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La división de la Habana:  
*Territorial Conflict and Cultural Hegemony  
in the Followers of Oyo Lukumí Religion,  
1850s–1920s*

**ABSTRACT**

The Yoruba presence in the Americas, particularly in Brazil and Cuba, has been the topic of much research in past years. The role of the individuals who molded and guided the new directions taken by these cultural manifestations, however, continues to be virgin terrain. In particular and without doubt, women were the most important contributors to these acculturative processes. The present article examines the influence of three African women and their contribution to the evolution and survival of Lukumí religion in Cuba. In so doing, it brings to the fore other important issues that cast light on the lives of Afro-Cuban women in nineteenth-century Cuba forced to live in a Eurocentric society in which they occupied the lowest rung of the ladder. These issues highlight the hardships and impediments that in many ways all Afro-Cubans had to overcome in their struggle for power and respect—even among members of their own ethnic groups. Eventually, this struggle played an important role in the contributions made by these groups to Cuban culture and society.

**RESUMEN**

La presencia Yoruba en las Américas, especialmente en Brasil y Cuba, ha sido objeto de muchas investigaciones en los últimos años. El papel de los individuos que moldearon y guiaron las nuevas direcciones tomadas por estas manifestaciones culturales, continúa siendo, sin embargo, un terreno virgen. En particular, y sin lugar a dudas, las mujeres fueron las que más contribuyeron a estos procesos de aculturación. Este artículo examina la influencia de tres mujeres africanas y su contribución a la evolución y supervivencia de la religión Lucumí en Cuba. El estudio saca a la palestra otros temas de importancia que arrojan luz sobre la vida de las mujeres afrocubanas en la Cuba del siglo XIX, forzadas a vivir en una sociedad eurocéntrica en la que ocupaban el peldaño más bajo de la escalera. Estos temas enfatizan las dificultades y los impedimentos que las afrocubanas tuvieron que enfrentar en su lucha para adquirir poder y ganarse el respeto, incluso de los miembros de sus propios grupos étnicos. A la larga, esta lucha jugó un papel importante en las contribuciones de este grupo a la cultura y la sociedad cubana.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Cuban society faced controversies that threatened to undermine the considerable economic expansion the island had recently experienced. Two important issues divided society and subverted its foundations: the barbaric institution of slavery and the illegal slave trade that brought so many human beings to the island. In the mid-nineteenth century, after the triumph of the revolution on the island of St. Domingue and the establishment of the Haitian Republic in 1803, Cuba had blossomed into Spain's most prized possession in the Caribbean. With the destruction of Haiti's sugar industry, Cuba became the world's leading sugar producer. This sudden economic expansion depended heavily on manual labor provided by African slaves. In a little over one hundred years, Cuba also had become Spanish America's largest importer of African slaves in the four-century history of the slave trade.<sup>1</sup> Scholarship that recognizes the contributions of Cubans of African descent in areas such as art, music, dance, religion, folklore, and herbal medicine is a fundamental part of Cuban studies.<sup>2</sup> On an individual level, however, it is Afro-Cuban men who claim the spotlight, while, with a few notable exceptions, Afro-Cuban women are virtually invisible.<sup>3</sup>

### **Methodological Approach**

Drawing upon methodologies in history, anthropology, mythology, folklore, and on more than fifty oral testimonies collected in Cuba and outside the island, this article reconstructs the life histories of three important African priestesses of the religion Regla de Osha in the nineteenth century. It will elaborate on the existing literature in order to broaden and add depth to our understanding of the Yoruba/Lukumí culture, which represents one of the most important African groups in the New World. The anthropologist William Bascom accentuated the importance of this ethnic group when he noted that "no group has had greater influence on New World culture than the Yoruba."<sup>4</sup> With respect to the lives of the three women presented here, much oral history survives, recounted by their descendants, both in Cuba and throughout the Cuban Diaspora. Individuals are, perhaps, the best repositories for their own histories. Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* and Daisy Rubiera Castillo's story of her mother, *Reyita, sencillamente*, illustrate the value of oral sources and the importance—indeed, the urgency—of documenting and preserving the chronicles and accounts of the people who themselves were part of this history.<sup>5</sup> In the insightful words of Reyita:

Some of the things they [writers] say upset me; I don't know, I think that they do not delve deeply enough, they don't interview the elderly, after all we were the ones who suffered all those situations. I believe that as we [the elderly] die off, writers will be further distanced from the truth. Because it is not only what is said in those papers

[primary documents]: those [papers], according to the proverb “sustain all that is placed on them.” Another thing is how these [documents] are interpreted by each person that uses them. I recognize the effort and the determination that they put into it; but in the end, the books that result do not properly reflect the reality.<sup>6</sup>

Because of their gender, race, and enslaved status, the task of reconstructing the life histories of the three priestesses presented here was a challenge. Nonetheless, research reveals that these three women, and others, were important conduits of African religious beliefs. They were not simply responsible for the preservation of their beliefs, but through their personal and professional rivalry, they became the reason why the religion spread out from Havana to Matanzas. More important, their rivalry reveals more than enmity. By looking at the causes of the dispute, we have been able to establish that each of the priestesses was fighting for the supremacy of African traditions in certain of the religious ceremonies she had brought with her to Cuba. One faction fought for the supremacy of “court traditions,” while another favored the less elaborate use of “regional traditions.” Eventually, the more ritualistic “court traditions” became predominant in Havana, but the conflict between the two traditions demonstrates the vitality of African cultural and political survival in Cuba.

The accounts that follow are for the most part based on oral histories collected by a Lukumí priest whose insight lends an insider’s perspective to this work.<sup>7</sup> They tell the history of a disenfranchised, mostly illiterate people. These are chronicles that the more “enlightened” sectors of Cuban society had no desire to document and/or save. Like most oral histories, Lukumí renditions can disagree over specific details, and the narrator’s perspective and/or emphases can affect many aspects of the story. While it is undeniable that there are weaknesses in these accounts, especially in the various and varying versions that exist in Cuba and in the Lukumí Diaspora, there is an almost universal consensus concerning the important elements of the story, which accentuates their veracity. The oral traditions that survive in the Lukumí community are so strong that we can rely upon this consensus to confirm the validity of historic events. Ironically, this is also the story of a people whose ancestors were formidable oral historians. What more fitting tribute than to gather and recount their histories through the same medium they employed?<sup>8</sup>

### **African Antecedents**

From the late eighteenth century onward, while Cuba was being transformed into a plantation society, events were unfolding on the African continent that would also have significant repercussions across the Atlantic. The Oyo Empire, a powerful political entity in West Africa for at least three centuries, had begun to buckle under pressure from various sources: internal political strife and

power struggles; the revolt of the Dahomey and their ensuing slave raids into Yoruba territories that had earlier been under the protection of the Oyo; the slave trade itself; and, finally, a *jihad* conducted against the Oyo by their northern neighbors, the Fulani. The Oyo's ascendancy probably began early in the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Like many other West African kingdoms during that time, Oyo had not become a politically unified empire until the early seventeenth century. Greatly aided by its geographic location—in an area of vast savannas—as well as by the introduction and adoption of the horse as one of its principal military resources, by the late eighteenth century the Oyo exercised considerable control in West Africa and also had become an important supplier of human cargo for the slave trade. The strategic location of the Oyo along the trans-Saharan trade routes that traversed the continent contributed to the development of the empire as well. The Oyo gained a considerable income from the sale of northern war captives and other unfortunates, who were purchased from the traders for whom Oyo was an important stop on their southward journey.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest evidence of Oyo involvement in the slave trade is found in the work of a Dutch writer, Olfert Dapper, published in 1668, and it clearly illustrates Oyo's active participation in the trade since at least the seventeenth century. Dating its existence to the 1640s, Dapper described "a large kingdom in the interior, north-east of Allada, called 'Ulkami' [Oyo] which sent large numbers of slaves for sale through Allada and imported salt, which was extracted locally from sea water, in exchange."<sup>11</sup> Later authors also spoke of trade between the Allada area and the kingdom of "Lucamee," which was reputed to be a source of cloth and slaves.<sup>12</sup> Still, at this early stage of the slave trade, Oyo's participation was not as considerable as it would become in the late eighteenth century.

