (a Cuban saying describing actions with bad intentions), prudence was recommended especially because I was a foreigner. The implication was that I might be considered an easy source of money. Most frequently I was advised to only attend *toques* accompanied by someone I trusted and some advised against consumption at the rites. These warnings were partly fear that some food or drink may contain spells and bad-spirits or harmful *brujeria*. If I had eaten food infested with bad magic, it would be harder to cure, as it is believed that once inside, stronger counter-*brujeria* is required.

³⁹ This illness went away when someone held her hands on my stomach as I tried to rest. The problem was that what had been extracted from me, stayed with this person for weeks after the fact, even after going home to Norway.

Many asked if I had a *resguardo*, an amulet for protection⁴⁰. When going to *toques*, devotees thought it worrisome that people shed all the bad things they carry. There seems to be an assumption that they are not destroyed so that they vanish but that they are expelled or removed and so can re-attach themselves to someone else, hence the common use of a *resguardo* or perfume to ensure one's safety. Cleansing baths were suggested to me after *toques*, purifying me of any bad influences I may have accumulated. This could involve bathing with *cascarilla* (eggshell powder). Some would also include fresh flowers, depending on the desired achievement. After bathing, I was told to pour water with a spray of perfume in it over my body, avoiding my head⁴¹. The perfume would cleanse the body, protecting it against evil-minded spirits that might seek to possess it.

Many initiates do these cleansings frequently, monthly, weekly or daily. They will also do them when instructed so as to solve a problem. If many things go wrong, a cleansing of the body or house may be required to re-establish balance, depending on what the problem is. One may seek out someone to divine the problem to inform what should be done and which Oricha or spirit will help. It may be required to wash the house with a blend of a special flower, *cascarilla*, honey and other ingredients, and place a special sweet for Elegua or a pumpkin for Ochún in the house to absorb all the bad things. You may also be advised as to how later you may need to dispose the ritual objects, like in a river and sea or, more specifically where the river meets the sea. Passages and liminal spaces that involve various kinds of cross roads, or meetings of different waters, seem to be recurring themes in this cosmology as they are in many other ritual contexts throughout the world (Turner, 1969, Douglas, 1979).

When asking people about the necessity of these precautions, some laughed, reassuring me that I didn't have to worry when with them, but if I wanted, I could take these precautions. One such precaution was to stay behind the dancing participants, furthest away from the sacred *batá* drums, shielded from their power. To hinder catching undesired energies released during the *toque*, devotees told me never to leave until after the closure of the *toque*. It was important to clear the space after all the dancing. They thought of the *toques* as a way

⁴⁰ This is an object that can give you strength and protect you. I was told that it should be carried at all times. As it may have an Oricha in it, it should be fed and given what you drink. Certain actions should be performed with it, such as passing it over your head.

⁴¹ When one receives Orichas, they are placed in your head. This may be the reason why one should not pour these water mixtures over the head.

of cleansing oneself; dancing all bad things out of the body. Therefore, at the end of every *toque*, a bucket with a water mixture would be placed in front of the sacred *batá* drums playing the closing solo rhythms. Participants should be present so as to move their bodies and cleanse any possible bad accumulations. All bad things present will be concentrated in the water mixture and this will be thrown out the front door. Where I was, in Havana, such concerns about precautions for avoiding bad magic, sorcery and luck were constantly in everyday conversation.

The precautions I took were part of what I have often heard Cubans say, “*Por si acaso*” (just in case) when talking about practices concerning religion and their wellbeing. Many are not sure that it will work, but it doesn’t hurt to try, just in case.

A *santera* told me once: “*Here, it is wise to take precautions, but at home you don’t need it, because over there, there is so little Santería that it is not necessary.*”

Approaching the field

Shortly after arriving Cuba, I was introduced to Rene, who would become my teacher and a main informant. He taught me the basics of Santería. He, himself, was a *babalawo* who played in a group of *tambuleros* that was often hired to play music at religious rites. Shortly after starting classes, Rene began inviting me when they were assigned to play particular “jobs” (they would just say that they *had a toque*). This allowed me to observe the everyday popular religious framework in which the Santería dances are performed in contemporary Havana. Quickly, Rene became my main source of invitation to *toques de santo*. These rites took place in private homes where religious families and friends participated in the music, dancing and singing in honour of the Orichas. The dances were executed in a natural ambience that seemed more authentic and truer to the religion than theatrical forms of the dances. The latter are organised by middle class academics and are of a more secular nature, fitting in with contemporary western aesthetic notions of choreography.

A well-respected man, Rene cared about doing things correctly. He warned me what to watch out for in the world surrounding Santería. Getting into an overcrowded old American car, as the *tambuleros* and I often did after *toques* far from the city center, he would never sit beside me. He always made sure that I sat with only one *tambulero* on one side and the car door on the other. I sensed him making sure that I would not be placed in an uncomfortable situation and it may also have been to inform his friends, through body language, that we had

a respectful teacher-student relationship. It was this that he reaffirmed when he brought me with him whenever and wherever his group were performing ritual music for rites. Knowing that I was in good hands, I would always feel safe at the *toques*, in spite of being in unknown locations, far away, often until after dark.

The frequency of playing jobs varied. Some weeks there were 4-5 *toques*, whereas other times a whole month passed without any. By attending, I got to observe how people participated in *toques* and other religious celebrations all over Havana. The location of the *tambores* always varied, as did the religious families hosting them.

Attending *toques*, I became familiar with the procedures of Rene's *tambulero* group. In general, these can vary slightly as practices differ amongst *tambulero* groups and religious families. Fluctuating somewhat, Rene's group had five habitual members. Occasionally when doing *toques* close to home, young boys in their teens from the local area joined them. They were students eager to learn the secrets of the *batá* drums. The *tambuleros* included me quickly in their performances, showing and explaining what happened. When they saw that I was sometimes unable to recognize the *toque*, the song played, they would discreetly indicate the accurate Oricha's dance steps. They always showed respect, good friendship with Rene and their professionalism. There was an honour of etiquette that they affirmed when they were with me. As they became used to my presence, they would ask Rene "Donde esta tu alumna?" (Where is your student?) if, by chance, I had not been able to join them.

The performers were a group of friends going back many years. A performance provided an opportunity to catch up on each other's lives. They were mostly Cuban musicians in their thirties-fifties all well-versed in Santería from an early age. I was their opposite a foreign girl in my mid-twenties, new to Santería, but they were keen to have the religion recognised as it was performed and lived locally.

When in doubt about something I observed, I would ask about it in the old American car on our way back to town. I would also ask Rene about it during our lessons, which often became discussions surrounding the *toques* we had participated in. Even though the focus of the lessons was not always directly linked to my topic of investigation, I learnt much from these weekly discussions with a *babalawo*. As my knowledge of Santería increased, our discussions deepened. Towards the end, Rene started to bring me to other styles of *toques*. He categorized himself as a practitioner of Yoruba, the religion that Santeria mostly stems from, and not Santeria itself. This was an attempt to claim and restore what was seen as a purer version of the religion. These new different *toques* that I witnessed were based in the Yoruba

religion and were different from what I had observed elsewhere. Rene gains his authority and prestige among many from these rites which are seen to be more authentic and closer to Yoruba than what Santería had become. In all of this, there is a certain critique of the national and middle class appropriation of Santería as transforming and weakening its African heritage. Sometimes the religious families' hosting the *toques* had connections to Nigeria and they would then seek out the "real knowledge" of how things were done in the past. They sought out rites for the *eggungun*, the Yoruba ancestors, and this was seen as gaining access to pure Yoruba, and not like Santería. As far as I have seen and heard, Santería does not practice this form of ancestor veneration and takes syncretic forms of veneration of ancestors. Different performing groups seek to differentiate themselves from each other by competing for access and control over more authentic "ancient" versions of African religion. Its mythology and performances becomes a form of cultural capital that places Cubans back closer to their creative origins. It is modernity and its perceived adulterating influence that produces this primitivism, this desire to revisit and reclaim a lost African heritage as the basis of cultural identity.

Through Rene, I observed the same *tambulero* group perform *toques* at a variety of religious families and places of worship. I was continuously introduced to new places, gaining an idea of the diversity of religiosity in and around Havana. As I became familiar with the group's performance and procedures, this enabled me to make comparisons with other *tambulero* groups and their variations in the performance of a specific *toque*. I found it difficult to gain the same close information from attending the *toques* of other groups because I did not recognize or have a familiar relationship with the performers and audience. Even though I did participate in *toques* without Rene, I was uncomfortable attending *toques* surrounded exclusively by strangers. Rene's group gave me security but also mediated my relationship with the host and audience, and I was much clearer about situations and what type of *toque* I was attending.

At *toques* without Rene, I often ran into the same *tambuleros* (not from Rene's group). This might have to do with my informants' networks, where many might have known and used the same *tambuleros*. Rene explained that the *tambuleros* knew most of the other *tambuleros* in town, but that there were differing views regarding the ritual procedures of specific *toques*. From my observations, the procedures did vary, depending on the customs of the *tambuleros* and those of the ritual families.

Chapter 3 How a Toque de Santo unfolds

In this chapter I will try to capture the sensual experiential aspects through which meanings are transmitted and understood in Santería.

Presenting Iyawós for the Batá drums

A wall of heat and heavy air hit my face when re-entering the *toque*. It was time to go back inside, the pause was over and the *tambuleros* were about to continue playing their sacred *tambores de batá*.

People had dressed for the occasion, wearing light colours, white, or the colours of their particular Orichas. Women wore dresses and skirts and men wore mostly pants. Many wore colourful beaded ritual jewellery. The little light blue square room of about 22m² was crowded and cramped. The *tambuleros* were seated with their backs to the wall on the left-hand side when entering from the patio. All the *santeros* were facing them from the other end of the room. They were standing in half chaotic rows along the wall, creating some space in the middle of the room between themselves and the *tambuleros*. Some stayed at the back of the crowd close to the wall, where the effects of the sacred *tambores de batá* are believed to be lesser, which in turn reduces the chance of becoming mounted or possessed. Some passed through the room and went further into the house making a slight constant flow of people joining the room and others leaving it. Others stood in the doorway leading to the patio, enjoying fresher air than that inside, while at the same time getting a glimpse of the happenings.

The *tambuleros* had already played the *Oro Seco*, which is the first instrumental part of a *toque*. It is often completed before the guests arrive. When doing this part of the *toque* the *tambuleros* play in front of the *trono* (throne or alter) of the Orichas. The ritual performance welcomed the Orichas to join in the celebration. At many *toques*, the *trono* is located in another room than where the rest of the *toque* involving *cantos* and dancing take place.

Before the break, the *tambuleros* had completed the first part of the *toque* in which devotees participate with singing and dancing. There is a specific order in which various Orichas are honored with their specific *toques*. The Oricha's spiritual children go in turn to salute the *tambores de batá* when they play for their Oricha. They salute Iyá, the biggest *batá* drum, by laying face-down in front of it. When they get up, they cross their arms over their chest and place their forehead onto the drum and kiss it. They continue to Iyá's right touching

Okónkolo, the smallest *batá* drum, with their forehead before kissing it. They continue to the other side of Iyá repeating the same sequence with Itótele, the second largest *batá* drum. Before heading back, most place a little something in the little bowl called *jícara*⁴², which is placed by the *tambores*.

Today, this part of the celebration had been calm, without big excitement, although the ambiance was heating up little by little. Usually excitement builds up amongst the participants during this part. Some copy the movements of those who seem to know the steps of the Orichas' dances. Those who know the steps are often in front, closest to the *tambores*. It is common for participants to mingle outside, talking with friends and not paying much attention to the happenings of the *tambor*. Often this entices the *toque*'s host to engage them by telling those outside to join the *toque* by singing along while moving to the music.

Singing started from far within the house and the sound was coming towards us. When the *tambuleros* heard the *Akpwón* (the lead singer of the *toque*) sing, they started to sing the *coro* (the response to the *Akpwón*'s song sung together) in the traditional call and response style and play their *batá* drums. The participants reinforced the *coro*, replying to the *Akpwón*'s song. Participants pressed themselves either into the room or close to the window to see. Some were on their tiptoes stretching their necks from behind the crowd. An *Iyawó* was about to be presented for the sacred *batá* drums.

The *Akpwón* entered the room ringing a silver *campana* bell every two seconds in a constant rhythm with his right hand. Behind the *Akpwón*, a little boy of approximately 8, was led into the room by two *santeros*. He was dressed solely in white with a crown, pants and a belt over his shirt. Barefooted, he carried a basket filled with offerings for the Orichas. This included a branch of green bananas and a rooster hanging by its feet was attached to his left arm. In front of the parade accompanying him was a *santero* sprinkling water onto the floor from a *jícara* as they entered the room. The water represents diamonds, and the *Iyawó* is a prince bringing sacrificial gifts to Aña. Usually he comes in with a white plate with two coconuts and two candles. Sometimes he comes with animals and fruit. Images of fertility, light and knowledge, death and rebirth, seemed to be evoked through these mediating sacrificial gifts.

⁴²The *jícara* is commonly used within Santería when handling liquids. It is made from a dried *güira* fruit, which has been halved.

The parade led the *Iyawó* (new initiate) to the *tambores* and then they continued to their left in a circle before they walked the *Iyawó* to and from the *tambores*, never showing their backs to the sacred *batá* drums. After going back and forth towards the *tambuleros* three times, the *Iyawó* knelt down with his head close to the ground for a minute or so while the *Akpwón* sang and said some words while shaking the bell in the same rhythm he had done when entering the room. The *tambuleros* were playing the specific *toque* associated when presenting an *Iyawó* for the *tambores de batá* in Havana⁴³.

The *Iyawó* was helped onto his feet and placed facing the *tambores*, with his back to the crowd. It was time for him to dance in front of the sacred *batá* drums. The *santeros*, who had led him into the room, stood on each side of him. Accompanied by the *santeros* at his sides, the *Iyawó* started dancing when the music started. Everyone present tried to get a glimpse of the boy. His *madrina* had, since the start of the presentation stood at the *tambuleros* right hand side, between them and the *Akpwón* (*lead singer*), looking at her *ahijado* (sponsored ritual child) going through the ritual.

The boy danced shyly showing some of his Oricha's steps. From what I have observed through my fieldwork, it seems as if the *santeros* danced beside the *Iyawós* to help them along with the dancing and to be close in case someone had to intervene. They were playing *toques* to Obatala, the Oricha that the *Iyawó* was crowned with. Participants danced and contributed energy, looking at the *Iyawó*. After about 10 minutes, he was required by the *Akpwón* to salute the *batá* drums. He laid face down in his saluting position with his hands down along his sides. When the *Akpwón* had touched both of the *Iyawó*'s shoulders with his hands at the same time twice, crossing his hands the last time, he got up to salute the *tambores*. Just as the *santeros* had done previously during the *toque*, the boy placed his forehead onto *Iyá*, crossing his hands over his chest, before giving it a kiss and proceeding to *Okónkolo* and lastly *Itótele*.

Having shown respect to the *tambores* and through them also to the Orichas, he was guided to lie down in the same saluting position in front of his *madrina*. She helped him up and gave him a hug and a *beso*⁴⁴ on each cheek. He saluted two or three more in the same way. Now the same *santeros* who had danced by his side and who had accompanied him the whole time, twirled him around before leading him halfway running out of the room, back to where he had been fetched. There was a new pause.

⁴³ We will come back to this later on in this chapter.

⁴⁴ A kiss of salutation on both cheeks, common when greeting someone in Cuba.

The *tambuleros* changed their positions, always leaving the drums in their right order and fastening them to the chair if they left the instrument so that they would never touch the floor. The women in the house made sure to give people some beverages, especially to the *tambuleros*. The *santeros* were talking about how beautiful the presentation had been and how the *Iyawó* had danced.

A new *Iyawó*, a young woman in her late twenties, was to be presented. She was dressed in a Yellow dress with a crown on her head. She too was barefoot. The same procedures as with the little *Iyawó* were followed. Often when observing these situations, the *Iyawós* have seemed anxious, looking serious and ignorant of what will happen. This *Iyawó* was no exception. Her eyes were intense and she seemed tense. When it was time for her to dance in front of the drums she seemed to know the steps and started out gently and somewhat messily in the beginning. After some minutes, with everyone's eyes fixed on her and devotees dancing behind her, her movements became more precise and energetic. She went from moving disjointedly to placing her feet and hands, torso and head where they were supposed to go. The musicians observed the effect they were provoking. The intensity of her execution of the dance kept augmenting until they suddenly stopped the music. One of the *santeros* who had danced beside the *Iyawó* had her hand around her while the *Iyawó* placed her head on the *santero's* shoulder. The *Iyawó* was hyperventilating loudly. I heard the *santera* whisper something like "everything is ok" while patting the *Iyawó* on her back. They let her catch her breath and calm down a little before she too had to salute the *tambores* and her *madrina*. She was then led out of the room in the same way as the previous *Iyawó*.

Valla Abierta

Now that the *Iyawós* had been presented for the sacred *tambores de batá*, the liveliest part of the *toque* remained. They say that this allowed the "*valla abierta*", the fence to open for everyone to enjoy the *rumba* (the party). After mingling for five-ten minutes the *tambuleros* started playing and participants gathered once again. The excitement still lingered from the presentation of the last *Iyawó*. When she had been dancing, there was uncertainty whether she had been on the verge of being mounted or not. They had stopped the music, probably to ensure that she didn't mount during her initial presentation for the sacred *batá* drums.