Before the 1770s, little evidence exists to identify Oyo either as a slave-raiding state or as a major source of slaves.<sup>13</sup> Oyo's interest in direct participation in the slave trade probably began around 1774 during the reign of Alafin [king] Abiodun, after he overthrew the tyrant Gaha, who had headed the Alafin's governing council, the Oyo Mesi. At the time that Abiodun ascended to the throne, Gaha had been the ruling Bashorun—a sort of Prime Minister whose power often surpassed that of the king.<sup>14</sup> Gaha's heavy-handed domination of Oyo and its subordinated kings began in 1754 and lasted until Abiodun's ascent in 1774.<sup>15</sup> In 1776 the French travelers De Chenevert and Abbé Bullet reported that the Oyo were furnishing slaves at Badagry, Porto Novo, and Whydah. They described Oyo as a "free fair where the different nations resort to trade; it is the Ayaux [Oyo] who currently hold the key to trade, and through whose hands pass the greater part of the slaves who are sold on this coast."<sup>16</sup> Abiodun was believed to have been active in this trade before his accession to the throne, by which time Oyo had attained its greatest imperial expansion.<sup>17</sup>

The number of slaves supplied by Oyo for export, primarily Hausas purchased from northern trade caravans, reached its peak in the 1780s.<sup>18</sup> But Gaha's tyranny and his ruthless disregard of the empire's laws had set an ugly precedent that would culminate in the revolt of Oyo's subject states and the empire's demise, something Abiodun was unable to prevent.<sup>19</sup> By the mid 1830s, Oyo was no more.

It was during this period — of instability in Africa and the intensification of sugar production in Cuba — that the Yoruba people, then known as Lukumí, made their appearance in the Americas in considerable numbers.<sup>20</sup> Although some Yorubas had been present on slave plantations in the New World since at least the seventeenth century, they were not a considerable presence until the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Thereafter, the Lukumí presence in Cuba grew at an impressive rate. In one study, for the years 1760–69, the Lukumí made up 8.22 percent of the total number of slaves in Cuba (354 slaves based on a sample population of 4,307 slaves); and even between 1800 and 1820, their numbers remained relatively unchanged, at 8.38 percent of the sample population (453 of 5,245). Fifty years later, the increase was significant. By 1850, less than twenty years after the Oyo Empire's demise, the Lukumí made up a demonstrable plurality in Cuba: almost 35 percent of the total slave population of the island.<sup>22</sup> This large Yoruba presence in the Americas, particularly in Brazil and Cuba, would be the most important progenitor of the Orisha religions that evolved in the Diaspora: Candomblé in Brazil and Regla de Osha in Cuba.<sup>23</sup>

### The Priestesses

Women have always played a pivotal role in Lukumí religion.<sup>24</sup> According to Lukumí oral tradition, fundamental to the preservation of the Lukumí religion in Cuba were three priestesses (*iyalorishas*<sup>25</sup>): Ma Monserrate “Apóto” González (Obá Tero), and Nã Rosalía Abreú (Efunshé Warikondó),<sup>26</sup> both believed to be from the Egbado region of Yorubaland; and Timotea Albear (Ajayí Lewú but better known as Latuán), believed to have been an Oyo native. Within the Lukumí Orisha community,<sup>27</sup> these three women were highly esteemed and respected for their position within the religious hierarchy and the knowledge they possessed. Of the three, only Latuán has identifiable living blood descendants. Nevertheless, all three are well remembered by their religious descendants in Cuba and abroad, who vividly keep alive many aspects of their history in the preservation of specific religious rites or traditions that are observed according to religious lineage. One of the traditional stories most present for today's practitioners of Orisha is the conflict over territory known to many as *La división de la Habana*, which resulted in the dividing up of religious jurisdiction for the island between Obá Tero and Latuán. Unintended yet important

consequences of this clash were the spread of the Havana-centric Oyo-Lukumí ordination ceremony to Matanzas and the reconciliation of the Arará and the Lukumí, two related West African peoples whose already strained relationship had further deteriorated as a direct result of the slave trade.

### **Obá Tero (Ma Monserrate “Apoto” González)**

Of the three *olorishas*,<sup>28</sup> the legends that surround the life and activities of Obá Tero in Matanzas represent the richest source of information. In all probability, Obá Tero was the oldest of the three, although it is impossible to know exactly when she was born. Many accounts speculate that she was well over one hundred years old when she died in 1907, from what most agree were natural causes and old age.<sup>29</sup> It is highly probable that Obá Tero was from the Egbado region of ancient Yorubaland and was brought to Cuba as a slave. Descendants agree that her Yoruba birth name was Apóto, and that Obá Tero — “the king has great calm” — was the name she was given when she was ordained in her native Egbado to Shangó, the *orisha* of thunder, patron deity of Oyo, and possibly one of the empire’s earliest kings.

According to oral tradition, Obá Tero arrived in Cuba around the middle of the nineteenth century, possibly in the 1840s or 1850s. Because of Britain’s attempts to stamp out the transatlantic slave trade, she may have been smuggled into the island on one of the many clandestine slave ships that illegally transported African slaves at that time.<sup>30</sup> If so, her experience would have been similar to that of Soledad Crespo, a Lukumí Obatalá priestess who probably traveled to Cuba via Sierra Leone and was smuggled into the island hidden inside a barrel.<sup>31</sup> Nothing is known about Obá Tero’s initial years on the island. Most informants emphasized that she had been a slave on an unnamed sugar plantation, possibly in Havana province, though one source insisted that Obá Tero had been brought directly to Matanzas and not Havana.<sup>32</sup> The harshness of plantation life may have been one reason she was reluctant to discuss the early part of her life in Cuba with her descendants. Or, if she did discuss it, it may not have been considered relevant by her descendants, for any details that might have been known have been long forgotten.

Though the details of Obá Tero’s life under slavery may have lapsed from the consciousness of her religious descendants, the pride they take in her place of origin remains extremely strong. It is universally agreed upon that Obá Tero originated in Egbado. In Matanzas, where her legacy retains much of its original purity, the lineage and its traditions were carried on by Obá Tero’s immediate religious heiress Fermina Gómez (Oshabí) until 1950, and since then by Oshabí’s descendants.<sup>33</sup> Even today, when members of the lineage discuss issues relating to religious authenticity and the group’s links to Africa, which continue to be the source of many heated debates, they emphasize that they are

Lukumí Egbado and that Obá Tero was born in Egguadó (Egbado).<sup>34</sup> This contention is supported by the existence, within Obá Tero's *ilé osha*,<sup>35</sup> of *orishas* that are considered to be of Egbado origin.<sup>36</sup> Although Yemojá is the *orisha* that is most closely linked to the Egbado, the two *orishas* that in Cuba are most commonly associated with Egbado are Oduduwá, the eponymous progenitor of the Yoruba people, and Olokún, the Yoruba *orisha* of the ocean. While these deities are known in many areas of Yorubaland and not exclusively among the Egbado, most *olorishas* on the island consider them to be of Egbado origin, possibly because they were introduced by the Egbado. Undoubtedly, these *orishas* were of great importance in nineteenth-century Egbado. In his review of primary documents written by Europeans living in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century, Peter McKenzie stated that in 1846 "all of Ado's [an Awori-Egbado town] citizens were seen as being dedicated to one or other of these *orisá* [Oduá, Obatalá, or Yewá]." <sup>37</sup> So strong is the association between the two deities and this religious lineage that Obá Tero, the best-known among only a handful of Cuban *iyalorishas* with these *orishas*,<sup>38</sup> is the one who is credited with having introduced the worship of Oduduwá and Olokún to the island. And until around 1950, through her descendants, Obá Tero's lineage continued to be the most important source for the worship and dissemination of Olokún on the island.

There are many cultural artifacts in Oshabí's home on Salamanca Street in Matanzas, which were entrusted to her by Obá Tero upon her death in 1907, that serve as further evidence to support Obá Tero's Egbado origins. Among these are Obá Tero's drums, the only known set of "Egbado" drums that still exist in Cuba.<sup>39</sup> These drums were in all probability made for Obá Tero in Havana by the famous *onilú* (drum maker) Ño Filomeno García (Atandá), who is also believed to have sculpted the first set of orthodox *batá* drums in Cuba.<sup>40</sup> In many ways, it is ironic that elements of Obá Tero's life can be reconstructed through musical instruments that women were forbidden to play. Obá Tero probably had these drums built while she lived in Guanabacoa, a suburb of Havana, and the neighboring town of Regla, the Lukumí "cradle." Regla was an important Lukumí enclave in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Cuba. Many Lukumí traditions that survived in Cuba came to the island through Regla's port. During the early nineteenth century, Egbado influence appears to have been strong there. Fernando Ortiz reports that a celebration for Olokún took place in Regla on the sixth of January annually, alongside the Catholic celebration of Three King's day. Egbado drums, according to Ortiz, were played by *egguado* musicians who "knew the beats and rhythms." Eventually, Ortiz says, as these musicians died, there was no one around to replace them who knew how to play the Egbado drums. As time passed, Oyo traditions eclipsed those of the Egbado and the Oyo *batá* drums became the dominant musical instrument.<sup>41</sup>

Obá Tero probably acquired her freedom sometime in the late 1860s, after which she came to Havana, leaving behind the plantation and the memories of its dehumanizing system of labor. The city offered ex-slaves many possibilities in terms of employment and survival. Ortiz dates Obá Tero's presence in Havana to the early 1870s, when she and her husband Ño Julio directed a *cabildo* in Guanabacoa.<sup>42</sup> Around this time, Ño Julio commissioned a set of *batá* drums for the *cabildo* from the famous Havana drummakers Ño Juan "El Cojo" (Añabí) and Ño Filomeno García (Atandá).<sup>43</sup> Ortiz has clearly shown that Ño Julio and his wife directed the *cabildo*.<sup>44</sup> Although Ño Julio was important in the association, the principal *olorisha* in the *cabildo* was his wife, which oral tradition says was Ma Monserrate González — Obá Tero.

By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Obá Tero was living on Dahoiz Street in the barrio of Alturas de Simpson, in the city of Matanzas, a place that many *olorishas* considered Matanzas's heart of Africa.<sup>45</sup> When Julio and Monserrate closed their *cabildo* in Guanabacoa and left for Matanzas, they took with them both the Egbado drums and the set of *batá* drums that Añabí and Atandá had constructed. Mystery surrounds the journey of the drums, and one account maintains that after Julio's death, the set of *batá* drums disappeared without a trace.<sup>46</sup> The mystery is complicated by the testimony of Obá Tero's religious descendants, who do not seem to know what became of them. Some even dispute or negate her role in bringing the *batá* drums to Matanzas.<sup>47</sup>

But, indisputably, *batá* drums did appear in Matanzas. Documentary evidence establishes the earliest usage of *batá* drums at a celebration that took place at the Cabildo Santa Bárbara on 4 December 1873:

An inspector from the town of San Francisco informed the Civil Governor of the city of Matanzas about a significant incident in the Lucumí Cabildo Santa Bárbara, situated on Manzaneda Street, on the corner of Velarde, where Ño Remigio Herrera Adeshina [Adeshina] played three strange drums he called *batá*, in the celebrations of December 3.<sup>48</sup>

The drummer and *babalawo*<sup>49</sup> Adeshina was probably the link through which Obá Tero came to reside in Matanzas. Oyo native Ño Remigio Herrera, better known by his Lukumí name Adeshina, was possibly one of the earliest *babalawos* brought to Cuba.<sup>50</sup> Adeshina entered Cuba through Matanzas, probably in the late 1820s, and was put to work as a slave in a sugar mill in that province. Tradition has it that soon after he came to the mill, he was recognized as an important priest by a group of fellow Lukumís who had acquired their freedom prior to his arrival. Adeshina's compatriots pooled their resources and raised enough money to purchase his freedom. Like most liberated Africans, Adeshina sought out the city, in this case Matanzas, and specifically the Simpson

barrio.<sup>51</sup> Soon after acquiring his liberty, Adeshina established the Cabildo Lucumí Santa Bárbara at 175 Dahoiz Street, on the corner of Manzaneda Street, where he began to practice as a *babalawo*.

Adeshina had obvious ties to Matanzas since it was his point of entry to the island, but he probably moved from that city (or was at least in the process of doing so) to Havana sometime around 1866, the same year that he established the Cabildo Yemayá in Regla, which is confirmed by the commissioning of the drums for this *cabildo* in 1866.<sup>52</sup> According to the archival documents, by 1872, Adeshina was established in Regla in a house at 23 San Ciprián Street. The house was valued at 1,800 Spanish pesetas.<sup>53</sup> He was still in Regla in 1881, although by then he had moved to 31 San Ciprián Street, where he lived with his wife Francisca Buzlet, his twenty-one-year-old stepdaughter Eugenia Lausevio, his daughter Norma Josefa, better known as “Pepa,” then seventeen, and his son Teodoro, fifteen.<sup>54</sup>

Why, then, do we find Adeshina back in Matanzas playing *batá* drums in 1873, when by that time he had already established his residence in Regla? Though it is possible that he lived in both towns and traveled back and forth, this seems unlikely, considering his advancing age and the historical period in question.<sup>55</sup> More likely, Adeshina, already well known in Simpson, made a trip to Matanzas to accompany Obá Tero and the drums that would be used in her *cabildo* there, as well as to introduce the priestess and the *batá* drums to the Orisha community. Ortiz has established that the use of *batá* drums in Cuba originated in Havana, in the town of Regla, where the drums were made. And according to archival records from Matanzas, until 1873 such drums were not known in that city.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the oral tradition of the *batá* drummers themselves maintains that it was Adeshina who trained the first generations of *batá* drummers in that city.<sup>57</sup>

Adeshina, then, was most likely the connection through which Obá Tero came to reside in Matanzas. By the time of Obá Tero’s move to Matanzas, the two had established a close and trusting relationship. According to all sources, they were inseparable allies. So much did Adeshina trust Obá Tero that he allowed her to ordain his daughter Pepa (Eshubí) as a priestess of Elegbá, the Orisha of destiny and the crossroads.<sup>58</sup> Most probably it was Adeshina who helped Obá Tero establish contact with the Lukumí of Matanzas. The *cabildo* that Obá Tero directed in Simpson was the very same Cabildo Lucumí Santa Bárbara that Adeshina had originally established there after his emancipation. The rapid growth of Obá Tero’s reputation as a priestess was greatly aided by Adeshina’s affirmation of her status. Many in Simpson also continued to associate the *cabildo* with Adeshina and considered it his residence in Matanzas.<sup>59</sup>

Obá Tero’s move to Matanzas may have been propelled by a series of competitive scuffles among Havana’s Lukumí *olorishas* in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In what is referred to as *La división de la Habana*, it is said

that some friction developed in Havana between Obá Tero and an Oyo priestess from another Havana *ilé osha*, the distinguished Latuán. During this period, the few Lukumí *cabildos* that existed in Havana were primarily headed by emancipated *iyalorishas*, possibly of Egbado origin, who represented the earliest Yorubas brought to Cuba during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Africa, women had played a pivotal role in Lukumí/Yoruba religious ritual; in the Oyo palace, for example, eight *iyalorishas*, titled ladies, had tended to the Alaffin's religious duties and needs.<sup>60</sup> By the 1860s, these *iyalorishas*, who had been transported as slaves to Cuba, wielded much power in the Lukumí community and made no effort to hide it. The Lukumí Regla de Osha that took hold on the island is indebted to the persistence, rigidity, and sturdiness of these women.<sup>61</sup>

### **Latuán (Timotea Albear)**

Latuán, an Oyo priestess of Shangó, arrived in Cuba in 1863.<sup>62</sup> Her descendants claim that she entered the island through Matanzas, and based on the date, she probably entered clandestinely. It is not clear if Latuán worked on any of the plantations in Matanzas province for any period of time. It is known, however, that eventually she and her husband Evaristo Albear, a Congo,<sup>63</sup> wound up as domestic slaves in the home of Colonel Francisco Albear y Lara, a military engineer who is famous for having built a new aqueduct to supply water to Havana's then growing population, a project that lasted from 1858 to 1893.<sup>64</sup> It is believed that Latuán and Evaristo met on the slave ship that brought them to the New World, as her descendants insist that they met and married in Africa.<sup>65</sup> Since they share the Albear surname, it is highly probable that at some point they were the colonel's "property" and not just his employees. Still, her grandchildren claim that Latuán was not a slave but an *emancipada*, and insist that legislation forced Colonel Albear to teach her to read and write and to pay her a salary for her work. They say that under the series of laws that led to the gradual abolition of slavery, she had to work as an *emancipada* for a period of ten years, after which she would have been given her freedom.<sup>66</sup>

Latuán apparently was a favored slave in Albear's home, something suggested by her literacy, since the fact that a law existed that required masters to instruct their slaves did not necessarily mean that everyone obeyed it. Being literate afforded Latuán a strong degree of respect among her contemporaries, which further buttressed her religious hierarchy.<sup>67</sup> Oral sources emphasize that Latuán was an avid reader; after her emancipation, relatives say, she would not budge from her house until she had read the day's newspaper. She was very proud of this achievement and boasted about being "una negra lukumí pero yo sé las cuatro reglas. Yo sé leer y escribir!" (a black Lukumí woman but I know the four rules [of literacy]. I know how to read and write!).<sup>68</sup>

Latuán and Evaristo had six children: Rosa, Isabel, Dominga, Martin, Eligio, and Herminio Severino. Their grandson Martin Zurria Albear, Dominga's son and the oldest of the surviving relatives, remembers that Latuán would gather all her children and grandchildren around her on the floor so she could tell them stories of Africa and of the *orishas*. In the religious realm, Lukumís from as far away as Santiago de Cuba would travel to Havana to request her services as a priestess and Obá Oriaté — master of ceremonies<sup>69</sup> — especially for ordination rituals. She was well known for her profound knowledge of divination, prayers, and chants to the *orishas*, and she shared much of this knowledge with her religious descendants and followers.<sup>70</sup> Despite her unyielding nature in religious matters, she was described as a very gentle, soft-spoken, and well-mannered woman who treated everyone with the utmost respect.