Moving synchronically to the rhythm of the music, the participants sang the *coro* as a response to the *Akpwón's* song. They played for one *Oricha* at a time, this time dedicating

more time to each Oricha. I have been told that the order is not as rigid as the foregoing part of the *toque*. The most sacred fragment had already been completed, making this next part of the performance more for the amusement of the *santeros*. When playing for an Oricha, its spiritual children would come forward and dance. The rest of the participants would internalize the rhythms and accompany the dancing. Those not sure of the steps for the specific rhythms would follow those who seemed to know them. I noticed, numerous times before, that there was only a handful that seemed to know the dances of the Orichas and who executed the dances correctly. During my fieldwork, I have observed that most *santeros* do not know these steps and they will dance the same common step no matter which *toque* is played. The common step is easily copied, including everyone as participants and makes for a synchronic flow of movement amongst all regardless of skill and knowledge.

After half an hour one of the *santera's* dance movements changed so as to become more precise and energetic. Her steps coincided with the timing of the music and her movements became more extreme, expanding in size and profession. She moved closer to the *tambores* and danced right in front of them, reinforcing their effect by seeming to encourage them to play more energetically. The rest of the participants geared up their voices singing stronger. They kept on moving to the rhythm while looking at the *santera* who seemed to enter a recognised *transit stage*, a phase between a normal state of mind and becoming temporally possessed. The energy was rising as people danced, sang and clapped to accompany and reinforce the sound of the drums. While the *Akpwón* (lead singer) started singing directly into her ear, he started shaking a little bell, which accompanied the Oricha to mount the *santera*.

The air was heavy and sweltering, everyone was sweating and exited. The *tambuleros* intensified their drumming and the *tambulero* holding the *Iyá*, which has a belt of metal bells and iron sound-making objects fastened to it, started to shake it. He made an intense and deafening cacophony of sound. The *santera's* body leaned backwards, in an impossible position, shaking to the rhythm of the bells. To every shake of the *Iyá*, the *santera's* body shook with it. When the bells stopped, she continued dancing obsessively for about 4 minutes. Suddenly her whole body started shaking uncontrollably. Her hands were lead up to the height of her head at the same time as her shoulders were pulled upwards and her torso was trembling with small shudders. When she started shaking more severely her hands went out to the sides, maintaining her bent elbows. Her hair attachment went flying as did her bracelets. Some participants picked up these objects as others tried to take off her glasses and religious

necklace, as it should not be worn while mounted. Suddenly the music stopped. The *santera* had stopped and was bending down in front of the Iyá saluting it. The *tambuleros* hit the *batá* drums in a specific rhythm. Her Oricha Ochún had “*bajado*”, had come down, and was in control of the *santera*'s body. She got up, laughed and walked in a sensual way, with her hands on her waist. She was indicating that she was someone else who had more freedom and a licence to act differently. She started to salute all the *santeros* in the room, starting with the head of the religious family. Not long after that, she was led further into the house and out of sight to get changed into her clothes. There was another pause where people mingled, went outside to get fresh air while waiting for the Oricha to come back out again.

After 10-15 minutes, the *tambuleros* decided to continue the *toque* to finish more or less on time. They were only paid to play half an hour more, until 6 pm⁴⁵. The participants started dancing. The Oricha came back in, dressed in the Oricha's colours, yellow. She kept walking sensually over to the sacred drums. She wanted to dance to another song, so the *tambuleros* changed the *toque*. Her movements were elegant as she danced in front of all the participants. They danced with her. Sometimes she would dance beside a *santero*. To me it seemed as if she was showing how the steps were supposed to be danced. In this kind of situation, it is the Oricha who dances and not the person who is mounted. People will point out how the person who is possessed does not know the movements so how could they be performing them so professionally unless it is the spirit inside them who is really performing. It is these kinds of materialisations of spirits that confirms for many their ongoing belief in what others might dismiss and criticise as the backward superstition of the uneducated.

Throughout the rest of the *toque*, Ochún was the center of attention. She took command of the ritual honouring her. She stopped the *tambuleros* if she didn't like their music, or required another song she preferred. If there were few participants dancing, she would fetch those who were not dancing, telling them to join. Someone was always walking close by her with a plate of honey (one of her foods) and another had a white towel to dry away her sweat. If Ochún wanted something, they would be quick to give it to her. If she wanted to talk to a participant she would take him aside and tell him things. This could be asking for something to please her, like an *ebbó* (big or small sacrifices and religious works)

⁴⁵ During my fieldwork in 2014 *tambuleros* would receive 500 Cuban pesos (21 USD) for a *Cajón de Muerto* or a *Guiro* and 700-900 Cuban pesos (29-28 USD) for a *tambor de santo* using the sacred *batá* drums. Due to inflation these prices had raised to 700 pesos for the first and 1200-1300 Cuban pesos (50-54USD) for the latter in November 2015.

or warnings of things to watch out for so as to avoid negative influences in their lives. She took aside those she perceived who could have problems, warning of things that could happen if nothing was done. This could be an accident within the family, sickness or loss of a job or losing one's good luck. Amongst all this, people acted as if it was an everyday affair to have an Oricha walk amongst them. They kept dancing to the music and joked with her or objected if they did not agree to what she said.

To the Ochún's protest, the *tambuleros* ended the *toque* an hour after the set time. They asked for the bucket of water which ends the *toque*, for it is important to cleanse those participating. The bucket was placed facing the sacred drums before the *tambuleros* started playing the closing *toque* that is not accompanied by song. Everyone had to move to the rhythm. The head of the religious house requested people to enter the room and move their bodies. "Muevanse!" ("Don't stand still, move yourselves!") was exclaimed. Now the rhythm and the participants' steps differed from earlier. They moved as a wave, first 3-4 steps to the left with a little bouncing movement, then 3-4 steps to the right, repeating the movement. They continued this pattern until the bucket had been twirled around by a *santera* and its contents thrown out the front door.

The musical part of the *toque* was now over. The *madrina* of the house and many of the girls, who were present, started to distribute "cajitas", small cardboard boxes filled with food from the *trono*, to everyone. The *tambuleros* ate their *cajitas* as they were packing their gear, leaving shortly after.

This description of a *toque de santo* has common elements from many of the *toques* I attended. The order of ritual procedure was usually similar to the above description. Some performance did not have *Iyawós* presented for the sacred *batá* drums as part of their initiation, while others presented multiple *Iyawós*. Some performances proceeded calmly without much energy and had few participants, while others were crowded and loaded with happy, joyful energy, playful lustfulness, or mindful watchfulness. Often performances involved transitions between all of these ritually authorised states.

Two different styles

Two different forms of presenting the *Iyawós* for the *batá* drums were often mentioned throughout my fieldwork: that from Havana and that from Matanzas. Only once did I observe the latter in Havana. I was told that in Matanzas, as the *Iyawó* enters the *tambor*, the song

“Maribu-ye-ye-ye, Maribu-ye-ye-ye-Ogún-echu-a-la-wede-oye” is sung. Preceding this, short songs for all the Orichas are performed until they reach the guardian angel of the *Iyawó* to which they dedicate more time and songs. Meanwhile the *Iyawó* will dance for all the Orichas and finally, mostly for his/her Oricha, to see if he/she feels the religion and is a “subidor” (a raiser)⁴⁶. In Havana I mostly witnessed, as described above, that “Oromayoko-iyaboye-iyawo” was sung as the *Iyawó* entered the *tambor*. This was to position the *Iyawó* before starting to singing for the guardian angel. In these rites, the *Iyawó* needed to dance only for his/her guardian Oricha.

The overall understanding was that these were two different styles within Santería. Most commonly, devotees considered their own style to be the correct one, criticizing the other style for not being true for Santería. One of the more extreme comments came from a *babalawo* claiming to do the Havana style. He said that he had witnessed a *tambor* in the Matanzas style only once to see how it was done, but that now, out of respect for the Orichas, he would leave the room if he were present at a “wrong” style presentation.

Touching this theme, another *babalawo* stated that there were not “two different styles”, as they were really the same. He explained that Santería started in Matanzas and that those who went there to bring information back to Havana had simply forgotten a few details making the basis for the difference. He said that both the songs were supposed to be sung, making the only real difference the sequence sung. Further, he said that there were some *Casas Religiosas* (religious houses) in Havana who did not sing for all the Orichas at the presentation, as they should, but this did not mean that none in Havana did.

Asking Guanche about this phenomenon he pointed to the practices of the *Casas Religiosas* as the reason for this. The practices are based on individual inherited methods, which may be similar or vary from others. The “true” methods are therefore relative to each house which makes for variations in the performance of *toques*.

⁴⁶ Someone who is spiritual enough to mount/get possessed with her Oricha.

Chapter 4 The Creation of Santería

I believe that to gain a proper understanding of modern-day developments in different aspects of Santería, it is important to be aware of where it came from and how it evolved. A complex religion, it is thought to stem mainly from the Yoruba who came from Oyo, modern day Nigeria. Santería has been under constant negotiation and change since its beginnings in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the number of Yoruba slaves shipped to Cuba augmented (De La Torre, 2004,164).

West-Africans arriving Cuba

When West-Africans arrived in Cuba, they were classified into subgroups called *nations*. Generalizations were erroneous and incorrect as the main criteria were ports of embarkation rather than places of origin (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,25). Due to the fear of large organized riots, it sometimes preferred to organise slaves into smaller groups. These groups were organized by common language and religion (De La Torre, 2004,168). They had their own separate “clubs” with their own music, drums, dance and religious worship according to their “ancestral” backgrounds (Brandon, 1993,57).

Today’s popular religions in Cuba still make references to Africa. When brought to Cuba, slaves carried no tangible items, only their knowledge. As the religions were based on transmitting oral, sound and movement based knowledge between generations⁴⁷, the religions were reconstructed in relationship to this knowledge, by taking from it what they found and adapting it. Guanche explained how local materials were substituted for traditional African materials when making new drums⁴⁸ and other religious items. Various substitutions but also transformations were crucial for the survival of the religions and served to continue past Oyo procedures into a new religious culture.

It was not before the nineteenth century, towards the end of the slave trade, that Orisha worshippers were able to establish a firm tradition on the island (De La Torre, 2004,164). Just like their descendants are called today, the heterogeneous Yoruba subgroups were called

⁴⁷ Today parents and grandparents teach children by including them from an early age in the practice of their religions.

⁴⁸ This can be illustrated with the *batá* drums that were constructed from memory and the wood found in Cuba, the *aguacate* and the *cidro*, which doesn’t correspond to the wood that was used in Africa. The drums are therefore historic references to an African past, but are not identical, as the vibrations differ because of the different material used.

*Lucumi*⁴⁹ (Brandon, 1993,55). Between 1760 and 1820 just over 8% of slaves arriving in Cuba were *Lucumi*. This increased to 30% during the last 20 years of the transatlantic slave trade. At the same time, the plantations began to resemble more that of a “normal” society (Brandon, 1993,58) with elders, women and children. Informants explained how even though family bloodlines were torn apart by the slave trade, within the *nations* to which they were allocated, people managed to transfer social knowledge from elders to newer slaves and then to younger adults and children.

After the English abolished their transatlantic slave trade in 1808 (Knight, 2000,114), redefining it as immoral, they tried to eradicate other persisting forms of transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, between 1846 and 1860, they captured slave ships on their way to Cuba and set slaves free in Cuba’s major ports. It is estimated that as many as 19,000 freed Africans arrived in Cuba in this matter. This introduced “fresh” African blood and knowledge directly from the continent to the streets of Havana and Matanzas towards the end of the slave trade. These new arrivals and their culture mixed with the local population without being controlled by any masters (Brandon, 1993,68).

At this time, 20-50% of Cuba’s enslaved Africans lived in urban areas, working side by side with freed slaves and other free negros and mulatos. Their situation was different from that of the slaves in the countryside (Brandon, 1993,68), because they would have had more freedom during their spare time as they often lived apart from the surveillance and supervision of their blanco masters.

Some informants talked about negro domestic slaves who were responsible for domestic chores and child-care for the upper-class blancos. When they put children to bed, they would tell them African religious and cultural lore. It is believed that these children may have been more accepting of Africanisms than their parents after having spent time with house slaves. Due to domestic slaves’ closer contact with aristocratic and creole families, it was more common for them, than for plantation slaves, to learn about Christian culture and belief. Although they might have practiced their African heritage in secret, alongside their master’s Catholicism, it is believed that they did not create Santería, as they were under the constant supervision and careful surveillance by their owners (Brandon, 1993,65).

⁴⁹ Today *Lucumi* is closely related to Yoruba and is the foundation of Santería, whose language is dominated by Yoruba words. During my fieldwork, some informants said that they were *Lucumi* and claimed to be Yoruba descendants. There is a culture of authenticity bound up with being able to trace one’s roots back to one’s African heritage.

Palenques, on the other hand, were possible cradles for the creation of Santería. These were societies established in the forest by runaway and marooned slaves. There, former slaves could reproduce their traditions outside of direct European control (De La Torre, 2004,169). House servants and freemen were part of the runaway groups (Brandon, 1993,65). Many *palenques* had members from different backgrounds and cultures, including in-born creoles and other new arrivals in Cuba. They had to preserve their unity in order to survive the harsh circumstances of their reality by modifying customs and traditions and finding similarities (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,19, De La Torre, 2004,169). The *palenques* became important sites for gathering information and preserving African traditions (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,19).

The last official slave arrived in Cuba in 1865. Many Afro-Cubans still practiced and remembered religious traditions from Africa at the abolition of the slave trade in 1886 (Knight, 2000,115), because 75% of the Cuban population of African descent were African born (De La Torre, 2004,166). Abolition put a renewed emphasis on locally transmitted information which had been consolidated within a hidden underground memory, where subordinate groups sought to renew and reify their social relations and cultural knowledge. By 1907, only 8000 negros in Cuba had been born in Africa. These were now elders and the only ones with memories of Africa (Brandon, 1993,55). They acquired a new kind of prestige and value that stood partly at odds with the devaluing of “Africanness” that existed in the racial categories and stereotypes of the slave owners.

Christening Cuba

Due to lack of financial funds by the church and difficulties with finding free time, many slaves were never properly indoctrinated into Catholicism (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003). The clergy could not proselytise without utilizing precious time which would delay plantation production (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,25). Priests met resistance from both plantation owners and their slaves who did not want to spend their precious free time learning about Catholicism which was identified with the blanco plantation owners.

As it became increasingly clear that the clergy was not achieving results in rural areas, the law was changed in 1842 so as to oblige plantation owners to christen their slaves (Brandon, 1993,63). But four years later results had not changed much. Hall quotes Regino Martin:

It is not necessary to have lived very long in the countryside to know that with few, but very honorable exceptions, the slaves have hardly more religion than the stupid idolatry which they brought from their country of birth (Hall, 1971,45).

In Cuba, a variety of Catholicism, was common in the countryside, what can be called Folk-Catholicism⁵⁰. It focused more on worshipping the saints than consulting priests (De La Torre, 2004,171). Attending home alters and providing the necessary offerings were more important than going to mass (Brandon, 1993,47), which was only held every few years in many places (De La Torre, 2004,171). Churches were far away, had little control over the countryside and the plantations (Brandon, 1993,61). They were unable to control the information about saints that Folk-Catholicism generated. The Folk-Catholics expanded the church's understanding of saints as generous humans who held special sacred powers that could be used to improve the daily situations of individuals⁵¹ (Brandon, 1993,47). These understandings of the mediating powers of Saints were merged with the mediating powers assigned to African spirits and dead relatives. For many Cubans, the day of their baptism was the last time they would see a priest or go to mass (Brandon, 1993,61, De La Torre, 2004,165).

In African urban areas, ethnic associations called *Cabildos* became centres for a guided introduction to Catholicism. They became popular places to learn about Christian values and mutual aid (Brandon, 1993,70). The first recorded *Cabildo* was established in Havana in 1598 (De La Torre, 2004,183). In the hope of guiding Africans into Catholicism, the church used a guided syncretism that allowed the *Cabildos* to spice up the Christian rites with the African traditions of singing, dancing and drumming (Brandon, 1993,71). The results were not as expected because African methods of worshiping were not abandoned, but continued much like before. In reality, the *Cabildos*, became, like the *palenques*, important places for the preservation of African religious traditions, practices, ceremonies, language and dances (De La Torre, 2004,168). They became environments where Catholicism and Yoruba were merged (Brandon, 1993,73), thus creating Afro-Cuban religions such as Santeria (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,24).

⁵⁰ Folk-Catholicism drew its major inspiration from the Catholic Church's *cult of personages*, which included the Holy Spirit, the saints, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Legends of miracles, folk tales, feast days and the patron saints came into the Catholic picture, as they were more open for the interpretations of the individual (Brandon, 1993, 46).

⁵¹ The church looked upon the saints as ordinary people who had lived a holy life and this was in fact a local manifestation of the sacred.

Dances were a common recreational activity when the *Cabildos* would parade along the streets whilst also playing drums and singing their ethnic dances. The *Cabildo's* biggest dances were held on Catholic holidays (Brandon, 1993,71). The Orichas themselves became called *santos* (from saints), and each Oricha became associated with a particular saint (Brandon, 1993,76). The compadrazgo (godparenthood) ritual relations within the Catholic Church were blended with traditional Yoruba Blood-relations where the *Cabildo's* members were thought of as a religious family (Brandon, 1993,75). Previously, each Oricha had been worshipped by families and priesthoods in separate locations, but now all the Orichas were joined together and worshipped within the *Cabildos* ostensibly as part of the pantheon of saints.