Sometime during the 1870s Latuán became affiliated with a *cabildo* in Havana, where she eventually exercised considerable influence in her capacity as Obá Oriaté. The *cabildo* was known only by its address, San José 80, which was in the Atarés section of Havana. It was considered an authoritative Lukumí cult house, and many powerful priestesses of the era were associated with it. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Atarés was an African enclave within the city of Havana. The Cabildo San José 80 had probably been founded by the first wave of Lukumís who came to reside in the city in the latter eighteenth century. Many of the Cabildo's founders are remembered in the prayers or salutations that are recited at the onset of most rituals. It was also presumably at the Cabildo San José 80 that Latuán met Efunshé, the other important priestess who would be involved in the subsequent struggle for power and territory.<sup>71</sup>

### **Efunshé (Ña Rosalía Abreú)**

Like Latuán, Efunshé was a highly respected and revered Lukumí *olorisha* in Havana. She was an Egbado, like Obá Tero, and possibly of royal origin. Some of her religious descendants insist that Efunshé was a princess in Africa. They emphasize that her disciples never allowed her to walk in the city; instead, they transported her around Havana in a sedan chair.<sup>72</sup> This emphasis on Efunshé's royal roots possibly is justification for the fact that she occupied the role of “queen” of the Cabildo San José 80. Efunshé's importance was unquestionable. At times, her personal presence there even overshadowed the important role of the *cabildo* as an institution. In the 1950s, for example, the researcher Lydia Cabrera confused Efunshé's name with that of the *cabildo* she directed, writing that “Efuché [was] the name of a late-nineteenth-century *cabildo* in Havana.”<sup>73</sup> How Efunshé arrived in Cuba is somewhat of a mystery, since most sources stress that she did not come to the island as a slave. Efunshé may have been one of those few fortunate Africans who, having been smuggled into the

island prior to the emancipation decrees, nevertheless gained their freedom immediately after arrival. Another possibility is that Efunshé may have purchased her liberty elsewhere in the Caribbean and then traveled to Cuba in search of work.

The facts surrounding Efunshé's arrival are not the only enigmas, as various other unanswered questions surround her. Efunshé seems to have left no trace whatsoever of her life before arriving in Havana. To start, there is some confusion about her Spanish surname: Abreú, Agramosa, Gramosa, Rosalía, and Rosarena have all been mentioned as possible surnames for the Lukumí princess. Most *olorishas* refer to her as Ña Rosalía, or by her Lukumí name, Efunshé, but they seldom mention a Spanish surname. Present thinking is that Abreú was most probably her name.<sup>74</sup> Two sources say that she was originally brought to a sugar mill in Havana province, the Ingenio Agramosa (or Gramosa), which belonged to a family of the same name, but thus far, no records of this sugar mill have been found.<sup>75</sup> Roque Duarte, the oldest Obá Oriaté in the United States, in a work in progress on Lukumí religion, uses Rosalía as her surname, referring to Efunshé as Ña Victoriana Rosalía.<sup>76</sup> Rosarena, another name that has appeared, may have been derived from Rosalía.

Additionally, Efunshé has no living blood descendants. Only one daughter has been identified with any degree of confidence: Calixta Morales (Odé Def). In apparent compliance with societal norms, Africans gave their children Spanish names, but many Cuban Lukumí also gave them extra-official African names.<sup>77</sup> Odé Def, therefore, is also known by her Lukumí name, Atikeké ("small gift"), a name that was usually given in recognition of a deity's intervention in the person's birth. Odé Def's Lukumí birth name suggests that Efunshé may have had problems conceiving the child and that she was considered as a gift from the deities.<sup>78</sup> The oral record also mentions two other relatives, either daughters or nieces, depending on the variant of the story. These two women are only known to us by their Lukumí names, Ashijú and Ashijú'rolá. One other possible relation was Kaindé, a *babalawo* associated with the Cabildo San José 80 who many say was married to Efunshé.<sup>79</sup> There is even some contradiction regarding Efunshé's *orisha*.<sup>80</sup> While most informants agree that she was ordained to Oshosi, some believe she was a priestess of Yewá, and at least one source has connected her with Obatalá. The link with Obatalá may derive from her name, which some believe alludes to *efún*, a white chalk used for Obatalá's worship.<sup>81</sup>

What is certain is that by the 1870s Efunshé and Latuán had joined forces and had established a strong reputation in Havana. Latuán acted as Obá Oriaté for all of her godchildren (*omó orisha*, literally, "child in *orisha*"), including Odé Def, who was ordained by Efunshé's first godchild in Cuba, Luis Suarez (Oshún Miwá). In the late 1800s, Efunshé inherited the direction of San José 80, and she ordained various *olorishas* in Havana in the last quarter of the

nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Until her death in the late 1920s, she and Latuán continued to work side by side, and Latuán was the Obá Oriaté for many of the ordinations conducted by Efunshé.<sup>83</sup> It is highly probable that Latuán either performed or directed Efunshé's funerary rituals.<sup>84</sup> Efunshé's influence was so strong that even today most practitioners of Lukumí religion in Havana claim to be descended directly from her, and not from the Cabildo San José 80.<sup>85</sup> For the most part, oral historians agree that when Latuán and Efunshé directed San José 80, the two priestesses were very close and expressed a mutual admiration for one another.

Efunshé's role in *La división de la Habana* is not clear. Obviously, she was a participant, since she was directing the Cabildo when the struggle took place. It is quite possible that she was the main protagonist in the contest, although she may have chosen to remain behind the scenes. One variant of the story of *La división de la Habana* insists that the real rivalry was not between Latuán and Obá Tero, but between Efunshé and Latuán, and that Latuán's move to Buena Vista in Marianao occurred as a result of friction with Efunshé.<sup>86</sup> There is little evidence to support this account; indeed, there is strong evidence to the contrary. What we can surmise is that there was a great deal of cooperation or, at the very least, some level of compromise between Latuán and Efunshé, for the rituals of their two lineages, unlike those of Obá Tero's, vary little, if at all, to this day. At the very least, we can conclude that Efunshé supported Latuán throughout *La división*, allowing the process to play itself out, which eventually brought a result that benefited everyone involved.

### Origin of the Dispute

Both Latuán and Obá Tero are revered today, and few Lukumís recall the territorial clash that resulted in Obá Tero's decision to leave Guanabacoa and move to Simpson. Of those who do remember, still fewer can say what led Obá Tero to move to the second most important city of the western end of the island. In the growing Lukumí community, which was expanding to include non-Lukumís as well, power and prestige were inseparable allies that everyone sought to attain and to maintain. Within their own "territories" in Havana, the Lukumí set their own rules. Anything or anyone that would counter any aspect of these rules was considered a threat. In a society where Africans and their descendants occupied the lowest rungs of the social ladder, the Lukumí fought tenaciously to retain their hard-won status, even if this meant resorting to *ogú* (spiritual power) and slander. The friction between Obá Tero and Latuán became much more than a contest for popularity, escalating to become a subtle, although by no means discreet, war that lasted for several years. Within the established rules of the combat, both *iyalorishas* used every resource at their command, including negative propaganda, intimidation, and spiritual power.

The propaganda became so vitriolic that Obá Tero's *cabildo* became known disparagingly as the *Cabildo Alakisá*—the House of Rags.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, after numerous encounters and scuffles, the two factions reached an understanding. Obá Tero moved to Matanzas, and Latuán, whom most say was the victor, stayed in Havana. From that day forward, neither priestess would set foot in the other's "kingdom."<sup>88</sup>

Beyond personal animosity and professional rivalry, however, several other factors contributed to *La división de la Habana*. West African antecedents probably fostered some bitterness between the Egbado and the Oyo. The Egbado in Yorubaland had been "very loyal subjects of the Alafin [king of Oyo]" since at least the mid-seventeenth century. But that did not necessarily mean that they were on the best of terms with the Oyo people, whose numerous incursions into Egbado territory in the latter half of the 1700s subjected the Egbados to Oyo rule.<sup>89</sup> Those Egbado who had suffered as a result of the Oyo's incursions, those who possibly lost relatives, or whose offspring or siblings had been captured as war bounty and sold as slaves, would not have held the Oyo in high esteem.

In Cuba, there were clear signs of unresolved tensions between the two groups. Many Egbados had been brought to Cuba in the late 1700s when the port town of Regla, which would soon become an important Lukumí enclave, was in its infancy. The number of Oyo slaves in Cuba would grow considerably after the 1780s, which signaled the onset of friction in West Africa that eventually escalated and led to the empire's downfall in the 1800s. But the Egbados definitely preceded the Oyos in Cuba. In the early nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Dahomey had rebelled against Oyo, extending its slave raids into southern Yoruba territories, including Egbado, that had formerly enjoyed Oyo's protection. As a consequence, the Dahomey enslaved many Egbado citizens and shipped them to the New World, especially to Cuba. At the time, the Oyo were too preoccupied with their own troubles to reprimand Dahomey for its defiance, and the empire stood silently by while its territories were invaded.<sup>90</sup> Accordingly, in Cuba, Egbado traditions originally dominated Lukumí religious practices, particularly in Regla. It was not until about 1825, then, that Oyo practices became paramount.<sup>91</sup>

As the Oyo grew in numbers and importance in Havana, they sought to expand their political and cultural hegemony by establishing their patterns of ordination and worship as the official patterns for Lukumí religion in Cuba. In the environs of Havana, until the Oyos' arrival in large numbers, the Lukumí religion had been conducted in a manner similar to the more personal, family-oriented worship that was commonly practiced in Yoruba compounds in Africa. In that system, the *orisha* was consecrated for the entire compound or household. Through possession or consulting the oracles, a representative from the family was selected to attend to the deity's worship, and certain ceremonies

were performed to grant this individual the right to do so. This person, although considered an *olorisha* because he or she attended to the deity, was not duly ordained into the priesthood; that is, he or she was not “crowned.” After having been so empowered, he or she could perform cleansing rituals, divination, offerings, and other rites for the compound or community, rites that elsewhere were typically performed by an ordained *olorisha*. Upon the individual’s death, a relative previously chosen by the deceased or determined in divination would inherit the deity. This type of worship in Cuba was called *santo parado* (standing saint), or *santo de dotación* (workgang’s saint).<sup>92</sup>

In contrast, the ordination of an *olorisha* in urbanized areas around Havana was much more complex, as it followed the intricate and highly ritualized patterns that had been used in the courts and royal palaces of Oyo and Oyo-influenced areas of ancient Yorubaland. All the areas in West Africa that had come under Oyo influence — Egbado among them — had been inculcated into the worship of Shangó, Oyo’s patron *orisha*, and by extension, had been influenced by Oyo’s rituals.<sup>93</sup> The Lukumí ordination ceremony, *kariosha*, is referred to as “crowning.” In the words of Efunshé’s daughter, Odé Defí: “Hacer santo es hacer rey. Y kariocha es una ceremonia de reyes, como las del palacio del Obá Lucumí” (To make saint [to be ordained to an *orisha*] is to make royalty. And *kariocha* [the ordination ceremony] is a royal ceremony, like those from the palace of the Lukumí [Oyo] king).<sup>94</sup>

Traditionally, when devotees spoke of ordination, they commonly referred to it as *coronar santo* (crowning the saint). In fact, even today, on the second day of the Oyo-centric Havana ordination ritual, the ritual garments include a very elaborate crown that is placed on the novice’s head by the godparent or sponsoring *olorisha*. Most important, Havana’s *orisha* rituals revolve around the Obá Oriaté, the master of ceremonies for all rituals, an indispensable religious specialist who performs the majority of ordination and consecration rites in the religion. While it is still unclear whether the Obá Oriaté existed in African tradition, in all probability this role would have fallen to the priestesses who served the Alafin in the Oyo palace.<sup>95</sup> The word *obá* (king) in the title Obá Oriaté is a clear reflection of the importance of this rank, and the religious dictates of the individual who holds this rank, like the Alafin’s secular proclamations, are considered “law.”

As Oyo natives displaced Egbados, the Havana rite of ordination into Regla de Osha became extremely Oyo-centric, and Havana became the center for the later dissemination of these traditions to other areas of the island. Not surprisingly, Havana practitioners sought to maintain their predominance by making the royal Oyo coronation ceremony the only legitimate ordination ritual of Lukumí religion on the island. Illustrative of such attempts to enforce Oyo hegemony is the case of Octavio Samá (Adeosun), better known as Obadi-mejí. Samá, born of Lukumí parents, became one of the most controversial and

influential individuals in the history of Lukumí religion on the island. When he arrived in Havana from his native Sabanillas in the early twentieth century, Samá sought to establish his religious practice in the city by identifying with the Lukumí religious community there. He claimed to have been ordained to Oshún, the Lukumí *orisha* of sensuality and beauty, in Sabanillas by his Lukumí family. The Havana community refused to recognize his claim and insisted that he submit to initiation in Havana's Oyo-centric ordination rite. Samá was definitely well versed in Lukumí rituals and even spoke the Lukumí language fluently. In fact, his Lukumí was much better than his Spanish. Although he was a Creole, it is said that he spoke Spanish like a *bozal*, a derogatory term that was used to describe newly arrived slaves.<sup>96</sup>

Latuán, who by this time had established a strong reputation as one of the most respected and powerful Lukumí *olorishas* and Obá Oriatés in Havana, insisted that Samá's ordination in Sabanillas had not been orthodox. By her decree, Samá was ordained in Havana, not to Oshún but to Aganjú, *orisha* of the deserts and patron of travelers. Latuán performed the ordination herself. On the third day of the ordination, in a ceremony during which divination is performed for the novice and the *orishas* express their prescriptions and proscriptions through the oracles, it was revealed that Samá had not lied about his earlier ordination. As a result, he was given the name Obadimejé — "he who is crowned twice." Actually, the term translates literally as "king becomes two," but in Cuba it is interpreted as I have given it here.

In the years following this controversy, any resentment that may have developed between Latuán and Obadimejé as a consequence of her challenge to his legitimacy was put aside, and until her death in February 1935 they remained great friends. Indeed, one of Cabrera's informants told her that Obadimejé and Latuán were inseparable. In fact, the informant hinted at a conspiracy between the two to reordain and/or limit the functions of *olorishas* from the Cuban countryside.<sup>97</sup> It is known that Latuán often boycotted the rites of *olorishas* whose ordinations she considered doubtful by Havana standards, by refusing to lend her services as Obá Oriaté.<sup>98</sup> If Latuán refused to participate, no other Obá Oriaté would dare to challenge her authority by performing a rival ceremony. Apparently, despite the deference she enjoyed from most of her contemporaries, Latuán continued her power struggles for leverage and hegemony well into the twentieth century.

Obadimejé became Latuán's only recognized male disciple, working alongside her and serving as her arms and eyes after she became too old to perform rituals herself. Interestingly, after Latuán's death, the position of Obá Oriaté became dominated by men, who gradually displaced the women who until that time had exercised the office. By the time of Obadimejé's death in October 1944, the Obá Oriaté position was an almost exclusively male function. Obadimejé trained two known disciples, Tomás Romero (Ewín Letf) and Nicolás Valentín

Angarica (Obá Tolá). Despite having been mentored by some of the greatest *iyalorishas* in Lukumí religion, he never trained a woman.<sup>99</sup>

### *La division de la Habana*

The coronation of Obadimejí and his subsequent leadership within the Cabildo, contrasts sharply with the rivalry that developed between Latuán and Obá Tero. Theirs grew out of the variations that existed between Egbado rites and those of the growing Oyo-centric groups. At the heart of the controversy was Obá Tero, who opposed the new reforms or variations that had been brought to Havana, which stressed the already contentious relationship that existed between Obá Tero and the rest of the community.<sup>100</sup> Obá Tero was an Oní Shangó<sup>101</sup>; she had been ordained in what seems to have been an Egbado palace tradition and was obviously influenced by Oyo, although her practice entailed significant regional differences. Although many of Obá Tero's Egbado ritual practices did not conform to the growing Oyo-centric Havana tradition, her ordination and status, in effect, her legitimacy as an *iyalorisha*, were never questioned. Because of common beliefs, her ordination was considered valid by Oyo, and thereby Havana, standards. By itself, her ordination to Shangó, her tutelar *orisha*, was sufficient proof that her coronation conformed to Oyo tradition.<sup>102</sup> She definitely was recognized as a valid and orthodox *iyalorisha*.