The state began to perceive that the *Cabildos* had lost their Catholic religiosity and feared that they had become places for rebellion against the system. This led to more interference and a series of restrictions from 1790-1843. These included that: A state representative had to be present at meetings (De La Torre, 2004,169,183, Brandon, 1993,82); and drums and other indicators of ethnic- or *nation* belonging were banned from street festivals. Dances could also only be staged once a week, on Sundays and on holidays, and then only immediately after mass. Separate alters for particular saints and the performance of their traditional dances in front of them was now illicit, Folk funeral rites involving dancing and weeping before the dead were also banned. The *Cabildos'* participation in Catholic holydays became prohibited and the only event they could participate in was “Dia de los Reyes”⁵². This day became the most important day of the year, where all the *Cabildos* paraded in Havana’s streets showing their skills, making music and dancing (Brandon, 1993,72). In 1877, the Good Government Law was introduced forbidding the *Cabildos* to meet and organize festivals. Even tighter restrictions, in 1884, it further forbade all *Cabildo* meetings and street celebrations of religious feasts, including “Dia de los Reyes” (De La Torre, 2004,185, Brandon, 1993,82).

Spiritism

There were other more unorthodox influences in the history of religion in Cuba. Spiritism entered the island in 1856 through illegal books and with time it became widely welcomed by the population (De La Torre, 2004,184, Brandon, 1993,186). Many

⁵² Three Kings Day, or Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th.

marginalised Catholics welcomed the new science⁵³ because of its anti-clericalism and its views against institutionalized Christianity (De La Torre, 2004,172). Spiritists concentrated on communicating with the spirits of the dead alongside Spiritism's philosophic and scientific doctrines. Gathering in smaller groups enabled communication between the spheres of the dead (*eggun*) and the living, through a medium (De La Torre, 2004,172). People had direct evidence of the religion's effectiveness in the form of talking directly to spirits, attaining answers and guidance to their everyday worries⁵⁴ (Brandon, 1993,87). Many Africans regarded Spiritism to be similar to their own beliefs for both involved communicating with ancestors, trance and spirit possession (Brandon, 1993,179). Devotees of Santería borrowed and integrated Spiritism into their communications with their *eggun* (De La Torre, 2004,172). The Yoruba veneration of later forefathers did not survive the historical changes in Cuba. Like Santería, Spiritism worked with the devotees' immediate needs on earth that mostly involved love, work and health (De La Torre, 2004,172). The spirits of Spiritism like the saints of the Catholic Church were integrated into Santería and put alongside the Orichas who achieved a new role as guardian "angels," as protectors of the believers (Brandon, 1993,88).

Religious politics until modernity

Historically, Santería has been looked upon by the blanco wealthy class as uncivilised, satanic and primitive and has therefore been often repressed or discriminated against (De La Torre, 2004,174). Until 1940, Santería was a punishable crime, afterwards persecution was less severe. In 1956, the first concert of Oricha music and dance was organized in honour of Shangó (De La Torre, 2004,186-188).

After the revolution in 1959, all religions were problematic in a secular scientific state. The new president, Fidel Castro, was a Marxist disciple of Lenin and an atheist. Discrimination against Christianity and other religions became the norm. The Communist party, the only legal party, did not allow Christians (Chadwick, 1995,266) or other religious followers to practice their faith. In 1962, Santería was again persecuted (De La Torre,

⁵³ Kardecism as it is also called, was a movement which was first started by the Frenchman and engineer Hippolyte Rivail who wrote under the pseudonym Allan Kardec. It became popular in Europe and later spread to Latin America. Some of its followers tried to claim it was not a religion, but a science that combined Christian moral, scientism, progressive ideology and mysticism.

⁵⁴ These forms of help were seen as not being provided by Catholicism where people had faith, but were regarded as without answers to their prayers.

2004,186-188) as broader state laws forbidding religious ceremonial gatherings. Talking to Alain, a Yoruba *babalawo*, he explained that *tambores* (rites) were in effect prohibited, and requiring a formal application to authorities 30 days beforehand. There were only two designated places in Havana where they could be held, otherwise, individuals had to go to more provincial areas. State policing was done through appointing an official (the CDR) who was responsible for the barrio/street, watching, reporting and informing on what was happening. The CDR would often decline requests for celebrations and worship. If one practiced without permission it could result in arrest.

In 1975, change was visibly evident when in a speech Castro pointed out the importance of the Africanness of Cuba, saying that Cuba was not only a Latin-American country, but a Latin-African country (Rasmussen, 2002,19). The communist party thought the arts of the Afro-Cuban religions should be integrated into the wider society, encouraging artist to use them in their art works. This was thought to take the mystical elements away from the music, dances and their instruments (Ayorinde, 2004',99), extending them into the party's folklorization project of making Afro-Cuban religions into national heritage. By the 1980's Afro-Cuban religion was perceived more as "Folklore" and heritage rather than as an idiosyncratic religion. The persecution of *santeros* lessened and religion in general had much more acceptability. Indeed in 1985 Fidel Castro published a book, "Fidel y la religion" (Fidel and religion) (De La Torre, 2004,176) where amongst other things Castro accepted responsibility of the exclusion of non-believers from the Communist Party. Things changed even more noticeably in the 90s, during "El Periodo Especial" (the special period), when the Soviet Union collapsed and could no longer sponsor Cuba. More people sought religion due to difficulties they were experiencing. State attitudes changed with the discovery of the possibilities of much needed tourist income that could come from performances of folk culture and especially of exotic African derived dances and songs (Rasmussen, 2002,19). State policies and personal financial needs encouraged *santeros* to sell their products to the growing flow of tourists. Part of their earnings went to the state (De La Torre, 2004,176).

In 1991, the state opened the possibility for religious followers to join the communist party. The next year there was a proclamation that Cuba was no longer an atheist nation⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Castro had been Afro-religious "tolerant", condoning more from Afro-Cuban religions than Christian ones. This may be due to the Afro-religious origins of many poor

There was sudden religious freedom and awareness about Cuba's African heritage. Museums showing Santería, Casa de Africa and Fernando Ortiz's houses were opened⁵⁶. Books were published about Santería and other African religions and it became popular to mix African elements into popular music. Changes occurred and it was now becoming common to see people in uniforms with religious regalia (Rasmussen, 2002,20). Two *santeras* told me that all Afro-Cuban dances and music, like the rumba, were discriminated against until 1994. Afterward, the rumba began to flourish and with the rumba, along came Afro-Cuban religions.

For many religious practitioners, the persecution of Santería still continues today in a more subtle form through its portrayal as folkloric and not as proper religion and belief (De La Torre, 2004,176).

Syncretism

Historically, Santeria was a religion that was partly a product of the social system. Alain explained that when the slaves came to Cuba, it was ensured that families were split up to avoid unions and solidarities which were feared by plantation owners. Different ethnicities lived in the barracks and interethnic marriage was common. If a woman came from *Yoruba* territory and her husband from *Bantú*, their child could receive a double spirituality, both the oral traditions and deities of the *Yoruba* and those of *Palo*. If this child married an *Arará*⁵⁷, their child might receive all three spiritualities. This may also have been how it was during slavery, but perhaps more so after abolition. Writing about his experience of slavery, Montejo claims that children were removed from their parents at an early age and taken care of by nurses until they were 6 or 7 (Montejo and Barnett, 1968,18,38). The religious traditions of the child-minders would then form the beliefs learned. This produced a popular religious system that had to encompass a diversity of African spirits, where the Christian saints became one of the many branches of spirits. African beliefs and rituals existed in a new context of colonial

Cubans and that it was a tactically good idea to keep them mollified to win the revolution's case in the Afro milieu (Rasmussen, 2002, 19-20).

⁵⁶ Casa de Africa, House of Africa, is a museum and Fernando Ortiz's house is a research center of Afro-Cubanism. Fernando Ortiz is seen as the third discoverer of Cuba as he was truly interested in Afro-Cuban religions and cultures. He was the first to do research on the topics. Another important figure in pioneering Afro-Cuban literature is Lydia Cabrera with "El Monte" which is looked upon, by many *santeros* as the "bible of Santeria".

⁵⁷ An Afro-Cuban religion, which is little widespread in today's Cuba.

subordination involving racism and labour appropriation. The slaves merged with Christian religion and its narratives of power and enslavement, their own experiential understandings of slavery, sacrifice and punishment. Whilst they might not want to accept the whole religion of their masters, it was possible for slaves and their descendants to incorporate selectively some of those meanings, key narratives and symbols that resonated with their experiences and African culture. African ritual notions of secrecy, of duplicity and need to cover up important ritual knowledge, also led many to adopt at least the semblance of Christianity for their own protection.

Contrary to what many may think, there is little indication that syncretism between *Lucumi* and Catholicism occurred on plantations amongst the slaves as there were no churches or schools in rural Cuba transmitting Christianity (Brandon, 1993,61). It's most probable that *Santería* came into being within towns where African traditions were preserved and where the Catholic Church was more prominent and became mixed with these traditions⁵⁸ (Brandon, 1993,84). A common theory for this syncretisation is the need for camouflage, for Africans were obliged to have a Catholic saint in their *Cabildos* and behind it they could hide their *Orichas*. Lévi-Strauss writes about how cultures that have no writing organise their forms of knowledge around perceptual analogies and comparisons and they set up analogous relations by looking for analogous systems of differences in their surroundings (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Along these lines, Guanचे finds it simplistic to say that the deities were just hidden behind the saints, for this underrates the intellectual capacities of Africans and their descendants, as well as human capacity to establish analogies (between different hierarchies and mediating figures).

It is in the nature of humans to constantly compare, consciously and unconsciously, and to make new relations. As Guanचे puts it “*One cannot underestimate humans’ subjective ability and the analogic principal, where the humankind establishes logic comparisons.*” Guanचे discusses the example of St. Barbara being equated with Shangó saying that it is no accident even though he is a male *Oricha*. For St. Barbara’s story is of a rebel woman who was sacrificed, linked to weapons and had similar attributes to those of Shangó. Herskovits also explains these tendencies with this same principle as similar deities in Cuba, Brazil and Haiti are syncretized to the same saints (Herskovits, 1937). As particular

⁵⁸ The *palenques* as mentioned, might have also contributed somewhat to the creation of *Santería*.

African spirits and particular Catholic saints became merged, both were being reinvented, creating something new out of these syntheses.

Some of my *babalawo* informants stated that Santeria had a tolerant and pragmatic attitude towards the Catholic Church because they saw themselves as a part of this church. The Church, on the other hand, was criticised for seeing *santeros* as practicing something bad, from the “devil”. Confirming this, Ernesto, an academic *babalawo* from Matanzas, stated that “*the Catholic Church does not feel any closeness towards us, but we have a lot toward them, because we send our ahijados to the Catholic Church to attend the dead*⁵⁹”. Due to the church’s impositions of going to mass, devotees started using the church’s space of peace and quiet instead of their homes⁶⁰ for spiritual centers of adoration. Within these circumstances, people made habits of going to church, but this doesn’t have to mean that many recognize it in its own terms. Some *babalawos* explained that Santeria devotees go to church to see *Olofi* as they look at the Christian God and *Olofi* as the same. “*The big difference between us is that the Church took away the practice of sacrifice and Santeria kept it*”.

The Catholic Church in Cuba undertook a survey in 1954 that discovered that one of every four Catholics occasionally consulted *santeros* (De La Torre, 2004,170). It was and still is widely accepted to practice various religions at once. Some Cubans call themselves Christian even though they consult spiritists and ask the Orichas for help. Despite an informant’s house full of *santero* and Palo attributes, she responded “*I stick to my Catholic religion*” when I asked her if she had received her *santo* (been initiated). She followed up and explained her answer commenting that there is so much badness around, that one has to protect oneself with what one can, hence, justifying her use of other religions.

One Sunday I decided to go to mass and found all around the church, both inside and outside, filled with *santeros* dressed in white and blue, Yemayás’ colours. There was even a *toque* for Yemayá by the water’s edge 50 meters from the church (see Figures 9 and 10). They

⁵⁹ The devout may have masses at home or at church. The difference is that the *eggún* do not speak in church. The priest says that the mass is for some specific people before they start praying. Many followers prefer to pray in *Ile Olofi*, the house of Olofi/God, where one can get a good response from the dead, “letting Olofi to permit them to clear their minds and come down to express themselves”.

⁶⁰ Many Cubans have only one room to live in, and so they are obliged to place everything together. This makes it seem as though all religious items are for the same spirit, but this is not so. If different family members practice different religions, all their regalia has to be kept in the same place even though they should rightly have their separate spaces.

were celebrating the day of the Virgin of Regla and that of the Oricha Yemayá. An informant explained:

It is interesting that before the Yoruba had to hide their religion and now we see it all over the place. There was a lot of racism against it. If you were religious, you couldn't go to university. The syncretism has changed from one generation to the next. From having to hide behind the santos, until it (the Oricha) became so strong that one cannot tell them apart. People look at them as one. They can't separate the Oricha from the santo because it is the same for them, but with two different names. One celebrates Ochun's day, 12th of September, and that of the Virgin of Charity, 9th of September.

In my fieldwork observations, when *santeros* used the Orichas' saint's name, they implied the Oricha, not the Catholic saint. The Catholic saint's name is a gloss, the outward form of a more primordial power, and there is a re-imagining of Africanness into a mythological source of beginnings and thus of creativity.



Figure 9. Santeros in the Church of Regla dressed in Yemayá's colour blue.



Figure 10. A tambor for Yemayá at the water's edge (she is patron saint of the sea). The tambor is 50 meters from the Church of Regla on Virgen de Regla's day (the saint with whom Yemayá is associated with) the 8th of September. Notice the santera dressed in blue with her feet in the water. It is believed that this will gain a closer connection to Yemayá while praying.

Santeria was created by the fusion of elements from different religions. The most noticeable elements in Santeria from Yoruba were the Orichas, cosmology, rituals, food offerings and animal sacrifice. Santeria's Catholic elements I detected were the saints' names and candles. Spiritism gave Santeria its forefather veneration in the form of glasses of water and spiritual masses in believers' homes and Palo contributed with the Cajon de Muerto dedicated to the *eggun* or *eggungun*.

Though there is syncretism in Santeria, many practicing Yoruba deny the existence of syncretism in their religion. Yoruba is seen as a purer version that came from Oyo and is the base of Santeria which has partly diluted and adulterated this African heritage. Yoruba followers maintain that their procedures of ancestor veneration, which have been lost in Santeria, have been replaced by other methods, as Spiritism and *Cajon de muerto*, within Santeria.

During my fieldwork, I only heard about one and witnessed another case of a religious house performing a ritual dedicated to the *eggungun* in what was claimed to be the Yoruba way. I was told that this ritual practice had almost died out in Cuba, leaving only a few

religious houses practicing this ritual, and that some had gone to Nigeria to retrieve this and other Yoruba elements. These followers claimed to be practicing Yoruba, not Santería. When mentioning the *eggungun*, some Santería devotees had not heard of it. They knew of the *eggun*, but not the *eggungun*.

Figure 11 . There are many similarities between Santeria and Catholicism. Here are some of those I observed in the field:

Similarities	Catholicism	Santeria
	Alter	<i>Trono</i>
Offerings	Money	Food, money, animals etc.
Incense/candles	Incense smoker/candles in mass	Small incense/candles by the <i>trono</i>
Statues	Jesus and the Saints	The saints, the Orichas and dolls
Making the sign of the cross	Yes	Yes
Kissing the alter/ <i>trono</i>	Yes	Yes
Praying	Yes	Yes
Respectful clothes	Yes	Yes
	Biblical Stories	<i>Patakís</i>
Music, singing of some sort	Yes	Yes and dancing
Sharing the offering	Communion	Food that has been offered
Collars	The crucifix	The crucifix ⁶¹ and the Orichas necklaces.
Saying what to do or not	The Sermon	The Orichas or spirits wishes
Spirits	Belief in life after death, with the dead being removed	The dead and the spirits are not fully removed but more invisible
Praying for help	To saints and the Virgin Mary to transmit it to God	To Orichas or through them to Olofi

Arguing for the absence of syncretism in Yoruba, Alain, the Yoruba *babalawo*, said that there are no Catholic elements in the room of the saint, in that of *Ifá*, or in the consecration rituals. He confirmed that the syncretism one sees is outside in the living room, where their forefathers had to mask and hide the religion. Vocabulary saying “saint” instead of “Oricha” is part of this. Inside, during an initiation ritual, it was claimed that there have never been Catholic elements except for the candlelight⁶² which he says is “*the only syncretic element not corresponding to Yoruba traditions and rituals.*” Mentioning a religion where

⁶¹ A cross does not have to be a crucifix. Some said it was the only sign of Olofin.

⁶² Previously, ancestors used a little bowl of palm oil and cotton. Now this is very expensive and only used for important events like consecrations of *Ifá* (becoming *babalawo*).

syncretism is strong, he mentioned Palo, where they have crucifixes in the *prenda*⁶³. Further he stated:

There is an enormous epidemic concerning those who think that one has to be baptized before receiving the Mano de Orula. Most recognize that this was an imposition from the Catholic Church, where one had to be baptized to do any type of religious activity. This has stayed as an unnecessary habit. Many, generally the youth looking for knowledge, know that it was an imposition. From habit the elderly visit the church. When wanting to give flowers to Yemayá, they give them to the Virgen de Regla. But when they experience problems, they know Yemayá created these problems. Therefore one will never see an elderly woman offer flowers to the Virgen de Regla to solve a serious family problem. When I go to a sick elderly person who is child of Yemayá, I automatically have to give, an offering or a toque to Yemayá. But never will they say “make me a sacrifice to Virgen de Regla”. Within them, they know it is Yemayá.

In earlier times, anthropologists, such as Malinowski (1948) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952), regarded rituals as something preserving culture and its stability. Now, rituals may be seen as expressing values, ideas and social relationships bound up with social and cultural change. The elderly who were born and raised within the Santería religion before the revolution know clearly that it is the Oricha to whom they pray. As will be seen in later chapters, the younger generations grew up with religious prohibitions and acquired a different kind of cultural knowledge.