While avoiding any overt challenge to Obá Tero's legitimacy, Latuán, at the forefront of the Oyo Court tradition in Havana, did challenge certain procedural aspects of Obá Tero's Egbado rites that were uncommon among the Oyo, and this was the basis of the rivalry between the two. Moreover, Obá Tero contended that Latuán was reforming the religion to cater to other Africans and to the growing presence of whites and mulattos.<sup>103</sup>

Efunshé sided with Latuán against Obá Tero, introducing many adaptations to the Lukumí religion in Havana as well as some rituals that had not been known before her arrival. Some informants say that, before Efunshé came to Cuba, it was the case that during a new *olorisha's* consecration she would be provided with two *orishas*: Elegbá, the *orisha* of the crossroads, as well as the specific tutelar deity that had been identified for the initiate by the oracles. This custom was typically referred to as *pie y cabeza* ("feet and head"), as the novice was provided with her/his tutelary *orisha*—the "head" *orisha*—as well as the *orisha* of the crossroads, which represented the "feet" with which one would travel along life's road. If the individual needed any other *orishas*, the oracles would determine that on the third day of the ordination ceremony. Oral tradition claims that when Efunshé came to Cuba, she introduced a number of additional *orishas* into the ordination ceremony. Perplexingly, in spite of Efunshé's Egbado origin, the Lukumí consider that most of these *orishas* have strong ties with Shangó, and thereby Oyo, not Egbado, tradition. Four

*orishas*—Obatalá, Yemojá, Oshún, and Shangó—along with Elegbá, are often considered the principal pillars of the Lukumí ordination.<sup>104</sup>

On the one hand, variations in ritual practices were not uncommon in Lukumí religion; each Lukumí group brought its own traditions to the island. Traditions varied considerably from one group to another, and distinctions often existed even within members of a single group. In all probability, these differences had their origins in Yorubaland and were then strongly enforced by the Lukumís in Cuba, who needed to reinforce a sense of connection with their lost homeland. The members of the Cabildo Iyesá Moddún in Simpson, all blood relatives, provide an excellent example of this type of tenacity. To this day, the Cabildo continues to follow the African traditions from its territory of Ijeshá, and they have not acceded to either Oyo or Egbado pressure. It should be noted that Ijeshá territory was never penetrated by the Oyos' cavalry because of its location in a heavily forested area of the country where horses were ineffective. Although they paid yearly tributes, the Ijeshá were never considered Oyo subjects. Indeed, the Ijeshas were typically mocked by the Oyo as an inferior people, which was possibly a way to divert attention from the embarrassment occasioned by the Oyos' inability to penetrate the Ijeshas' forests.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps the refusal to accept Oyo-centric religious influences as practiced in Cuba reflects a continuation of the Ijeshas' historical resistance to Oyo hegemony.

On the other hand, what constituted the exact procedure for the *pie y cabeza* rite is contested. While the rituals inherent in *pie y cabeza* in all likelihood reflect the older, rural *santo parado* tradition, there is no evidence that the *pie y cabeza* consecration was limited to only two *orishas*. This custom of receiving various *orishas* seems to have African antecedents, for it is paralleled by similar practices in Brazilian Candomblé.<sup>106</sup> It does not seem likely, then, that Efunshé introduced additional deities to the ordination. Rather, what is most probable is that she introduced the Oyo-centric palace tradition of the crowning ceremony, the *kariosha*, which then gradually supplanted the rural, *santo parado* tradition.<sup>107</sup>

Obá Tero refused to practice according to the new standards or alter her rites in any way. She, too, may have introduced some Oyo influences from Yorubaland, but apparently they were not sufficient to placate Latuán. Indeed, one of the fundamental traits of Obá Tero's character was her unyielding nature, and the controversies in Havana earned her a disparaging nickname: la Reina de Quitasol (literally, the "Queen of Take-Away-Sun," or the one who makes the day cloudy). Eventually, Obá Tero came to be seen as a heretic whose rituals varied from those of the more powerful faction; in other words, Obá Tero's rituals "clouded" the rites of the contending faction by flying in the face of the system Latuán and her supporters were trying to impose. This perception worked in Latuán's favor, as many *olorishas*, both deliberately and uninten-

tionally, used the disagreement between the two priestesses to foment additional tensions. It is worth noting that Latuán did not have any difficulties with the other Egbado *olorishas* who practiced in Havana; perhaps this was because not all Egbados were as contentious and rigid as Obá Tero.

### Obá Tero in Matanzas

As a consequence of the bad blood between the two reigning priestesses, Obá Tero relocated to Simpson, where she introduced the unknown Oyo-Egbado ordination ritual to the residents of Matanzas. She is therefore credited with having brought the *kariosha* ceremony to Matanzas, from whence it spread to other areas of the island.<sup>108</sup> Controversy followed Obá Tero to Simpson. Soon after her arrival, she once again found herself engulfed in a religious conflict with a Matanzas *olorisha* over the legitimacy of the ordination of Fermina Gómez (Oshabí). Oshabí was a Creole, born on a sugar plantation, where her mother María Elena Gómez (Balagún) had been brought as a slave from the Kalabar area of West Africa. Balagún was ordained to Oshosi in Cuba by Obá Tero. Oshabí's father, Florentino Gómez, was an Egbado. He was apparently involved with Egúngún worship in Matanzas, and was called Elepirí, a name that may reflect some ties with the Yoruba Egúngún cult.<sup>109</sup> Some sources say that he was in charge of the masks used for Egúngún rituals in the city.<sup>110</sup>

Oshabí had been ordained to Oshún in the 1870s by Ño José (Ikudaisí), in what seems to have been the rural *santo parado* tradition. One source insists that Ikudaisí was Oshabí's paternal grandfather.<sup>111</sup> Oshabí's paternal family was Erómele, an obscure Egbado subgroup that in all probability are the Egbado Imálà.<sup>112</sup> One researcher has said that the Imálà were mostly Egbados who migrated south from Oyo during the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>113</sup> Presumably, Ikudaisí, who is alleged to have also lived in Regla, was responsible for having brought Oro dancing and Egúngún masks and dancing to Matanzas.

Ironically, Oshabí's life took a terrible turn soon after her ordination ritual. Word of the situation reached Obá Tero, who sent for Oshabí and, through divination, determined that the calamities she was facing had occurred because her ordination had been improper. To correct the mistake, the ordination had to be revalidated. To make matters worse, Obá Tero claimed that Oshabí had been ordained to the wrong *orisha*! Obá Tero reordained her, this time to her "true" *orisha*, Yemojá.<sup>114</sup> Needless to say, the decision to reordain Oshabí brought Obá Tero serious problems with Ikudaisí, and in a stark reminiscence of *La división de la Habana*, soon after, the two *olorishas* were at war. But this time Obá Tero was determined to win, and in so doing, she established an unsailable reputation in Simpson as an extremely powerful and knowledgeable priestess.

A few days after Obá Tero had concluded Oshabí's reordination, sometime after midnight, Ikudaisí came to the Cabildo's door and began to perform a ritual that he boasted would teach his rival a lesson. But Shangó, Obá Tero's *orisha*, had other plans. The unsuspecting *iyalorisha* was already asleep when Shangó possessed her, and she ran to the door and caught Ikudaisí in the act. Ikudaisí was shocked. Dumbfounded, he stumbled and fell, then immediately jumped to his feet and deliriously ran down the street, fearing Shangó's wrath. The commotion awakened Obá Tero's neighbors, who came out to see what was going on. Immediately, Shangó performed a ceremony in the doorway to overturn Ikudaisí's *ogú*. When she returned from her possessed state, Obá Tero was puzzled and wanted to know what had happened to her. When her neighbors told her what had occurred, she was outraged!<sup>115</sup>

Hostilities between the two *olorishas* lasted for months. Whenever Ikudaisí had to walk down Obá Tero's block, he would cross to the opposite side of the street to avoid any encounters with his feared rival. Nevertheless, Ikudaisí continued to discredit Obá Tero wherever he went and persisted with his spiritual attacks against her. Although he never dared return to her doorstep again, he sent envoys to throw medicinal powders and other *ogú* in her doorway. At first, Obá Tero simply chose to ignore Ikudaisí's futile threats and remedied the situation with minor rituals to protect her house against him and his magic. Shangó was another issue, though, and he was losing patience. One day, just before noon, the enraged *orisha* again possessed Obá Tero. Tradition insists that she behaved like the dark, menacing clouds raging with lightning flashes that roam the sky at the onset of the violent storms that are so typical both in Africa and the Caribbean.