Santería rituals also create and transmit memories (Brandon, 1993,140). To maintain a collective memory within Santería, rites are repeated on specific days of the year where dance and possession are practiced. It was this that was problematized during the period of prohibition.

⁶³ A *prenda* or *nganga* (the spirit of the dead) is the center of the *palero*'s (practitioner of Palo) religious practices. It is a spirit but also refers to the recipient, an iron pot with its contents such as herbs, sticks and stones, where the spirit lives (Vélez, 2000,14-15). It is thought that it can do supernatural things.

Chapter 5 The Orichas' Dances in Modern Cuba

"The music and dance forms are expressive patterns that connect to and are able to connect all spheres of life and knowledge."

Yvonne Daniel

(Daniel, 2005,232)

Dance and Movement's Meaning

The dances of Santería and related religions are important religious elements. Fernández Olmos says that Voodoo⁶⁴ is first and foremost a dance (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,122). Writing about Voodoo and life in Haiti, Hurston describes the excitement when many participants in a religious rite become possessed and start to dance (Hurston, 1990,162). Evans-Pritchard notes that the most public rites of the Azande involve dance, drums and choro (Evans-Pritchard, 1937,154), with many coming to the scene for entertainment, local scandal and to watch dancing (Evans-Pritchard, 1937,158). Explaining the importance of the Orichas' dances Daniel writes:

When Oricha dance movements are performed, they provide for historical catharsis, contemporary release, and meaningful social action. ... [They are] learned over time, and transferred beyond the dance/music event to other arenas of social life...The dances express the collective memory and understanding of the cosmos, as they relate to wholeness in the present (Daniel, 2005,252).

Daniel notes how dance movements communicate meanings and teach lessons, with the Orichas communicating their desires to participants. An example is Oyá who may, while dancing, hug a participant, who is not a member of the religious family, for a long time and implore the individual to join the group. She may also ask and indeed order two neighbors, who are fighting, to shake hands and become friends (Daniel, 2005,252).

In 1979, Awolalu wrote that the patterns used and the steps danced were exact and by dancing badly an individual could bring scandal onto themselves. Devotees had to follow specific spatial patterns and certain forms of timing to execute the dances correctly. Though to outsiders it might seem that individuals were possessed and dancing randomly, they were not completely free to let their emotions, affected by the music, tell them how they should dance (Awolalu, 1979,107).

⁶⁴ Voodoo has similar roots to Santeria and shares therefore many religious elements.

This is contrary to my observations at rites in 2014. Today, as many devotees no longer know the Oricha's dances, dancing badly will not bring scandal. As Balbuena says, now it is more the feeling of the individual steering, letting devotees dance as they please. This implies that the meaning of Orichas' dances seems to have lost some significance or, more accurately, acquired new meanings as part of a contemporary culture of expressive individualism. Informants often mentioned the lack of specific knowledge of the different dances and so few knew how to dance well, that is to dance suitably for that Oricha and occasions. Talking about dancing at *tambores*, O'Farrill, head of the Folkloric department at ISA⁶⁵ and former first dancer at the *Cojunto* stated that:

The importance is the movement, that people move themselves. Not the steps. If they knew the steps of the Orichas, it would have been something different, they would bear meaning. Now that people don't know the dances, it is people's movement which is important. Before, 15-20 years ago, people knew how to dance. Now they don't know much and it is the movement which provokes reactions. All three things are necessary; music, chants and dance (movement).

Today movement is conveyed by general forms of dancing, not particular steps and rhythms. Participants have to move together so as to reach the desired affects at *tambores*. As Maria put it: "What is important is that they dance, not what they dance."

Even though fewer dance the particular Oricha dances correctly, there is something more to their dance than pure movement. When the dances of the Orichas are performed, their meanings go far beyond the event itself. They are experienced as placing devotees outside of time and connecting them with their African past and culture. The dances, along with other religious elements, are thought to have preserved ancient knowledge and power. Once, I saw Alex show Elegua's dance to a Nigerian visitor who recognized it at once as from his home country. The Orichas' dance movements might have changed throughout time, but they still bear elements from their origins.

Oswaldo is a *babalawo* who grew up in an environment where the artistic elements of the Orichas were important. He explained the dances as a material representation of what the Oricha is and the *physical expressions as to how the Orichas originally walked*. Elegua enacts the opening and closing of paths with his *garabato*⁶⁶. Artistically, these steps are danced, but in reality this is how he originally walked and he continues to create- opening paths whilst

⁶⁵ Arts University educating dancers and musicians.

⁶⁶His attribute stick to open and close paths.

closing others. Oggún does the same, he clears a path from all bad things in the mountain with his machete. His opening of a path enables hunting. Another example is the Oricha, San Lazaro who is said to be sick and has “spit” drooling from his mouth when he dances. This is a representation of how he walked and moved in the original world of creation, for it is this that is being reinvoked to introduce new beginnings and creative possibilities into present reality. When San Lazaro dances, it is clear that it is he, just like Shangó who has an axe in his hand whilst Elegua has his *garabato*. These are iconic regellia but also the creative instruments of the Oricha. For example, Oggún’s machete clears paths, and Shangó’s axe is associated with swift and balanced justice.

Alain told me how his grandparents had explained to him that religion needed singing so as to awaken the divinity of human beings. He described three important elements creating magic in a ritual: invocations, music (which is understood as life), and movement which often imitates different aspects of nature, such as the wind, birds, animals, river water, sun and sea. These elements put one in harmony with nature as every rhythm and movement should be compatible with a natural element. Each dance has its expression and communicates with nature. Examples include Yemayá who is the expression of moving and altering waters. When she twirls and moves, her dress is bringing water, the waves of her dress are iconic with the waves in water, as are the waves of her movement. Shangó’s movements are for making lightening, although today, people believe these to be erotic movements for he embodies strength and virility. Indeed, Shangó is popularly represented as a womanizer. His movements involve repeatedly stretching his arm up and out in a 45° angle before leading it down towards his pelvis, which is also the movement of bringing lightening. In times of drought, Yemayá and Shangó danced together to make thunderstorms, lightening and rain. Alain, tells the following story he collected from a visit to Holguin in 2005-6;

Those with whom we stayed were constantly complaining that it had been months without rain. Therefore we did a *tambor* for the rain, and it started raining half an hour after the *tambor* was done. It kept raining for 3 or 4 days straight with heavy tropical rain. This really happened, without fantasizing, because it was no fantasy.

The combination of Yemayá and Shangó’s movements are indicative of a fertility ritual and the invocation song “Wemiliere-eludeo-o-bao-eo” communicates with nature through the creative begetting powers of sexuality. It might be said that the *babalawo* is attempting to seduce rain, to court it and to re-fertilise existence.

In Cuban Santería, dance creates the atmospheric intensity desired for a successful *tambor*. Dance contributes to a feeling of community among devotees and even though they are not performed for mere amusement, many get pleasure from dancing and watching dancing. One reason that some informants gave for going to *tambores* in order to dance was so that excess energy and emotional excitement could be released (Langer, 1953,177). I often witnessed that when the dancing picked up its pace and the energy rose at the *tambores*, people seemed to be in good spirits, which at times bordered on the ecstatic.

When asking why informants went to *tambores*, some mentioned “*to dance away bad things*”. When I asked *madrinas*, *babalawos*, *santeros* and researchers why individuals should dance at *tambores*, a common response was “*para descargar mala energía*”, or to unload bad energy. An informant explained: “*people dance to release (descargar) bad energy and influences. Moving or dancing at the toque triggers this. It is to cleanse oneself of all negativity one may have accumulated*” over time. The ritual dancing leaves individuals with only good energy.

This understanding of cleansing may also be applicable to the earlier described custom of making participants move their bodies when playing for a bucket of water to conclude the *tambor*. O’Farrill offers this analysis that “*Supposedly, the buckets of water accumulate all bad energy or bad things which people have gotten rid of while dancing at the celebration. Throwing this out the door is getting rid of all bad things*”. To ensure that bad energies do not adhere to participants, it is essential that they move their bodies which throw off the heaviness of worldly involvement. It is not just the water but the dancing which is purifying.

Dancing places the body in unusual spatial movements and rhythms that allow the body and the self to be experienced in new ways which are indicative of the moral transformation of the self and its state of purity that is sought. Transformations in corporeal experiences mediate religious transformations of the self. Once, while leaving a *toque*, I talked to a female informant about a devotee who had been dancing beautifully throughout the whole session. She commented that “*it is because he is a dancer that he danced so beautifully and with all the right steps. Sometimes you can see people who are not dancers that dance just like him, due to their proper spirituality.*” My perception is that dance is something that comes to the individual from within. It is developed through exposure over time and it differs from person to person and also depends on the music’s effects on them. Some enter spirit-possession trance unwillingly, just by hearing the music, others are not able to enter trance even if they desire it. By learning the dances properly and becoming clever within the arts of the religion,

an individual may earn respect within the religious community for knowing and being in touch with its ancient knowledge⁶⁷.

Transmitting and Internalizing Orichas' Dances

When I am dancing, I am giving my whole life.

– Dayron –

The Oricha dances are learned through family traditions and through regular visits to performances. Michael Jackson writes that our relationship to others and our habitus, condition our “technique du corps”, our forms of body use. We learn how to use our body from our surroundings, by imitating and internalizing what others do. Mimicking embodies practices, which in turn gives meaning to the practice (Jackson, 1983). Guanche explained that from a young age, children see how their parents dance and, through a mimic-imitation process, they reproduce those movements. Depending on the knowledge held by their family and acquaintances, they learn to differentiate between the different *toques*. Later abilities develop and it is no longer just dancing like Elegua or dancing like Ochún, it is more what these activities imply in a symbolic sense. Since music records itself in our motions and emotions when we are young (Rossato-Bennett, 2014), these performative events are important for children. By participating in the audience and the choro, they embody their culture, and often in tacit nonverbal ways (Becker, 1994,42). Osvaldo, who was a member of a folkloric group in the town of Matanzas, explained it as follows:

Children are usually not placed beside someone who says that the steps are like this and like that. The emphasis is on looking and hearing. If you are seeing and observing all this from an early age, in a religious family, you will come to have a feeling, a love for these dances and for your religion. It is something which comes and grows in your person. You grow to love it. The religion, the dance, the folkloric music, it all becomes part of your life.

Once, at a *toque*, the best dancer was an *Iyawó* who was perhaps only 13 years old. She enjoyed the music as she exhibited talented understanding of the Orichas' dances. Her movements were coherently aligned to the music and she mastered her body beautifully,

⁶⁷ In contemporary Cuban society, those from a poor background can use this religious skill and knowledge to earn income and improve their status. Today the dances have become lucrative tourist attractions. Someone capable of dancing the religious dances can get a job at theaters or at other major tourist sites. Some dancers have even the possibility of leaving the country for there is a demand for Cuban dances and dancers in the western world.

isolating body parts where it was necessary and shaking and moving rhythmically when this was supposed to be done. It was obvious that her musical talent had been developed over time as she danced the *toque*'s steps together with her father. They had clearly done this many times before. She had, and still was, internalizing the *toques*, the movements, the chants and the ritual procedures.

I often saw younger children at *toques* watching while playing and doing other things. Frequently they would peek in, giggling, and try to copy the movements of the dancing mass. Instructed to stay at the back, furthest away from the drums affects, they watched, learned and imitated. The *Iyawó* dancing with her father had likely started out like these giggling youngsters. Attending another *toque*, I was, as usual, in the back, moving with the crowd, when a *santera* I knew told me to continue dancing so that she could copy my steps. She was imitating my steps!

I noticed at rehearsals that the local folkloric dance group had members of varied age (20-50+) and gender. Talking to the group's professional choreographer, Dayron, afterwards, he confirmed this but added that everyone, including himself, were from the street. None had been schooled in the dances through state education or cultural institutions but rather from public street performances, relatives and friends. After joining the dance group, they deepened the knowledge. He described how many of them began to learn the folkloric dances in the street, as he put it "*the street is where it really exists, where it is really felt*". Instead of playing baseball as most children, they always played "toque-toque-toque" on street corners and on their way to school. The street here is really a succinct way of talking about poverty and the close community of relations it creates between family and neighbourhood. Dayron explained that he learned the different Orichas' dances and the *tambores* on the street, but the technique of how to dance these in a choreographic form came when he joined the Folkloric dance group. He insists on the need for repetition so as to build up and maintain the cultural knowledge, otherwise one will forget. This knowledge is not written down but is passed on through mimetic repetition. Similarly, Osvaldo explained that he also learnt his first steps by watching and observing but later joined a professional group. There, he learned new techniques, steps and movements through choreographic and technical classes.



Figure 12. A tambulero bringing his son to play with him and the other musicians at a Guïro rite where the son plays the third Guïro. His son is predicted to become a musician, therefore he has started his schooling early.

There is a certain professionalization of Santeria going on in the art classes, where the culture of the streets assumes a new choreographic form. To some extent the sweat and energy of possession is assuming a more graceful way of articulating intensity. There is a class aspect as the culture of the street moves into art classes, where it is aestheticized in a new way that makes it more consumable for more middle classed audiences and visiting

tourists. I do not wish to argue that the street is disappearing but that the street is being redefined as a domain of popular cultural styles to be re-polished and re-choreographed. I do not believe that the dance classes are neutral spaces of knowledge transmission but domains where cultural transformations are occurring that are related to increasing middle class acceptance of Santería, along with its commodification and folklorization. It is not just African heritage and Cuban syncretism that is being made into national icons but also the culture of the street, of the poor and their entertainments.

A problem for the transmission of Santería was that many *babalawos* did not share information easily, even excluding their own sons who might be *santeros*. Nicolas Angarica states: “outrages and abuses that the Africans and their closest descendants suffered infused such fear and heaviness into their souls that they chose not to teach the religion to their own sons.”(Angarica, 1955?,81). Prohibitions on Afro-Cuban religions resulted in decades of impeded oral tradition. According to Alain, this phenomenon affected Santería from 1964-65 until 1992, when the state abandoned atheism. There was no systematic teaching or learning during the prohibition and parents had to transmit their religion to their children, but could not risk that they would talk about it at school. Therefore they had to deny it and send their children outside when talking or showing other devotees the ritual procedures. This has produced a sense of loss in the contemporary period, a sense of alienation and removal from one’s cultural roots. This is how two sisters from Matanzas explained their predicament;

Religiosity has to do with where you grow up. As we did not grow up in this environment, we lack this knowledge. As our parents were religious, maybe they got up early in the morning to consult each other⁶⁸. We were born during this period precisely when religion was slightly abandoned. There was always an image which we couldn’t enter. This is why this happened to us and our generation.

The new revaluing and celebration of Santería has reinforced this sense amongst youth that a history of different forms of repression has stopped their induction into truer forms of their culture and they live with a false hollow shell of it that they struggle to overcome. This sense of alienation gives a religious aspect to the process of rediscovering and reowning Santería which is occurring among many youth. Informants talk wistfully about how ages ago, you would decide to *hacerte santo*, that is to be initiated by receiving and being crowned with your principal Oricha. This involved living with your chosen *madrina* (godmother) for a

⁶⁸ I heard many places, that parents did religious practices during the early morning hours.

period of perhaps a few months. She would tutor an *ahijado* (godchild) by making them study Santería-related topics, like the steps of the Orichas (especially those of their particular Oricha), and how to dance in front of the *tambor*. Today, this tutoring role of the *madrinas* has almost disappeared. It is difficult for initiates to go and live with their *madrina* because everyday life has other pressing obligations of work, education and social life. Given that both men and women often work outside of the house, *madrinas* are less able to house an *ahijado* and the *ahijado* seldom has time for extended stays with his *madrina*. The loss of this ritual learning time has affected the ability to adequately learn the *santos*' steps. There is a critique of present day individuals as not having the right motives to complete the process of initiation. They are criticised as not truly seeking to learn religious *santero* tradition, but to alleviate health problems or quench a desire to travel. People are said to not act like *santeros* anymore, to lack respect as evidenced in them violating the norms and religious prohibitions. Such critiques of the present serve to romanticise the past as a more authentic time of true religiosity. Such critiques set up a pilgrimage relationship to the past as something that has to be reclaimed by individuals, and this can be in new modern ways.

Dance is precisely one of the things undergoing change. Ernesto voiced that those who really know how to dance have either assisted at a cultural house or come from a family with a tradition of *santeros*.

Theaters, Dance Groups and Folklorization

“Recently the dances have become more popular than ritual dances”

– Alain –

Whilst discussing history, a *santera* told me once how the folkloric dances had changed when the dance companies began performing them. Previously, the dances were not so publicly displayed like today, but occurred in the home of a religious family. Presently, there are many cultural sites where Oricha dances can be observed outside of religious contexts. Professional and amateur groups, like the *Cojunto*, perform Afro-Cuban dances at theatres or in the streets, like at “El Callejón de Jamel”.

The basis of their performances is taken from Santería and other Afro-Cuban religions. The religious *patakís* (stories and tales about the Orichas) and steps are still used, respecting the characteristics of the Orichas, while also employing artistic liberty. Though out of their religious contexts, the dances were similar to what I had observed at *toques*. At times, the

executions were more exact as the performers were schooled more precisely in these dances. The performances give a good introduction to the dances of the Orichas, and allow outsiders insight in Afro-Cuban traditions. However, there is also a transformation of meaning, as the aesthetic forms are partly detached from their religious traditions so as to become steps, dances and movements to be appreciated as aesthetic forms in their own right. Bourdieu talks about how the middle class has an aesthetic, which values form for its own sake rather than for its content. This aesthetic appreciation is interested in placing one aesthetic style alongside other aesthetic styles. They become valued for the cultural and social views they embody, e.g. folk or street culture, African heritage or syncretism. The meaning of a work of art emerges from a comparative project of situating a style or a culture within a network of other styles and cultural forms, which compete with it or may have influenced it (Bourdieu, 1987). This is the case with Oricha dances, which are turned into aesthetic forms to be placed alongside other aesthetic dance forms. This allows for the emergence of new reading positions where professional artists embrace the dance and musical forms of these religions in new ways, opening up for a different type of tourism. Today Oricha dances gain their new meaning, not by being referred back to the details of the religious cosmology, but by being considered Art with its own aesthetic form of beauty, compared to other dance styles like reggaeton, and to what other styles, like salsa and rumba, have incorporated into their dance movements.

In 1959 the National Theater of Cuba created a department to develop folklore into an academic field. Two institutes shared this task: the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore was to research and preserve traditions, and the *Cojunta* Folklórico Nacional was meant to preserve the artistic works of Cuban religions (Vélez, 2000,76). Two of my informants, a researcher and a *babalawo* noted, as Vélez and Ayordine (2004,114) had, that when the *Cojunta* started it had the effect of producing greater standardization at the expense of local diversity in knowledge and practices. Communism celebrated the art of the people and sought to elevate this aesthetic into a national project. The *Cojunta* gathered information from all over Cuba, from those perceived as knowledgeable in folk practices. They consulted elders and those who knew the dances, asking how the Orichas danced, when and to which music. The attires of the Orichas were noted and this collection and summarisation promoted their standardization. The *Cojunta* saw itself as producing a visual authentic presentation as close to tradition as possible. However, it also had the effect of authorising and elevating certain forms of knowledge, dances, music and decorations as the underlying correct practice. Soon students and staff of the *Cojunta* performed the standardized version of “authentic” dances,

songs and music in theaters. In effect, they took them out of their religious, ritual and secretive contexts, and placed them in the public sphere, turning them into popular folklore for entertainment. Sometimes in the process of staging the dances, the *Cojunto* incorporated new stylistic movements⁶⁹. They performed the folklore culture for a new national audience that was often not familiar with the background, religious symbolism and knowledge, but instead had its own understanding of the meaning of art and aesthetic performances.

The *Cojunto* had the authority of the state and of the academy behind their work, making presentations of tradition. They became influential in reforming the contemporary dances of the Orichas and their rituals. Both *babalawos* and academic researchers stated that before the *Cojunto* started their work, it was not common to dress the *Iyawó* in his/her Oricha's clothes during the presentation in front of the *batá* drums, as is done today. The *Cojunto*'s new performances of tradition were taught to those working with them and they became the new standard that still holds true throughout the country. Even so, there are some places where the steps are performed differently, that have kept local idiosyncratic knowledges and performances as the basis of distinguishing their locality, neighbourhood and ritual family as "authentic".

Although the *Cojunto* is one of the greatest preservers of the Cuban folkloric dances, many learning the dances today learn the *Cojunto*'s standardized form and not necessarily in the manner that their forefathers danced. When the ENA and ISA⁷⁰ were founded, the *Cojunto*'s standards were adopted. As a researcher informant stated:

If you see anyone dancing well at a *tambor*, you can be sure that they have taken classes to learn this. Of course some have had good family traditions, but most have learned through teachers schooled in the "correct manner" of doing it.

This may explain why a *tambulero* (drummer) once asked me whether I had received dance lessons or not, due to the way I was dancing at a *Cajón de Muerto*. He remarked that it was

⁶⁹ One of these movements is that of Shangó when he kneels down twice in the course of 8 beats with one knee at a time and gets up in the same way while making a large circular gesture with his right arm as if he is cutting his belly. A teacher at the *Cojunto* pointed to this movement and described how a famous dancer at the *Cojunto* had made a mistake on stage and fell down. He improvised this movement so that the audience would not know that he had actually fallen. Everyone liked the movement and it was integrated into subsequent performances by Shangó. This is why this movement can be seen frequently today in theaters, but not at *tambores* when a devotee is mounted by Shangó.

⁷⁰ These are arts schools educating dancers and musicians. ENA is a high school, and ISA is a University.

uncommon to see a participant dance like I did without being schooled. He also noted that people didn't dance this way anymore, because few knew how. Here it is schools which became domains for transmitting detailed stylised movements that can then be associated with an authentic past.

Theaters have become arenas where Cubans and foreigners alike, enjoy the artistic aspects of Afro-Cuban traditions, making the music and dances accessible to a wider population. A different kind of aesthetic is being cultivated in the theaters which is different from the aesthetic in religious communities. There is a different kind of physicality and choreography being used. The grace and cleanliness of performers in theaters does not match the sweat, panic and seemingly chaotic realities of devotees mounted by spirits seeking satisfaction for their own desires and lusts. Even so, as the dances represent the way the Orichas walked and the state they were originally in, Babalu Ayé is often performed at theaters with liquid foam drooling from his mouth. The dances, which were previously only performed privately within religious settings, are now often exposed without their original framework of meaning. This allows for new interpretations, differing from those within Afro-Cuban beliefs. One of the effects has been the perception of the dances as folkloric more than religious. This creates a folklorization process, where the religious aspect has yielded to heritage and national cultural identity aspects. Ironically the acknowledgement of syncretic Cuban-African religiosity produces a process that secularises that acknowledgement.

Another noticeable effect of the folklorization process and the much larger acceptance among the broader population of Santeria as a style has been the incorporation of its religious dance steps into Cuban popular dances. This can be profitable or for entertainment purposes (as music clips and club dances). Dance innovation also occurs in the street, not just in the professional dance groups. Here the dance steps of the Orichas are performed in non-religious contexts and for audiences with no concern for the detailed religious meanings but more with the stylised rhythms of Africanness and of religious secrecy. Once while walking in a *barrio* in Matanzas, I noticed people combining dances of the Orichas with reggaeton, which is a modern, popular and trendy dance with roots in the street culture of Latin and Caribbean music. Ironically Santeria also had some of its steps performed in the street and it is no accident that these two street cultures merge, for there is a recognition that each articulates symbols of marginality. The suppressed Africanness of Santeria which was part of Cuban class structures is merged with a modern dance form stemming mostly from poor neighbour hoods.

In theaters and in other secular performances for tourists, professional dancers may borrow steps from the Orichas to spice up their rumba and salsa dances. This borrowing and mixing is done by many Cuban and foreign hobby dancers, who use the syncretism in all of these dance styles to justify further mixing and syncretism as an ongoing historical process. Outside of Cuba, Santeria dances have too gained wide fame. Many dance schools and dance congresses⁷¹, which teach popular Cuban dances like salsa, might also teach the dances of the Orichas and other Afro-Cuban dances. The folklorization of Afro-Cuban religions is also prominent in song lyrics where their elements as sayings, words and musical rhythms are used.

Even though the Orichas' dances are often perceived as cultural and folkloric when staged, many remember their religious nature and power while performing the steps. A co-student told me during one performance that some of the dancers from another group had deliberately spread and blown powder onto the stage when my classmates were performing. Apparently this powder originates from Palo religion and is 'bad', it is used to make mischief. This was *brujeria* (magic/sorcery) used on stage as a dramatic device to sabotage other dance groups. For the performers, this obvious act of rivalry was not part of a process of secularisation where religious meanings disappear. Instead sorcery during the performance added to the power of the powder, the sorcery become subordinate to an iconography of the spectacular, of the spectacle of the power of African tradition to both create and destroy.

Staged Dances affect Religious Dances in Times of Fading Transmission

"I prefer the dance, this is what I feel and it is all my life.

This is all my life."

– Dayron –

The ritual godmother (*madrina*) of one of my informants, along with the other religious siblings (initiates) did not know the Oricha dances. She was told to dance whatever occurred to her at the presentation for the *batá* drums. Since she wanted to dance the 'correct' dance of her Oricha during her presentation, she searched for videos of her Oricha and learned the correct steps through this means. She affirmed that this was not normal in all religious

⁷¹ These are dance gatherings over a number of days, often with international instructors giving workshops in different dance styles.

families, but that many families had lost their dancing traditions, just like her own. Due to the danger of losing important parts of heritage, she also stressed the importance of looking to dance companies for particular dances. Though not religious performances, the companies have gained a certain authority in defining folkloric traditions. People may observe these dance performances and then bring those movements back to the *tambores* (rites) in which they participate

Dayron noted this trend of adding new “staged” movements to the repertoire of devotees’ street dance movements:

I have created movements because they fit well into the choreography and to the *patakí* (stories and tales about the Orichas) I was using. Later I have seen these same movements in the street. People liked the movements they saw and started imitating them in the street, incorporating them in their vocabulary of movements.

A new kind of aesthetic is evolving that merges folklore dances with professional choreography. The order and discipline of choreography begin to invade the culture of the street in a way that reverses the previous incorporation of street culture into choreography.

Balbuena remarked ironically that it is mostly those who do not know how to dance, who are the most active dancers at the *tambores*. In contrast, those who do know, remain more reserved avoiding exposure of their knowledge. There is status and authority in guarding knowledge, in restricting and controlling its circulation, in making a gift and an obligation out of its transmission. This may explain why there seems to be so few who know the dances and parallels what I discovered at a *tambor* when a participant introduced me to a skilled folklore dancer after the closure of the *tambor*. I had hardly noticed her dancing beforehand, for she seemed reserved and was obviously not dancing the way she knew how to as a dancer.

Interviewing Balbuena she said:

It is the oldies who know how to dance and as they are “viejito” (oldies) they don’t want to sweat and they do not care if those dancing learn how to dance or not. This explains why it is harder to find devotees who know how to dance. ... They dance what they feel. if the religious [followers] don’t become aware of this and do something about it, it [the cultural knowledge] will get lost.

Balbuena talked about tradition and the need to maintain and be faithful to it, which she contrasted to growing forms of expressive individualism that emphasise personal autonomy and freedom. If the focus becomes the way one feels when expressing dance, this creates a particular meaning, indeed a modern individualistic form of the meaning of art and performances. This shifts away from tradition as the source of meaning and makes the

experiences of the individual the new “authentic” source of meaning. There is a transformation in cultures of authenticity.

The artistic elements of the religion are also changing in a similar way in the field of drumming and music making. Alain spoke of some *tambuleros* as engaged in grooving (*rumbeando*), more than playing the sacred *toques* (rhythms). The original sound of the *batá* drums was meant to communicate messages for and from the deities and nature through a language behind their rhythms. If a *tambor* is played two blocks away one should know what the message is; if it is for war, a natural phenomenon, or sickness. People’s sense of cultural loss is partly bound up with a critique of growing forms of individualism where the meaning of dance and music become individualised and bound up with the experiences of the individual rather than of an original mythological sacred reality within these artistic elements.

Sometimes the act of not dancing is connected to avoiding becoming a medium for trance, and avoiding attracting attention and envy. Perhaps it is also about knowing how not to know, that is know how to feign simplicity and vagueness. This can be motivated by an unwillingness to boast of knowledge, and a fear of others mimicking or appropriating one’s knowledge and skills. However, experienced participants claimed that before more people were actively dancing the dances of the Orichas at *toques* and more devotees knew how to dance. They saw the change as due to difficulties in transmitting specialised religious knowledge.

Balbuena claimed that today’s devotees saw the importance of the dance, but not *the importance of dancing it as it was specifically executed before*. The act of moving in front of the *tambores* is now paramount and easy rumba-like steps are common. But the specific dances of the Orichas are complicated and it is necessary to dedicate time to teach them by *santeros* to new initiates, as was done in the past when the *padrino* taught his *ahijados* the different contexts of the *fiestas*⁷² and *toques*. The changing nature of dances is due to the demise of generation-to-generation transmission that resulted from anti-religious policies after the communist revolution. This led to increased secularism among the youth for a period of time. However, in the crisis of the 90’s, religiosity has flourished again, but in an altered way that affects the “authenticity” of the dances, music and rituals of Santería.

⁷² The Cuban word for “party” which is common to use about rites like *toques* or *tambores*.

The *Tambor* as a Temple

When observing *tambores*, the highpoint appears to be when someone enters *transit* (*transito*), which is the period of moving away from one's own identity and the secular mundane world. But if there is little energy being generated, people will start to go outside for fresh air. As soon as there is a change in energy, they will swarm back in, or look through windows and stand on their tiptoes to get a glimpse of what is the rapid movements that are occurring. When someone goes into transit, these movements can slow down, people will stop dancing, or move only a little. Focus will shift from the dancers and musicians to what the person in transit is doing. This is how O'Farrill described his experiences and thoughts about *tambores*:

The *tambor* is like a temple. The musicians are on the one side and the song continues the circle to the dancers who are on the opposite side of the musicians. These three elements form the union. Without one of these elements, it doesn't work. It's like magic, energy; the currents need all three elements. It is when all these are functioning that the Orichas descend. If there is one who knows the steps, have you seen that the rest will follow him? Well, this is like a current. When everybody moves in the same direction or rhythm, this is when the current starts and the Orichas descend. This is if the music and the chants are also present. If this combination doesn't exist, the Orichas do not descend.

If the dance steps are performed well, Orichas may come and possess the bodies of the dancers. If done poorly, it may offend them and prevent them from coming (De La Torre, 2004,120). This was the case in some of the *tambores* I attended. Interestingly, the Orichas are still descending even though participants dance "badly" by traditional religious standards. Now it is not the specific dance, but the current produced which is important.

Participants are affected by energetic dancing around them. It is experienced as contagious, affecting others to let loose and dance more wildly. In a performance, participants and musicians communicate and react to each other; they feed off each other's energy. When musicians see someone dancing more energetically, they will activate or intensify their music, stimulating and provoking participants to dance even more enthusiastically, augmenting the collective energy and noise level of the *tambor*. This creates the conditions for devotees to enter transit and become mounted by an Oricha who rides them like a horse. They become the beast, an animal body, steered by another intellect.

Once Alex told me that she had participated at a *tambor* with her mother who is not a *santera*, but who has received Oyá in the *Mano de Orula*⁷³. When they played for Oyá, her mother started to dance the correct steps in time to the right music as if she knew how to. As a dancer, Alex knows the steps and timing of Oyá's dance, and as a daughter, she knew that her mother did not know how to dance. Alex was astonished to see her mother dance so beautifully and correctly⁷⁴. The energy level was likely quite high when this occurred. As many such stories relate, it appears quite common that people who do not know how to dance start dancing spontaneously to their music at *tambores*. Such events confirm the beliefs of the faithful that it is not the living who are dancing but the spirits; that another kind of body and knowledge has entered and inhabits the body of the dancers.

Referring to the strength of music and that of the sacred *batá* drums, Alex told a story about when she was in school. Percussionists were using the same *batá* drums that were to be played at a *toque* after class⁷⁵. The students were dancing Columbia (the strongest form of rumba danced mostly by men) to their music when Alex suddenly found herself on the floor. The teacher said that she was just nervous, but she knew that this was not the case. She had been dancing to the strong rhythms when the power of the sacred drums had taken hold of her. Such stories are part of popular folklore, and they serve to create a mystique around the instruments that mediate and keep alive Africa's mythological heritage in Cuba.

Arguing that human beings are constituted of rhythms, Susanne Langer says "*rhythm is the basis of life*" (Langer, 1953,128). Music has its own internal structure where its rhythms may be perceived to enter and reorganise the body's rhythms, making it follow the rhythms of the beat (Langer, 1953,205, see also Kapferer and Friedson). Dance is one of these rhythmicized gestures, where none of the movements are automatic but provoked by the music. If the person has a liking to the music or dance, this may induce an intense and complete feeling of the body being controlled by the music's rhythms as the body responds spontaneously to them (Langer, 1953,203). Especially percussion instruments may induce this effect (Friedson, 1996',38-9), as their strong sounds reverberate through the ground and into

⁷³ The ritual indicating one's mother/father Oricha, One's main Orichas.

⁷⁴ She had a similar story about one of her sisters from her religious family who didn't know how to dance. When she was presented for the *tambores* in the initiation rite, she started to dance her Oricha's steps and this led to a transition.

⁷⁵ Generally these drums are not played outside religious rites, so this was also a moral warning that religious instruments are not to be toyed with but revered and treated seriously.

bodies. These rhythms may liberate the dancer from his body and gravity (Langer, 1953,203), letting him experience his body as organised in another reality; the internal world of music. This experience of the organising reality of music mediates a religious sense of the organizing reality of spirits. The alterity of music mediates the alterity of spirits, it is therefore no accident that religion and music are intimately bound up together.

Feeling Comfortable when You get Mounted

Both Maria and Alex love dancing at *toques*, but feel most comfortable if they are at *toques* where they know the hosts. Neither of them go to unknown *toques* unless a good friend brings them. When Alex was younger she was very active and went to *toques* often. Many knew that she danced and invited her to their *toques*. She would dance animatedly, contributing to the atmosphere of the celebration. Once, Alex got a fright when she was asked to dance in front of the drums when they were playing for her Oricha. She started feeling strange sensations, but luckily nothing happened. As she has only received *Mano de Orula* and not her Oricha, it could be dangerous for her to be mounted. She would be placed in a vulnerable situation and grave consequences could result. The *santeros* were partly being criticised for not looking out for her, but using her to activate the crowd and initiate the current when they asked her to dance in front of the drums. Now she only goes to *tambores* with trusted hosts, like her *madrina*, and where she feels safe and knows that she will be taken care of.

Maria, who is initiated, does not know the dances of the Orichas and mirrors what others do at *tambores*, just like many other devotees. She told me that when she was first mounted, she danced a lot. Today, if she can control it, she tries to let the mounting only happen in places where she feels safe or surrounded by people she trusts. She does not like it to happen in foreign places. She fears the loss of consciousness and control and wants confirmation that those surrounding her know what to do.