Shangó dashed out to the wooden bowl that rested atop the inverted mortar where Obá Tero kept his attributes and took one of his most sacred emblems, the lightning stone (*edún ará*), from the bowl. Myth says that such stones accompany the bolts of lightning that the *orisha* propels from the heavens to castigate the wicked. Shangó ran out the doorway with the stone, and then walked to Ikudaisí's house and stood in his doorway. Holding the stone in his hand, Shangó performed a rite with the stone and yelled to the heavens. Soon after, the skies darkened and an ominous thunderstorm ensued. Lightning strikes were reported all over the town, but one very symbolic bolt struck right in front of Ikudaisí's door, in the same spot where Obá Tero, possessed by Shangó, had stood a while earlier. Mysteriously, Ikudaisí died the following day and Obá Tero was hailed as the victor.<sup>116</sup>

In spite of the teleological echoes in this story, believers are convinced that *La división de la Habana* and Obá Tero's subsequent relocation to Matanzas were the result of a supernatural intervention, whose intentions reached beyond the petty human issues involved in the disputes. In the thirty years that she lived in Simpson, Obá Tero revolutionized the practice of Regla de Osha in the town,

and by extension, the entire province. She completely reformed Matanzas Lukumí practices by introducing her Egbado ordination rituals as they had been practiced in the ancient Yoruba palaces and in Havana. Before her arrival in Simpson, there had been no orthodox ordinations in that city, at least not the type of ordination that would have been considered orthodox by Havana's criteria, the *kariosha*. That ritual eventually became the acceptable ordination rite for the entire island. Additionally, after her clash with Ikudaisí, Obá Tero's reputation as a powerful priestess and mount of Shangó was unassailable. No one dared to doubt her knowledge, and any skeptics that may have had their reservations were too impressed — possibly intimidated — to dare to voice them.

Obá Tero's arrival in Matanzas had one other important repercussion. Although the details are a bit vague, she was the principal influence in reuniting two African ethnic groups that had been archenemies in West Africa: the Lukumís and the Arará, so-called by traders because their origins were at the port of Allada in the ancient kingdom of Dahomey. Since its inception as a state on the West African coast, the kingdom of Dahomey had had a significant impact on neighboring coastal areas. Dahomey often disrupted the flow of slaves from the interior, as well as sowing seeds of disruption at the compounds where slaves were held awaiting European slave ships. Eventually, these disruptions affected the trade of neighboring peoples so much that the Oyos decided to take action against the younger kingdom. Francisco Pereyra Mendes, the director of the Portuguese slaving port of Whydah, reported that around April 1726, the Oyos began a series of devastating invasions into Dahomey.<sup>117</sup>

Oyo attacks continued for the remainder of the decade, so that by 1730 the Dahomeans came under the domain of the northern empire, agreeing to pay Oyo a yearly tribute. But Dahomey encountered difficulties in fulfilling the terms of their agreement with Oyo, which brought further Oyo hostilities down upon them. Finally, in 1748, both states reached an agreement that would stay in force until the onset of Oyo political unrest in the late 1770s. By that time, Oyo had also incorporated much of northern Yorubaland and was receiving considerable revenue in the form of tribute from various other Yoruba states (including Owu, Egba, Ketú, Sabe, Egbado, Ilesha, Ilá, Ijebú, and Dahomey). One result of the Oyo invasions of Dahomey was that many Arará found themselves on slave ships bound for the Caribbean. Their arrival in Cuba preceded that of their Oyo-Lukumí foes by almost one hundred years.<sup>118</sup>

Resentment and bitterness, legacies of Africa, marked the relationship between the two groups on the island. This clash, which probably existed since at least the late eighteenth century, intensified during the nineteenth century with the increased presence on the island of enslaved Lukumís. As the number of liberated Lukumís grew, a confrontation between the two groups became inevitable. By the nineteenth century, emancipated Lukumís and Arará had

been forced by circumstance or necessity to live in the same cities or towns, and sometimes even in adjacent houses or *solares* (housing complexes). Tradition emphasizes that although the two groups exhibited some level of tolerance for one another, for the most part they tried to keep their distance. Although the Lukumí and Arará religions are sister religions, and many Lukumí deities had been adopted by the Arará in West Africa, the religious rituals of one group were often declared off limits to the other and seldom would an Arará visit a Lukumí *cabildo* or vice-versa.

Oral tradition emphasizes that at some point, possibly around the 1890s or early 1900s, at the behest of the deities, the Lukumí began to share their knowledge with the Arará. Before that time, Cuban Arará religion had not been as heavily influenced by the Lukumí as it is at present. Evidence indicates that Lukumí influence on Arará religious practices was born in Matanzas during this particular period.<sup>119</sup> Any initiate familiar with the current Arará ordination ritual will find an unmistakable Lukumí influence that is a definite Cuban product and not something brought over from Africa. The Obá Oriaté, an important hierarchical figure in the Lukumí priesthood, now plays an important role in Arará rituals as well. The Obá Oriaté—a master of ceremonies who directs and presides over all rituals—is considered the utmost source of ritual knowledge. Likewise, the Lukumí oracles, the use of divination with sixteen cowries (*Dilogún*), and divination using four pieces of coconut (*Obí*) have all achieved importance in Arará rites.<sup>120</sup> The Obá Oriaté's participation in Arará ordination rites has become as indispensable as it is in Lukumí ritual. For this fusion to have occurred, the Lukumís and Ararás had to declare a truce in their embittered relationship. In all probability, as suggested by testimony from various sources, this truce was influenced by Obá Tero after her arrival in Simpson because of her reputation as an orthodox and powerful priestess that she so ardently fought to maintain.

According to oral testimony, sometime at the turn of the century, an important religious celebration took place in Simpson. The exact nature of the ceremony is no longer recalled, though it was possibly a *wemilere*—a festivity that involves drumming and chanting and possession by the deities—and that it had been requested by the oracles at the annual divination ritual.<sup>121</sup> The exact location of the observance is not known. Both Lukumís and Ararás were present, which perhaps indicates that the tension between the two groups had already started to abate. Present at the celebration were Obá Tero and Micaela Arzuaga (Melofo), an important Arará priestess who had founded the Cabildo Arará Sabalú in that city. It was on that day that Flora Heredia's life—and by extension all of Arará culture—would take an interesting and highly significant turn. Subsequent events, whose seeds were planted at that particular *wemilere*, would create a strong alliance between the two groups and change Heredia's life forever.

Heredia, or Florita, as her descendants know her, was a Creole of partial Lukumí descent. From birth, the oracles had identified her as a daughter of Oshún, the Lukumí Venus, but at the time of the celebration she had not yet been ordained. She was a young woman, possibly in her twenties, and that day Florita was enjoying the celebration, dancing somewhere toward the back of the room where the drums were playing, as the uninitiated are required to do. At some point, Towossi (an Arará *vodún* related to death) and Oshún joined the faithful in possession and were dancing to the beat of the drums. If there was tension among the human worshippers, there seems to have been none among the deities, for they shared the same ritual space without any semblance of animosity whatsoever. Towossi turned and caught a glimpse of Florita and then suddenly turned to face Oshún, asking, "Oshún, may I have your daughter?" Oshún, according to the story, answered unhesitatingly, "Sure," — and kept on dancing. But then, possibly because of Towossi's relationship with death, Oshún's worst enemy, it struck her and she asked: "Towossi, what do you want with my daughter?" To which the other deity answered, "I do not want to harm your daughter in any way. Instead, I want to take her somewhere where the people have no leader, no direction. Somewhere she has never been, where I will make her a queen and give her more than you could ever imagine. Give her to me and I'll bring her to rule over my people, and together, our people will know peace." "Let us take her there together, then," answered Oshún.<sup>122</sup> If the gods ordained it, the devotees could do little but abide by their deities' wishes and accept their guidance.

Soon after, in the first of its kind, Florita was ordained to Towossi in a ritual directed by both Arará and Lukumí priestesses and priests. In the ordination, she was named Afoare. Obá Tero directed the ritual, functioning as the Obá Oriaté, and in so doing, she began the process of teaching the *kariosha* ceremony and the use of Lukumí oracles to the Arará who would eventually incorporate much of this knowledge into their own rituals. Like the Lukumí *olorishas* initiated in the *santo parado* tradition, prior to Florita the Arará had not "crowned" their priests and priestesses. Rather, they had consecrated a *fodún* (*vodún*), as dictated by individual necessity, preparing and instructing the devotee in the particulars related to that deity so that he or she could attend to it properly.