I often heard warnings that it was dangerous to be mounted by the wrong Oricha, or by an Oricha without being initiated; bad things could occur to the person, including death and insanity. The same dangers are also present if you rise with your Oricha among people who do not know the rituals or the proper name of your Oricha (its right path), because leave-taking has to be done correctly, mentioning the Orichas proper name. Such warnings and the stories, which illustrate and validate the warnings, serve to reinforce the religious hierarchy of

Santeria as controlling mystical creative forces that need to be ritually managed by religious experts.

Hiring Dancers

In Havana, a *dancer* is not always a professional dancer from ISA or any other school. It may be someone known to be mounted easily by his Oricha at *tambores*. Not everyone has the *aché* (a spiritual and mystical energy-power) to do this. It is also a physically and mentally exhausting event. Many elders often say that, before, it was more common for individuals to be mounted at *tambores*. Today, at a *tambor*, there is no guarantee that an Oricha will descend. Sometimes, organisers will pay a dancer to attend at the *tambor* so as to ensure that a possession happens. These dancers are referred to as *bailarines* (dancers) or *montadores* (mounters). An informant explained: “*It is a way of life, to make money. It is religion and at the same time, a way of earning a living.*” Balbuena explained that today *santeros* will hire dancers just as they hire *tambuleros*. They have a gift not everyone has, and they validate the performance. In realising and materialising the sacred in their bodies, they give authenticity to the performance as having the right intensity, rhythm and precision.

Paying *montadores* continues an old tradition of paying those who make the rite turn out as it should. The *tambuleros*, the *madrina* “working in the Oricha” for initiates, the cooks, the herbalist, everyone gets paid for their work because they have specialised knowledge. This is called “*el derecho*” (the right) and has always existed. The difference is that before prices were low (1.5-3 pesos⁷⁶), now they have increased substantially. Balbuena does not look upon it as part of *negocio* (business). It is their work in the religion and the rite. She compared it with the Church, saying that those who dedicate themselves have to live and eat. If not, they will not have people who will dedicate themselves to the religion. It takes a lot of time and people cannot leave work for a whole week to help initiate a devotee. This is why everyone receives their share for the work done. As the relative costs of rituals are increasing, this is partly a factor for the decline of the ceremony and the dances. There are less relatives, friends and acquaintances who could provide free labour and resources for the rituals, so there is a greater need to purchase more and more services. Though Balbuena denies this being

⁷⁶ During my fieldwork the value of a Cuban peso was 1/24 of a CUC. 1 CUC is the equivalent of 1 USD.

business, it is part of the commodification of Santeria and of the labour needed for a successful ritual performance.

Hired dancers mix well into *tambores*. It is not obvious to an outsider who the dancer is or even if there is one present. On one occasion I witnessed one who came late after the *tambor* had started. He rushed into a room to prepare the clothes he would eventually change into once mounted. Without saluting participants, he went straight to the *tambores* and started dancing in front of them. He did not mark the steps well and was dancing very sloppily and imprecisely. All the devotees were dancing behind him and participating as if nothing was happening. 10-15 minutes went by and his movements improved somewhat, but were far from perfect. Still more time passed before his movements changed. He started dancing with more precision. His dance steps were better, correct and on time to the music. He placed himself in front of the *tambores* for maximum effect. Soon he danced with strong movements from side to side before he suddenly started shaking as many do when going into transit. He placed himself halfway hanging over *Iyá*, the largest drum, and saluted it. The *Oricha* had come down, mounting the dancer who was then led into another room to change clothes. The music had stopped and some of the religious house's members were taking care of him. In a casual way, they served him well, doing what he asked them to do as he started giving participants advice. When the music started again, he danced with the participants. Sometimes he danced beside those who did not know how to dance, showing them the steps. He also made sure that everyone was in the room and urged people to dance.

There is a culture of religious authenticity being asserted in knowing how to dance, where those who know are the ones closest to the spirits for it is the spirits who should dance. Through dance, those who may be poor and marginalized can become empowered with the beauty and pageantry of the sacred along with its knowledge and creative magic.

Chapter 6 Possession-Trance and Music

“They manifest themselves. They become incarnate in the bodies of their servitors. They eat, drink, talk, dance in the person of their medium. Some gods make themselves men all day long. ...And the person possessed...becomes god, he is the god in flesh and bones.”

– DR. LOUIS MARS –

Trance, possession and music

Genovese (1976) notes that possession amongst slave societies has had differing interpretations. Some have perceived it as madness or hysteria and others as a form of symbolic expression for repressed personalities⁷⁷. Anthropologists have been skeptical concerning psychoanalytic explanations of possession, since

“no genuine schizophrenic could possibly adjust to the firm system of control that the rituals demand. No matter how wild and disorderly they look to the uninitiated, they are in fact tightly controlled; certain things must be done and others not done. Thus they require [...] social, not psychological, explanation.” (Genovese, 1976,239).

There are many types and degrees of trance (Becker, 1994,41) which are culturally conditioned and rely on beliefs and cultural expectations of what will happen. Associations with specific music and ritual contexts are also important (Herbert, 2011,204). Lévi-Strauss analyses possession as related to two types of thought processes. The first is the normal thought which continually strives to find meaning in things which do not reveal their significance. The second is the pathological thought which uses personal interpretation to give meaning to those things which normal reasoning cannot explain, but where something empirical can be verified. These two thought processes are not opposed, but complementary processes working together to explain, things, as in magic (Lévi-Strauss, 1963,181). This same explanation can be used in respect to possession. It is something incomprehensible to

⁷⁷ This last perception of trance was that of Roger Bastide.

the normal reason, and leads groups to give their own interpretations explicating the phenomenon they observe.

For Lévi-Strauss, if a person perceives himself to be in an extraordinary situation (such as sorcery), the sympathetic nervous system may make physical things happen with the body, hence allowing some magical practices (or possession) to work. Both the sorcerer and the recipient have to believe in the effectiveness of the magical powers and techniques used, and in addition so does the audience which is the ultimate arbiter of the effectiveness of ritual techniques (Lévi-Strauss, 1963,168). The “Shamanistic complex”, as Lévi-Strauss calls it, is an inseparable threefold experience. It consists of a fabrication of procedures and realities. The sorcerer or shaman undergoes states of a psychosomatic nature. The recipient feels or does not experience an improvement in condition. And lastly, the audience contributes to the cure with its own enthusiasm, beliefs and emotions, producing a collective acceptance of the cure, which legitimizes the procedures. It also confers and authorises a new cured identity for the patient (Lévi-Strauss, 1963,179).

Rouget, a French ethnomusicologist, has a general theory that trances, through possession cults, are socialized forms of behaviour. This approaches Genovese’s thoughts about possession in slave societies (Genovese, 1976,239). Similar to Lévi-Strauss’s theory, the individual has to internalize the possibility that something may take control over his body and the wider society has to recognize this event as a deity willing to take control over the body of the possessed. Further, they have to look upon this as a means of communication, where they identify the possessing deity and its behavior (Rouget, 1985,322). Possession trance involves an identity change which would be meaningless if the group did not recognize and authorise it (Rouget, 1985,325), “[c]ultural expectations always play a part in trance behavior”(Becker, 1994,42). Emphasising the important of symbols, cultural understandings and psychological processes, Lévi-Strauss argues that Kwakiutl shaman, Quesalid was not “*a great shaman because he cured his patients; he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman*”. If the group no longer believes in a shaman, his cures will not work (Lévi-Strauss, 1963,180), just as possession will lose its presence if the group loses belief in its existence or validity.

As music is made by the group and not by the individual, possession happens for and because of the group. Music becomes the instrument of communication between the subject and the group through music-making and dancing (Rouget, 1985,325). Rouget perceives music as mediating cultural control as it socializes and organises trance states (Rouget,

1985,323). Becker, another ethnomusicologist, notes that “[g]iven the right cultural expectations, any kind of music, whether it be vocal or instrumental, can be associated with trance states” (Becker, 1994,41). Guanche has argued that some specific vibrations from the *tambores* help generate mechanisms allowing individuals to fall into states of possession, especially when festivities reach states of ecstasy. He notes how people generally do not enter possession without the sound of the *tambores* (see also Friedson 1996,129). As mentioned earlier, the vibrations of the *toques* differ as each Oricha has a diversity of paths. These individual vibrations are culturally associated with specific dances, mythological gestures, creative acts and psychological characteristics.

Dayan argues that spirit-possession and trance are a fusion with the divine, a “reciprocal abiding of human and god”. She sees it not just as dominance when the “horse” is mounted and ridden by the deity, but as a “double movement of attenuation and expansion”. The deity cannot manifest on earth without a devotee temporally mounting and giving itself up as “an instrument in a social and collective drama”(Dayan, 1997,19). The possession allows for the “horse” to become one with the spirit, transcending its materiality. The spirit may also renew itself drawing upon the “horse’s” vitality, energized by the music, dance and feast (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,122). Osvaldo explained that everyone is not able to mount as one goes into another level of reality when mounting. There is an energy which charges you. The Oricha or *eggún* empowers itself from everyday matter. It is not only in the body, for the people also are not only in themselves, they get empowered and become something else. The spirits converse, give advice and talk about the future, the past and personal things that only the individual knows⁷⁸. These experiences and accounts serve to verify the existence of the Orichas and spirits, and their omnipotent and omniscient nature.

Cuban *santeros* say that the saint or Oricha “*bajó*” (came down), that it manifested itself in an initiate’s spirit-possession trance. While some people many think that the saint or Oricha physically descend and enter initiates, others argue that: “*It is not the saint who descends, but its spirituality. If the saint literally descends, it dies.*”⁷⁹ This interpretation is in accordance with the ethnographic fact that many initiates may be mounted by the same saint at a particular *tambor*. The Orichas are not bound by geography and the human body cannot

⁷⁸ Throughout my fieldwork I heard many stories about Orichas or *eggún* telling people details which they knew no one else knew.

⁷⁹ “El santo no baja, es su espiritualidad. Si baja, muera.”

hold the entire Oricha (De La Torre, 2004,120). Yet, there is an embodied aspect to the saint, for it has certain music preferences, dance steps and physical desires, e.g. for particular foods. It has certain psychological qualities that are manifest in corporeal gestures and needs of the horse, which becomes like a second body. When two different Orichas appear at the same *tambor*, they may act out their original mythological relationship and actions as told in the *patakís* (De La Torre, 2004,120).

Whether it is spirit-possession trance or prayer, communication with the deities and the guidance received through these sessions, is a fundamental aspect of Santería and related religions⁸⁰. Communication through possession shows a deity's closeness to, and great power over mankind (Barnet, 2001,40). Devotees try to comply with the wishes of the deities to please them. By submitting to their demands, it is hoped the deities may help people to achieve their wishes. Deities can also punish devotees who ignore them or neglect their wishes and they do so by removing or destroying the material possessions of devotees or inflicting bad luck, illness and a failure in romantic relationship. There are many such stories, they are often repeated and some even tell of the death of an initiate which is the ultimate proof of the Oricha's great power over human affairs.

Becker analyses trance as learned behaviour that usually bears the imprint of the society's belief (Becker, 1994,41). Likewise, Barnet argues that prior contact and knowledge is crucial to getting possessed by a deity (Barnet, 2001,35). Questioning the latter theory, I was told a story about foreign tourists present at an Arará⁸¹ rite, who although ignorant of ritual procedures, went into possession-trance by the touch of a devotee mounted with an Arará deity. The informant providing this story was an investigator of Afro-Cuban religions and claimed to have seen it on tape. He wanted to emphasize the great powers and energies, unexplainable to the uninitiated, which can take place in these rituals. He wanted to argue that previous knowledge was not always necessary in spirit possession-trance; it was not just a question of belief, but of the power of another reality. This type of supernatural story⁸² is

⁸⁰ This includes Voodoo, Palo, Candomblé and others.

⁸¹ An Afro-Cuban religion, which is little widespread in today's Cuba.

⁸² In Friedson's epilogue he writes about a happening that was just as unexplainable and strange as the above case. It involved great energies, strong enough to destroy a 5 minute sequence on his video tape where a cow was sacrificed. The tape was undamaged, as were the 60 other hours he had filmed, but as the cow was sacrificed and its life was released, the tape got blurry and the sound stopped (Friedson, 1996).

common in Cuba and helps to legitimize the existence of the Orichas and the religion they represent in the face of a sceptical secular foreign world.

Barnet writes that it is necessary for the devotee to demonstrate a willingness to embody and consciously adopt the deity's traits and attributes by getting possessed (Barnet, 2001,35). I would qualify this remark by noting Rouget's comment that one should not will the possession, but undergo it (Rouget, 1985,325). Becker also says that one has to "*surrender personal will and accept the penetration of her bodily boundaries*" when being mounted (Becker, 2004,11). Numerous times, I observed possession occur without the willingness of the initiate⁸³. During many *toques*, there were initiates who were afraid of and didn't seem receptive to the idea of something controlling their body. Some informants and devotees ran from the room if they felt something happening. Once, a young teenager, who was dancing carefully by the door leading to the patio, suddenly started shaking, which often happens when someone enters a *transit*. He stumbled out the door, trying to escape the music and get away in time to avoid entering a spirit-possession trance. He sat outside, overcome, breathing heavily and refusing to return before the *tambor* was over. I overheard his mother tell a participant that after his initiation, the boy's body had become very responsive to getting mounted, something he feared. Nowadays, he resists falling into trance, but she hoped that as he grew older, he would overcome his fears and allow himself to go into possession trance so as to dance his saint's dance.

The common factor among those I witnessed entering transit or possession is the belief that possession is possible, albeit involuntarily. Opening themselves to the possibility of permitting a possession trance is part of their cultural knowledge and corresponds to Rouget's remarks about internalizing the possibility of something taking control over one's body (Rouget, 1985,322).

Some uses of Dance and Trance

Dance and music have been a part of healing processes and health care treatment in many societies (Friedson, 1996,xii). This has been well documented for Africa and Evans-Prichard (1937,148-82) writes about how Azande "witch-doctors" eat divinatory medicines which they activate with drumming, singing and dancing. Friedson (1996,83) studied the

⁸³ The possibility exists that all these observations were of initiates acting as though they did not want to go into trance, but I do not believe this to be the case.

Tumbuka who use dance as a treatment of disease. As with the Tumbuka, in Santería, reaching a state of possession-trance through dance is full of healing potential. The Oricha may communicate with the participants warning them of impending dangers such as sickness, bad luck, personal ruin, and accidents. The Oricha may also provide guidance on how these are to be avoided. In the ritual, the Oricha may perform actions like touching or giving benediction, which have curative effects. I witnessed the following case of an act of healing at a *toque* in Santiago by an initiate who was mounted by Shangó. In the midst of a musical dancing frenzy, where Shangó danced and gave advice to participants, he told a young lady to lay face down on the floor. As she obeyed, he jumped onto her back with his whole body weight. It was later explained to me that Shangó was seeking to cure the girl's back problems. Hurston observed healing rites in Haiti were female devotees, who wished to have children, were thrilled when Ogoun⁸⁴ danced erotically with them. He was seen as promising them children (Hurston, 1990,162).

Memory, Trance and Music

In Santería, it is often said that a person has no memory of them being possessed after a deity leaves a mounted devotee. But some do not accept this. Rene was not convinced of memory loss during spirit-possession trance. Both his sister and mother often became possessed but he disbelieved claims of being mounted and searched for flaws in the behaviour of those mounted. He claimed that those who were seemingly possessed by the Orichas should be able to remember something afterwards. He argued that the reason why no one said that they could remember was the risk of not being believed.

Contrary to Santería, the Tumbuka *nchimi* (healers) *have to remember* when they dance and are possessed so as to give back a suitable diagnostic for their patients. They will otherwise not be able to detect what is wrong with their patients (Friedson, 1996,29).

Becker explains trance and the phenomenon of memory loss using the term “structural coupling”. She suggests that biologically, the brain may accustom and adjust itself to the rites enabling trance⁸⁵ (Becker, 2004,121). Experiencing certain music, the brain has the capability to shut down areas of awareness, it may block out certain events and exist solely in this other world of altered experience, knowledge and insight which belongs to the music world

⁸⁴ Haitian Voodoo's counterpart to Santeria's Oggun.

⁸⁵ For a detailed explanation, look at page 121 of her book.

(Becker, 1994,47). This may well explain the ecstatic states people experience at the rites, or just by dancing. At such times the brain may shut down certain functions like short term memory so that the individual is unable to remember the event or sensations afterwards (Becker, 1994,47). Drawing on research centered on autonomic nervous system arousal in relation to music and emotion, she suggests that some trancers are able to control physiological processes which usually happen automatically, like heart rate and transpiration (Becker, 2004,11). She also argues that performers are able to train themselves to remember their experiences during trance.

The documentary *Alive inside* shows the effect of music on people suffering from dementia. Music influences emotion and can stimulate physiological experiences aiding the patient to reacquire identity for a while. Music can arouse the whole person using many different parts of the brain, awakening memories and emotions which correspond with them. It is clear that we possess music within us, correlating with both feelings and memories (Rossato-Bennett, 2014).

Bluffing Possession Trance and Resistance

The gestures involved entering trance are well known. Some learn these movements, making it difficult to distinguish a real transit from someone faking it. After having attended many *tambores* where this phenomenon had seemed very real, I saw a classmate doing the *exact same movements* at a dance class. He was fooling around, not actually falling into trance. O’Farrill commented that acting is an important element within Santeria and there are many who pretend.

There are numerous stories about people who fake possession. I was told that no one would ever confess to having pretended as this is viewed negatively. However, one story was about a *santero* who in the midst of his shaking, knocked over one of the *tambulero’s* (drummer) instruments. At once he turned and uttered in a normal voice “Sorry!”, before turning around again, and continuing his trance. He was supposedly in another consciousness, and should not have known what was happening. The *tambulero* telling me this story was laughing and shaking his head as if exclaiming: how is it possible to do anything like this!?

Another story I was told was about a man mounted with Shangó at a ceremony where his son says “Dad, you have got a call”. He answers, “Not now, I am busy”. “But Dad, it is from abroad”. “Ah! Wait! Hello, hello, this is Shangó”. The *babalawo* telling the story said, “*There are horrors like this happening which should not happen. I do not know if this story is*

true or false, but you know that the ball starts rolling". It is unimportant if the stories are true or not, because it is in the telling and retelling of a story that is important. In this case the stories serve to police commitment to ritual practices. The stories are more warnings to performers that unless they are vigilant they will be caught out and others will laugh at them behind their back and tell stories about them. This telephone story is also about competing and contradictory lines of communication; the modern electronic world versus the religious medium. Its comic effect resides in substituting one foreign world for another, a modern secular foreign world for a religious one. It is also echoes with the Cuban desire for communication with the outside world, where mounting by Shangó could wait as communication with an absent family member is often rare and expensive. The retelling of such a story is about preserving the ritual frame from disruption.

Those possessed are studied by ritual specialists and other audience members for authenticity in performance and to assess if there are any flaws in the spirits' behaviour. At *tambores* it is important for followers to verify to their own satisfaction that if it is, indeed the Oricha who dances and talks, and not an *eggun* spirit or a mere individual. One verification is to note if the Oricha says and asks for the right things and performs the correct gestures right after descending. There has to be a consistency with everything including what the saint asked for at a pre-ritual, the day before the *tambor*, as crossings with *eggun* may occur. It is important to know the difference between being mounted by a dead person or a saint. Ritual specialists determine the legitimacy of those possessed, and if it is by an Oricha or an *eggun*, as the latter may talk and act like the Oricha. Verifying the possessed prevents the ritual and the knowledge from being used inappropriately or appropriated by just anyone.

The audience may require physical verification that those mounted are not faking it. An informant told a story about how the lady of a religious house was mounted. One of the participants poked her backside with a needle to see if it was for real. She turned around and was very angry. The musicians stopped playing as a fight started. They were unwilling to play for no reason, as the mounting was not genuine.

Often I heard about members of the grandparent generation who supervised the rites and ensured everything was done properly. One story was about a grandmother who did not accept people acting during *toques*. She was said to be extraordinarily perceptive in spotting frauds who deviated from how things should be done then. She would say "*this one does not have anything*" and then ask the person to leave her house. According to my informant, she was always right.

It is difficult for someone with little experience to judge whether a possession is real or not. Explanations of how to tell were often, “one just knows”. Experience and growing up in the religious environment were pointed out as factors to tell the difference. Some thought that the reason for faking was pride and a desire to claim greater spirituality and closeness to divinities.

A *santero* said it was easy to verify if the possessed was bluffing or if it was genuine. Having received and been *crowned* by his saint (been initiated) years ago, he knew that a properly mounting saint would see his invisible crown and be able to tell him apart from the rest without him having to wear his special religious attire, beaded bracelets, necklaces etc. The saint should therefore come over and salute him. If the possessed walked by without acknowledging him, he knew that it was not genuine. What is being measured here in genuineness and fakeness is the degree of everyday knowledge concerning religious membership and hierarchy.

Being able to spot the fakes or define something as fake allows ritual specialists to try to control the religion from those who might hastily appropriate it. It is part of controlling knowledge and membership. When people become possessed, they threaten to assume the authority of the sacred, and it is this that is being subverted or shifted back to the ritual specialists. By verifying and busting fakers, they warn outsiders that they are in charge of what is a true possession; they are in charge of the hidden religious powers of creativity.

Hurston notes that assuming possession by certain deities in Haitian Voodoo may be used as a type of resistance against those repressing individuals. *Guedé* is the deity of those who are repressed, the negro uneducated at the bottom of society's ladder. When possessing a devotee, this deity may critique those at the top who are exercising repression. Possession of this deity may be used to express what is felt but which one dares not say. Hurston concludes that one is forced to believe that many of the possessions of *Guedé* are disguises for those who do not have the courage to freely utter what they desire without the disguise of *Guedé* (Hurston, 1990,221). However, here Hurston is using disguise in another sense, in the sense of an empowering vehicle and voice rather than of conscious deception. For both people can be possessed by another spirit as a way of speaking their home truths. This is a point that Janice Boddy makes when discussing spirit possession in Egypt as for women to renegotiate gender relations and inequalities (Boddy, 1989).

Devotees have said that Orichas may “attack” those who are not dressed according to certain standards, especially if dark clothing is worn at rites, for light coloured clothes are

required. Similarly, if a woman wears pants instead of a long skirt, the Oricha might react by telling her that the clothes are unacceptable, or even rip them off her. One informant said that if I had worn the black pants I had on, the Oricha would rip them off! Such rules can be interpreted as resistances to social and cultural changes, to new models of femininity and gender relations. The spirits are voicing all kinds of social and cultural concerns with correctness, with maintaining tradition.

Other types of outbursts I heard of were during *cajones de muertos*⁸⁶ when a dead person mounted one of those present. If someone had made *brujeria* or a “dark deal” against a person at the rite, the dead were sent to do mischief. They would attack the culprit while others would have to try to control the possessed person so that not too much harm was done. When asked why he had come, he would answer who was behind the sorcery. Oricha and the dead operate here as moral guardians of the community, they police acceptable forms of magic, acceptable ways of using the supernatural.

In Cuba, trance and possession are used to try to overcome misfortunes. The Orichas can help solve problems if the right ritual steps are taken. This gives people a sense of regaining control in situations where they experience themselves as losing control. Trance-possession and dance gives devotees a stronger relationship with deities and strengthens belief in a better, prosperous future. By communicating and embodying the Orichas, they are able to control persistent problems, undesired situations and unforeseen circumstances in their lives.

Reaching Climax

Energy is an important contribution strived for during *tambores*. Determining a successful *tambor* from the unsuccessful, the energy level is crucial. Friedson (1996,39) writes that where the music is *physically felt*, there are “*substantial sources of energy*”. The energy produced by the *tambuleros* and the participants is through their calls that involve clapping, drumming, singing, chanting and dancing, without this the desired affects will unlikely be obtained. The energy is essential to heat up the event adequately to attract a deity’s attention, enticing them to join the festivities of the *tambor* (Wirtz, 2007,110). Dance, or even just moving is a spiritual current between the dancers that reaches out into another world. Emphasis is on the songs and the *Akpwón*, the lead singer of the *tambor*. Yoandri

⁸⁶ See the rituals for the dead explained on page 36 and in footnote 35.

explained that it is thought that the spirits come through the songs and the special language used:

When you go to church, there is a multitude of people who pray together. The Oricha is similar to this. To invoke the Oricha, the spiritual calls have to be done in a group. If the majority of those present knows the songs, it will help. One person will not achieve effects, but the positive energy of a group, not too big, and preferably religious makes it easier through channeling communal energy. For the Oricha to come down for real, there has to be enough energy and people to complete the circle properly. It is this energy, this circle which makes the spirit together with the Oricha descend. It resembles Catholicism, but it's different.

By wearing rattles, rustling streamers, and clanging metals, the bodies of those dancing are transformed into rhythmic instruments while moving to the music (Evans-Pritchard, 1937,157-158, Friedson, 1996,15). This helps create the ambience needed to reach climax. To reach this, the drummer's skill is a key factor. They have to have an overview and full control over the ceremony and know when to intensify the drumming and when to decrease the energy⁸⁷. They have to analyse those present, knowing whether those entering transit are initiates and if they are mounting to the right songs. To know which *toques* (songs) to play and to avoid an undesired spirit-possession, it is crucial for a *tambulero* to regulate the intensity and the possessions of a *toque* (rite). The sense of energy is directly linked to the drummers' abilities both to follow the pulse of the dance and to lead it at the same time (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003,120).

A successful *tambor* builds energy and intensity throughout the session, striving for a highpoint where the desired trance possessions may take place. All participants are encouraged to participate in both the singing and in bodily movements of the various *toques* played. Wirtz noted (Wirtz, 2007,101) that she often heard leaders demand that participants chitchat less in order to participate more in the singing and dancing so as to create the energy

⁸⁷ Maya Deren describes the drummers skill to control the energy's intensity in a rite by stating:

I doubt that a profoundly informed musicologist could explain how it can be that, without any change in beat, tempo, pacing, tone or volume, it is possible for the drumming to become more or less intense, although this fluctuation is unanimously recognized and can be consciously controlled by the drummer. He may observe that a loa (equivalent of Oricha) threatens to overcome the hougan (Voodoo priest) who must execute some complex ritual detail, and he can relieve the situation by making the drummer less intense. On another occasion he may, by simply maintaining that intensity, make futile a serviteur's resistance to possession (Deren, 1953,239).

required. Collective participation is crucial. When everyone sings and flows to the beat, the energy level can be overwhelming and from personal experience, the energy from the strong rhythms and crowd motion make the atmosphere contagious. It is this experience of *communitas* and liminality that Turner and Douglas saw as transformative power of ritual and as the essence of intense religious experience (Turner, 1969, Douglas, 1979).

When the energy level at a *tambor* soars, approaching climax, many participants get excited, intensifying both dance movements and the chants. A positive energetic spiral seems to take place. As the *tambuleros* succeed in encouraging the participation of devotees, they in turn invoke the *tambuleros* to play even more energetically. This intensifies the atmosphere, which again strengthens both music-making and dancing. From the outside, these situations may seem like chaotic frenzies bordering on stages of ecstasy. For participants though, this is both an enjoyable and primarily a religious experience. The happenings live up to the expected, and are done in accordance to traditions and customs.

Most participants are accustomed to the *toques* at the *tambores*, have seen the dances and heard the songs of the Orichas before, therefore recognition of familiar chants and rhythms alters enthusiasm among devotees, increasing energy levels and dance participation. As the chants are repetitive and are organized in a call and response form, it is easy for those unfamiliar with the chants to follow and participate with the others. As my fieldwork progressed and my involvement with *toques* widened, I experienced an increased pleasure partaking in these rites as my body remembered and had expectations to the happenings of the *toques*. Kapferer notes that “*music and dance have their meaning constituted in the directly revealed experience of them*” (Kapferer, 1983,181). As individuals gain experience through participation at *tambores*, their musical and dancing experience of them may be brought to new levels, where these experiences become the reality of the immediacy. As Friedson notes, being-in-the-world in a musical way can be a strong form of lived experience, where our world and our experiences of it melt into one (Friedson, 1996,5).

The Sensation of getting Mounted by an Oricha

When talking about the sensation of getting mounted by an Oricha, a *santero* said that he didn't feel anything, it just happened. Another said: “*It plugs your ears and it falls like a brick in your belly*”. He stated that the feeling was stronger when it was a *santo* than when it was the dead mounting him. A third *santero* explained a feeling of losing control over his body, losing air, starting to dance more and not remembering anything when waking up.

Explaining the sensation afterward he said: “*It sucks. You arrive there nice and clean, but when you wake up, eh!*” He bent over, looking down at his pants while laughing, “*You have to wash everything!*” He says that he feels no difference to mounting whether participants are dancing or not. If it is meant to be, it happens, whether you like it or not. It doesn’t matter where you are, in the kitchen, in front of the drums or seated. This *santero* did not go to many *tambores*, because he did not want to get mounted. If he starts feeling something while at a *tambor*, he tries to get as far away from the music as possible, drinking lukewarm water and waiting for the feeling to disappear before returning to the *tambor*. When he starts feeling things and is unable to leave the room, he often becomes mounted. Certain bodies are seen to be more porous and susceptible to the divine, and they need to take care not to be exhausted by this experience.

In a discussion with two *babalawos* I was told that some Orichas mount their children outside of *tambores*, without the generally required music, movement and chants. Explanations for this ranged from; the individual was a very spiritual person to the individual had not developed their spirituality properly. It is said he could be mounted if the Oricha passed by because he would be unable to control it. This could also happen if an Oricha wanted to warn its spiritual child. In one case, the mounting Oricha informed the possessed person that someone had just died. When he called home to that friend, the Oricha had been right.

Once, when an informant showed Elegua’s dance steps to a friend, he suddenly felt something strange happening, like lightning going through his body. He stopped at once, because it felt so powerful. As he is a son of Elegua, he feared that he might go into a trance-possession outside of a *tambor*, where drummers, musicians and ritual specialists were not present to control possession. For him, it was enough to do some of his Oricha’s dance steps, to feel a connection with Elegua. These forms of spiritual closeness are part of everyday life and have to be managed by individuals if they are going to be self-possessed. It is this struggle for self-possession and autonomy that is being partly worked through symbols of losing oneself. It is perhaps contemporary experiences of alienation that are being romanticised and refigured in religious terms.

If an individual or group feel the dance and music to be particularly strong outside of a ritual context, they may fear that an Oricha is descending outside a religious context. Talking about training by members of his Folkloric group, Dayron, the choreographer, said:

Sometimes we have been dancing folkloric dances within the group and there are people who have gone so deep into the dance that it has entered them, almost as if it had been a *tambor de fundamento* (consecrated *batá* drums), because there are people who it enters, who rise.

They were worried that the Oricha might not come down properly and then it has to be sent off correctly. Mounting outside of a *tambor* is dangerous if there is no one present who can bid the Oricha farewell safely. Orichas can descend if their child is an especially spiritual person who begins to feel and live himself within the dance and the strong beats of music.

One of the dangers of possession outside of a ritual is that the use of a *tambor de fundamento* is understood differently from an unconsecrated *tambor*. This is how Dayron explained it:

It is felt from within. You feel a strong current which takes you, which is the one that makes you shake and makes people rise. When you are really in an Oricha and the religion, it is something from beyond which you are not capable of imagining. Training and toques are two completely different things. There are profundities and feelings that enter and take you. These are things that may come to you when you have really gone into something. The difference is that when you are in the street (at *toques*), you feel something stronger because you are merged into the fundamento and the religion. At trainings the dances are danced more as choreography.

In the choreography of theatres, the dances are taken out of their religious context and practiced apart from their origin and meanings. Here Dayron, like many others, is revaluing street culture as the authentic and true culture where the dances are attached to the deities, religious rituals and meanings. Staged dancing seeks to reproduce and capture its power and authority, or such stories hint at this possibility but the stories are also warnings that the two are not the same. Through mimicking, the dancers may enter so deeply into the reality of dances and the religion they invoke, that they are able to reach a level of concentration, an altered state of being, triggered by the rhythms that allow them to get possessed. The stories entertain this possibility, they point to the power of ritual gestures, but they also warn against copying, that ritual is not the same as repeated or copied gestures. The latter can unleash energies that are too powerful and need to be ritually contained by specialists, musical chants, special languages, consecrated drums and knowledgeable participants.

Becoming at One with the Rhythms and Dancing One's Spirituality

Participating at *tambores* during fieldwork, I experienced the links between experience and levels of participation. Prior to attending my first *tambores*, I had learnt some songs at the introductory course at the *Cojunto*, but these were not close to the totality sung at a *tambor*. Likewise I knew some steps, but lacked knowledge of all the Orichas' dances. As my stay progressed, I became familiar with most of the chants sung and the dance moves performed. Through this familiarity, I was able to participate in a new way. The known rhythms felt stronger than the unfamiliar ones and were capable of taking control over my dancing body. Sometimes the heat, sound and energy in the room led me into a flow where thoughts stopped and I lived in the moment as it took away my self-awareness regarding the movements and steps I performed. Tiredness and exhaustion were replaced with energetic joy and happiness, dissolving whatever problems previously present. My body became synchronized with the music and became at one with the rest of the dancing bodies surrounding me. Observing the others present, they seemed to be in similar ecstatic states of dance where their movements were performed more energetically and exaggerated than earlier on in the *tambor*.

Anthropologists and musicologists have felt, as I, this contagious atmosphere where the current and energy take control over their bodies. They have felt dance's ecstatic function (Langer, 1953,201). Wirtz describes dancing and feeling the rhythms, not her, dance in her body (Wirtz, 2007,110). Likewise Friedson describes similar experiences where the tiresome dances become effortless (Friedson, 1996,15) and the feeling of observing himself dance from the outside (Friedson, 1996,18). This refers back to Becker's earlier description of trance and Langer's discussion of the virtual power of dance and that of rhythms to liberate dancers' bodies by carrying them through space in an easier and more effortless way than before (Langer, 1953,202). In highly ecstatic performances the group may be transformed into dance-beings dancing with the world (Langer, 1953,199).

Recognition of rhythmic songs or patterns may inform bodily movements and can enter and become the rhythms of the body. Langer and Jackson both speak of different forms of knowledge; the cognitive, which is mediated by words and reflection, and the embodied, like skiing, carving, and riding a bike. This latter knowledge is internalized into the body in a tacit non-discursive way. Music and dance are the same. They are mediated by a perceptual apparatus. This apparatus has a non- reflexive or non-discursive intelligence within it. The

embodied knowledge, instead of the head, executes learned or observed cultural movements according to the mimetic rhythms penetrating the body's senses.

In general, a typical *santero* only participates at a few *tambores* yearly. I suspect that in letting time pass between these events, the totality of the experience may become stronger. It may seem as if the body is capable of longing to hear the music and to dance its embodied dances. Therefore when it hears the yearned for and anticipated music in its learned context, it may overly absorb the rhythmic energy from the music and spread it to all its cells, turning into a dancing frenzy of energy and passion.

Actions are more likely to lead us to common truth as they speak more ambiguously and louder than words. We experience truths from within our Being when we attend communal activities where we all find our own meaning, the impression of common agreement and having a common cause (Jackson, 1983,339). The act of dancing the Oricha's dances in their religious context may provoke similar experiences which might contribute to a joyful experience of the rite in a communion of religious siblings, but could also diminish the distance to the deities with whom they communicate. These experiences are part of the apparatus justifying the existence of the Orichas and their powers over the humankind.

Chapter 7 Changes and Business

*“The real Babalawos,
the ones who really know how to work the religion,
live in poverty”*

– *Santero* in Havana –

Through previous chapters we have seen that within Santeria new devotees appear to be shifting focus. The suffering and deprivation in Cuba during the 90’s “special period” was blamed for these religious changes. The quest for hope and means to influence destiny through religion by the impoverished led to a new form of superstition. Together with the effects from the legalization of religion and the folklorization process of Afro-Cuban religions that redefined them as national heritage, religion was more accepted and religiosity gained popularity. After generations of religious prohibition, interest for Afro-Cuban religions increased amongst the wider population, including middleclass Cubans. Dayron explained that previously regarded as only for negros, Santeria could now appear to have more blanco devotees than negro. Some were motivated by concerns with stabilising or improving their health and economic status, and this was often merged with many looking to the past so as to find what they believe to be a truer religious tradition closer to the national history and roots of Cuba.

Many Cubans say that today, the religion has turned into something different, it has become business. Others such as Alain explain that this is nothing new. With abolition after an era of slavery, the only knowledge and profession ex-slaves had, apart from the work they had done as slaves, was their religion. To earn a living, the social system obliged many ex-slaves to take their religion as their work. There was more modesty about it according to Alain, whose own grandfather earned a living through these means. They preserved the truth, earning enough to eat and survive. The difference presently is that the once original modesty is perceived as having vanished. Osvaldo explained, as many others did, that previously small religious works would be done if perceived to be necessary. Now, however, if the help-seeker has money, a religious specialist will add unnecessary additional rites by claiming that this religious work is necessary, as a way of attaining additional fees.

Santeria as Business

*“They don’t look at the boy as a client,
as a person, as someone looking for help,
but as an economic product.”*

– *Babalawo in Havana* –

Certain *babalawos* are regarded with suspicion due to the perceived practice of seeking monetary gain. An informant stated that after finding psychology books on “how to convince people of what you say” and “how to know what they are thinking” among her ex-husband’s *babalawo* books, she no longer believed much in *babalawos*. She implied that these were part of his modern training in “How to trick people” instead of practicing the religion honestly as it is perceived to have been in the past. There is a romanticisation of the past that is part a critique of the growth of the money economy and the perceived way it is transforming people’s motives, commitments and beliefs.

Yoandri’s *padrino* (godfather) taught him that his *ahijados* (godchildren) were the only ones needing to know that he was a *babalawo*. Further he claimed that today’s *babalawos* show off the title because it is popular and can generate good money-earning opportunities. This corresponds very much with my observations as many *babalawos* wore religious regalia clearly indicating *babalawo* status.

Explaining a new trend, *santeros* and *babalawos* frequently mentioned with reservation the growing number of *babalawos* and their young age. It was pointed out that this tendency was strongest in Havana. This implication being that this tendency was strongest in this urban commercial area as opposed to the perceived greater authenticity of the more rural folk and their culture. In Havana, the price to receive Ifá (to become a *babalawo*) has risen greatly. Both the cost of the ritual procedure and required sacrificial animals have increased. The latter may be explained partly by restrictions concerning the shipment of live animals into Havana from the provinces (there is the threat of a prison sentence if caught). According to Alain, it has become so expensive that a humble, honest person working as a doctor or plumber, earning almost enough to support his family, three out of four weeks a month, would never be able to save enough to receive Ifá. Referring to the rapid increase in young *babalawos*, he claimed the majority had “vagabond mentalities” and had a monetary concern with turning everything into business and that they had just paid to become *babalawo*. He noted how selling drugs or other illegal products, could gain them 50 000 pesos (ca. 2000

USD) a week, and thus enough to receive Ifá. He suspected 90% of those newly initiated had a bandit-like approach to the religion as this was all they knew, consequently they made the religion into business. The bandit mentality that Alain mentions is perceived as having been reinforced in Cuba due to desperation conditions of the 90's when people started to "invent" new ways to survive. I see such interpretations as moral narratives that seek to explain the new situation where gangs and criminals use Santeria as part of their internal structures of solidarity and hierarchy. The poor have always been drawn to Santeria just as they have always been drawn to crime. I believe it is the changing nature of crime in contemporary Cuba as it becomes linked to gangs and drugs that concern many citizens and especially those who see themselves as the custodians of the religion.

The popularity of religion among tourists was also pointed out as a source for money and for tricking people. Foreigners were and still are perceived to be an easy means to earn money by many *babalawos*. Alain explained that tourists are tricked daily and that the swindle is astronomic. Sometimes tourists have rituals performed where they are given saints twice or non-existent Orichas⁸⁸. I observed on such rip-off at a *tambor*, where a Spanish *Iyawó* had her face painted as a stereotypical Indian⁸⁹ when she was presented for the *batá* drums. Rene, who was among the *tambuleros* (drummers), seemed troubled and when it was concluded, he angrily told me that he would never again do religious work with the head of that particular religious house as he seemed non-serious, and immoral. Alain explained how some *babalawos* milk their foreign *ahijados* for money by obliging them to return to Cuba to receive Orichas every few months. Upon receiving them all, new Orichas are invented because the ritual specialists become dependent on the exaggerated prices the *ahijado* pays to receive an Oricha. When the same Oricha is given twice to an individual, his or her two versions are given as though they are different, that the saint "from the *santero*" and that "from the *babalawo*" are given. The *babalawo*'s wife (a *santera*) will give the first, and later the *babalawo* will adorn the same Oricha more beautifully and give the latter⁹⁰. As a result,

⁸⁸ Two of these invented saints are "Gulu Gulu" and "Las dos Aguas" (the two waters, where objects of both Yemaya and Ochún are placed in a bowl making the "two waters". For a representation see Figure 2 of the dolls in blue and yellow.)

⁸⁹ Faces are generally not painted in any manner during *tambores*. It is felt that tourists need this kind of theatre and pay more when it is provided.

⁹⁰ Alain explained that this was generally done with Orichas as Olokon, Ordua, Ocha Oko and the Ibeyis, which are all less known Orichas than the main Orichas described in Chapter 1.

the couple receive money twice for the same Oricha. These practices are not religiously legitimate, but are methods to earn more money from the foreign *ahijado* who is seen as coming for the theatre of the ritual, its dramatic spectacles, rather than its inner real name. There are many foreigners who follow and learn the game, they know that it is indeed a business. Alain mentioned Mexicans who come to Cuba looking to receive Orichas so as to use them at home. Many of them have studied and know that it is a ruse, but it is also a business for them too. They become complicit in the ruse for they too are marketing primitive authenticity as a site of true magical mystical powers.

Though Santeria religion was discussed by many as in decline and losing its ethos to greed, there were some, like Osvaldo, who insisted that, overall, there was more good than bad. There were several *Cabildos* and religious houses that were still very serious and practiced as their ancestors had taught them. Alain perceived his *Cabildo* to be one of these when he stated that their job was to educate future generations, making them conscious of what was happening and enabling preservation. In this manner, they would make sure that the religion was passed on in a correct and original form.

Negating money

Even though money has become more important in religion, most *babalawos* with whom I spoke contrasted themselves to this perceived new trends. Yoandri, a *babalawo* and *tambulero*, said that he seldom thought about payment. There were many practices involving the *batá* drums, like funerals, where payment was not mandatory and where religious performances were seen as gifts. Specifying that commerce was not involved, Yoandri told me that he lived off his music, making religious earnings secondary. But he did claim that many others did work lucratively with the devil for economic gain⁹¹. He distanced himself from the practice, by affirming that he made a living through teaching religious music. He taught both Cubans and foreigners the artistic aspects of Santeria: the drums, chants and dances. He justified charging more to teach foreigners as enabling him to charge less for Cuban children. Though stating that religion was secondary, music-teaching was mixed with

⁹¹ This is one of the themes in Michael Taussig's book: *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America*, dating 1980.

religion; I saw one of his foreign students play amongst the musicians at his *Guiro*⁹². Religion and the teaching of music were therefore not held apart as he claimed, but often melted into each other.

The Orichas will Clear their Path!

Before, everyone knew the price of a consultation was 1.5 pesos. Today, prices vary depending on the ritual specialist and are generally very costly. 100 pesos may not be enough. Alain claimed that an old lady whose pension was 200 pesos (8.3USD) was often not able to pay for her monthly groceries. How much should she then be charged? Did she not deserve a consultation?

Ernesto claimed that Ifá's work is to save humanity. *Babalawos* are supposed to help people, not make money off them. Agreeing with this, Alain said that it was all about getting advice on your path, and generally no one should try to convert you. In his *Cabildo*, one gives what one can for a consultation. Sometimes only advice is needed to solve a problem. Reinforcing this, Ernesto argued that a *babalawo's* hand cannot do anyone harm and works defensively. If someone throws *brujeria* (sorcery/magic) at the *babalawo*, he will do *ebbós* (big or small sacrifices and religious works) and other things but never attack back.

Some *babalawos*, especially Yoruba *babalawos*, with whom I spoke believed that there would come a day when the deities would clean their paths, punishing those who were taking advantage of the religion for personal benefit. Rene explained that often the Orichas' punishments for a *babalawo's* wrong-doings affected the following generation and not the perpetrator. If a *babalawo* did not behave, his children would suffer from early death, sickness or misfortune. Likewise, Alain confirmed that any *babalawo* doing ill deeds would suffer through their families being destroyed via sickness, accidents and social problems. Money was no protection and the deities would not protect those who abused them. He argued that often those who sought just money did not believe in the moral punishments coming their way. But others did start to pray daily because they became aware of what they had done and the consequences. They had somehow observed the effects of dishonesty within the religion and none of them wanted their families to suffer for it.

⁹² A *toque* without the sacred *batá* drums which is seen more as pleasure and fun and is perceived as less serious than the sacred *tambores de batá*.

Reconstruction

Today it is often said that there are few good teachers left to pass on the sacred knowledge. Most have either passed away or moved abroad. Alain considers those with most knowledge as dating from before the revolution. Those born afterwards are often perceived as having not received the same rigorous training due to the legal prohibitions. Though many might have intended to teach others later, they were said to be unwilling to share knowledge as they considered it to carry taboos of secrecy. There is this sense of having moved away and lost a powerful mystical heritage and this is cultural of time and the present as less authentic and needing to work to reclaim and maintain the past. The romanticisation of the past and the sense of loss is also a call for vigilance.

Although, much seems to be forgotten, there are those who try to reverse the “bad” spiral. Alain explained that the mission of his *Cabildo* was to reconstruct ancestral heritage, teaching how ancestors did religious procedures. The two *babalawos* I met who claimed to be practicing Yoruba, not Santeria, were both involved in this re-establishment of lost knowledge. Rene’s *padrino* and Alain had frequent contact with Nigerian Yoruba. They argued for the importance of maintaining cross-continental communication- Alain explained that Santeria really wasn’t a Cuban religion, but a religion of African origin, practiced very differently in Cuba than in Africa. Here Africa acquires almost a pilgrimage aspect as the true site of sacred knowledge, of origins that needs to be kept alive in the present. There is a romanticisation and idealisation of this African heritage as having the potential to bring the sacred past back into the present.

Oswaldo, who was a Santeria *babalawo*, was of a somewhat different opinion. He stressed the importance of remembering that the religion is Creole, a mix of the African and the Cuban, not wholly African, when he said: “*Maybe the reality is over there, but in Cuba another reality exists*”. There seemed to be a difference in thought between Yoruba- and Santeria *babalawos*, where the former try to re-establish the original religion as it was upon reaching Cuba, while the latter think that it should not be reclaimed as such for Santeria is more a unique product of Cuban history.

In his teaching of religious knowledge, Alain uses modern methods. He has established schools that use videos to school new *tambuleros*. He also employs a dance teacher with a semi-professional background outside of the religious sphere to educate others in these ancient dances. This teaching system altered the initiation ritual process. The *ahijados*

no longer had to move in with the *madrina* individually, but were instead taught in groups by teachers. He said himself, as I have heard others say, that he was criticised for his methods of passing on religious knowledge. But he saw it as modernising the teaching process so as to maintain the objective of his *Cabildo*: to correctly pass on the ancient knowledge. Others thought that his methods were bad inventions that transformed the religion into something different, something less Cuban. The difference here is partly between those who seek to transmit religious content versus those who see the ritual procedures, taboos and rules as what is also being taught, as not just superficial baggage holding a truer content.

Conclusion

The communist revolution's prohibitions on religion had large consequences for Afro-Cuban religions' transmission of knowledge. This was based on an oral transmission of knowledge with the need to participate over time so to learn the practices, taboos and beliefs. This transmission was practically arrested over two generations. Therefore, many of those who grew up after Castro's revolution were not active participants in the religion, but had held it at a distance due to the risk of their children talking about it at school where authorities might then report them. When the practice of religion was legalized in 1992, an economic crisis had already descended upon Cuba, generating despair and destitution. The search for hope in hard times, created a boom in religiosity influencing initiation into Santeria. Partly due to new initiates' lack of religious education and background, changes within Santeria occurred and fewer were truly indoctrinated into the knowledge of the religion's dances. Another factor affecting change was that the State encouraged religious specialists to sell religious products to tourists. Here, the lack of specialised religious knowledge was not a disincentive for those with economic problems who could now make much money by selling religious products. This commercialization of the religion transformed the transmission of religious knowledge, especially the dances.

To some extent the polished and professional dance forms of folklorization were turned into models for new believers who came from families that had lost the knowledge of the dances and other religious knowledge. A religious specialist described the conflicting attitudes towards the staged folklore dances among the religious, when during one of the *Cojunto's* first performances, most of those watching left the venue after 30 minutes. The dances were perceived as badly performed and trivial. The difference from then and now is that when they were first performed, they were compared to how they were danced at rites and were not accepted as true copies of those "more authentic" ritual dances. Today, on the other hand, they are thought of as the true and correct versions. I met many devotees in Havana who sought these forms so as to learn the religious dances of their ancestors.

Even though the focus of this paper has mostly been on Havana I find it worth noting the difference I found in Matanzas. My impression was that devotees had a higher level of

knowledge of the dances, seemingly due to stronger family traditions⁹³. Noting the difference between these towns, informants argued that it was easier to preserve Santería through a tighter social control of the religion in Matanzas, which is a smaller town than Havana. A shared knowledge and a community existed in Matanzas, making it easier to maintain a certain religious standard due to a smaller population. There, most *santeros* know each other, often being siblings of the same ritual specialists and assist at the same rites. This makes it difficult to lie or practice incorrectly, for there is a self-policing community. Havana is bigger and has devotees from all provinces. It is impossible to know everyone, there are numerous religious activities, and specialists are more diverse and always present at ritual events to control procedures such as in Matanzas.

In addition, motives for religious initiation have shifted partly from religious to also include non-religious concerns with income. Individuals undergo initiation more rapidly, spending little time learning the dances for specific Orichas. Awolalu (1979) noted that dancing badly could upset the Orichas. Today, few know the specific dances and it is not regarded as mandatory to know them. It is now seen as sufficient to move oneself to the Orichas' songs and do general steps, but it is not necessary to know specific dances. Balbuena mentioned the change of importance towards pure movement and energy that featured currently at *toques*.

In a ritual context controlled by specialists, the specific music and dance create the atmosphere for Orichas to mount their spiritual children. Mounting is said to just happen and come to the person. Devotees believe it depends on a person's receptibility to the rhythms, but also the spirituality of the person. Furthermore, the following factors may all enable a spirit possession at a *toque*: time passed since the last event amplifying the feeling of the strong rhythms, the hypnotising movements of the crowd, the energy produced together as a dancing body, the belief that the body can become a vehicle for something foreign to take over it, and immerse oneself deeply into the music and dance so as to experience a feeling of being at one with the music and movement.

Orichas riding a devotee still try to encourage and show the dance steps to initiates who do not know how to dance. For the devotees, this sheds light on the importance of

⁹³ Due to my short stay, there is a possibility that those with whom I spoke were not representative for the whole religious community, though I did talk to people in different spheres.

dancing, but few take it seriously enough to learn the specific dances properly. Often there is a correlation between those who know the dances steps and those who get mounted. One of the effects of the decline in this knowledge has been a decrease in initiates who get mounted by Orichas during religious rites and therefore the need to hire mounters to secure communication with the Orichas at the *toque*.

Another important factor of the dances is the pleasure attained from dancing together in a group. Yoandri pointed to dancers' ability to escape from daily burdens through pleasurable dancing. He explained it as like going to the club together with other devotees, while visiting one's African roots. Dance is enjoyment in the cultural ambit. Dancing at a *tambor* may represent releasing and distancing oneself completely from all the problems in daily life. This was often mentioned and was one of the reasons devotees went to *toques*. Some like the prospect of having fun amongst their religious family and friends, dancing the Orichas' dances together. It contributes to the feeling of togetherness in a community, as it includes everyone through physical movement and enjoyment.

The religious dances are not just important within the religious sphere. They have become part of Cuba's cultural ambit, exemplifying national heritage. They have become part of Cuba's Art and help show what "the real Cuban" is. Popular modern Cuban and Latin music and dance incorporate Afro-Cuban elements creating other Art genres like salsa, reggaeton, etc. It has also become an export. The dances and dancers, the music and musicians are highly sought after internationally.

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