Obá Tero's gifts to the Arará were numerous. The geographical proximity of these two peoples in West Africa cannot be ignored, and it is highly probable that diffusion preceded their reencounter in Cuba. Many of the ceremonies that Obá Tero is believed to have shared may not have been new to the Arará. Possibly, the rituals practiced by Obá Tero may have simply reawakened dormant Arará rituals in Matanzas, allowing them to thrive and coexist with Lukumí rituals. One of many possible examples of this revitalization is the

current Arará use of cowries and coconuts for divination. Though the Arará had used cowries and coconuts for ritual divination in Dahomey, sources stress that they had not made use of these oracles in Cuba, at least not until the Lukumí shared them with the Arará. Until then, they had been strictly Lukumí possessions.<sup>123</sup> Following the patterns of the Lukumí ordination ritual, the Arará now consecrate a set of *dilogún* for each *fodún* at the time of the ordination of the *asió* (the Arará novice), and on the third day of the ordination, like the Lukumí *orishas*, each *fodún* now communicates the prescriptions and proscriptions through the *dilogún* oracle.

Obá Tero continued working as an Obá Oriaté for the Arará, in many ways bridging the differences between them, until her death in 1907, at which time her religious progeny, Oshabí, took over. The first Arará Oriaté, trained by Oshabí, did not arise until shortly before her death in 1950. As foretold by Towossi, Afoare grew to become the most renowned Arará priestess in Simpson, revitalizing the Arará rituals and invigorating them with a new energy provided by the Lukumí transfusion. Like the unification of power in Havana, for the most part the Arará and Lukumí in Matanzas put aside their political rivalries born of conflict in Africa and allowed similarities in belief to fuse in the New World. In so doing, they gave birth to a new manifestation of Arará religion. By the 1950s, when Cabrera was conducting fieldwork in Matanzas, the relationship between the two groups was definitely amicable, so much so that in Cabrera's legendary study, *El Monte*, the Arará often seem to be just another Lukumí ethnic group and not an individual nation. Cabrera even mentions an Arará informant named Salakó, clearly a Lukumí name, given to a child who is born in a caul.<sup>124</sup> At present, there is a strong unity between the two religious communities in Simpson that has overcome tensions that existed between them in the past. Many Lukumí actively participate in Arará ceremonies, and vice-versa, something that both groups say was unheard of until Obá Tero's arrival in Matanzas.

## **Conclusion**

In a century of rapid expansion and constant change, Africans and their descendants in Cuba were not very different from the rest of Cuban society in that they attempted to transform their world and lay the foundations for their permanence on the island. In all respects, it was a contest in which all participants sought one thing and one thing only: power. Those who had it were not willing to part with it, even if this power was in the limited realm allowable to Afro-Cubans. Those who sought power used whatever means they had available in a society that placed limitations on them because of the color of their skin. Lukumí natives such as Obá Tero, Latuán, Efunshé, and others, no strangers to

power and power struggles themselves, reflected the dominant trend of the society and attempted to carve out their niche on the island, a sort of refuge that for Afro-Cubans was impossible to separate from the religious realm.

For most Africans, and especially the Lukumí, religion is not an element in their life but rather a *way* of life, one that is constantly present, and one where worship is not relegated to a specific and detached building or a chosen day of the week. African religion is lived and experienced daily and the supernatural is always in constant relation with humankind. John S. Mbiti summarized this notion when he stated, “Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion.”<sup>125</sup>

*La división de la Habana* is just one of the many struggles that Afro-Cubans confronted in making the best possible use of the resources they had available in Cuba. Nowhere is the importance of women in the larger struggle more evident than in this contest for territory and power. Obá Tero, Latuán, Efunshé, and countless other women whose names and contributions have been lost to the historical record were fundamental protagonists in the perpetuation and propagation of Lukumí religion in Cuba. In turn, religion played a central role in Afro-Cuban society because it was the only thing that was truly theirs, the only remnant of their pride and identity that the dominant society could never extirpate, as religion was totally inseparable from the African worldview. *La división de la Habana* and the reunification of the Lukumí and Arará in Matanzas are just two examples of the various impediments that Africans had to overcome in Cuba to preserve an identity and a sense of self-worth, two important contributors in allowing a degree of power to an otherwise disenfranchised group. In so doing, power struggles of this sort laid strong foundations for the evolution of Regla de Osha in the island and its eventual diffusion in Cuba and abroad.

## NOTES

1. Brazil was the major importer of African slaves in the New World, with Cuba trailing close behind. Nonetheless, Cuba was the major importer among all of Spain’s colonies in the New World (see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade – A Census* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969], 46). See also Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1967); Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales: Esclavos, hacendados y comerciantes en la Cuba colonial (1760–1840)* (Madrid: Centro de Publicaciones Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1996); Manuel Moreno-Fraginals, “Africa in Cuba: A Quantitative Analysis of the African Population in the Island of Cuba,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, ed. Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977); Manuel Moreno-Fraginals, *El ingenio: Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978); Jose

Luciano Franco, *La diáspora africana en el nuevo mundo* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975); Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Slaves, Sugar, and Colonial Society: Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801–1899* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992); Enrique Pérez-Cisneros, *La abolición de la esclavitud en Cuba* (Tibás, Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, 1987); Juan Pérez de la Riva, “Cuadro Sinoptico de la Esclavitud en Cuba y de la Cultura Occidental,” *Suplemento de la Revista Actas del Folklor* (May 1961); Juan Pérez de la Riva, *Para La Historia de la Gente Sin Historia* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1976); Juan Pérez de la Riva, *¿Cuántos Africanos fueron traídos a Cuba?* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977); and Juan Pérez de la Riva, *El barracon: Esclavitud y capitalismo en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1978).

2. Isabel Castellanos and Jorge Castellanos, *Cultura Afrocubana*, 4 vols. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1988); Arturo Lindsay, ed., *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Katherine J. Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); María Teresa Vélez, *Drumming for the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe García Villamil, Santero, Palero, and Abakuá* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

3. Well-known examples of such Afro-Cuban men are Antonio Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gómez, Martín Morúa Delgado, and Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés), among many others, while only Mariana Grajales comes immediately to mind when recounting the achievements of Afro-Cuban women.

4. William R. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 1.

5. Miguel Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 2d ed., trans. Nick Hill (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1995); Daisy Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita, sencillamente* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1997).

6. Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita*, 27.

7. Much of this research was conducted over a period of thirty years as part of my own interest, as a priest, in the religion. I am indebted to a considerable number of *olorishas*, both living and deceased, and too many to list here. *Modupué ó!* I must also recognize the importance of the grant that I was awarded by the Ford Foundation and Florida International University’s Cuban Research Institute in 1999, which allowed me to spend time researching primary documents in Cuba’s Archivo Histórico Nacional.

8. I cannot proceed without giving recognition to two individuals who read and edited this article, and without whose input the article would have been weaker. First of all, I must thank Dr. Sherry Johnson, historian at Florida International University in Miami. Dr. Johnson recognized the importance of this article as a contribution to the growing body of significant research on Afro-Cuban women and Lukumí history and encouraged me to publish it. I am further indebted to Dr. Akinwumi Ogundiran, also of FIU, who read the original draft and provided much valuable input and clarity. To both of you, *modupué ó!*

9. A. J. Aşiwaju and Robin Law, “From the Volta to the Niger, c. 1600–1800,” in *History of Africa I*, 3d ed., ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowders (New York: Longman, 1985), 426.

10. Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3d ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 37; Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–c. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2d ed. (Brookfield: Gegg Revivals, 1991), 211.

11. Olfert Dapper, quoted in Law, *Oyo Empire*, 219; Snelgrave, quoted in *ibid.*, 219.

12. Dapper, quoted in Law, *Oyo Empire*, 219; Snelgrave, quoted in *ibid.*, 219.

13. Robin Law, “The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yoruba Historiography,” in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 127.

14. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921), 70–72, 178–87.

15. *Ibid.*, 187–88.

16. De Chenevert and Abbé Bullet, *Réflexions sur Juda* (1776), in Robin Law, *Contemporary Source Material for the History of the Old Oyo Empire, 1627–1824* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1992), 47.

17. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 187; Law, *Oyo Empire*, 232, 236; Aṣiwaju and Law, “From the Volta to the Niger,” 445.

18. The Oyo Empire acted primarily as a sort of middleman between northern traders and Europeans on the coast. Prior to the nineteenth century, the scale of slave raiding within the Yoruba heartland was limited; strong proscriptions were in place that shunned the forcible enslavement of Yoruba people (see Law, *Oyo Empire*, 223; Law, “The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yoruba Historiography,” 127).

19. J. A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980), 30–31.

20. I would like to express my gratitude to Isabel Castellanos for guiding me in the right direction regarding the term Lukumí. She provided me with a copy of an early, undated French map of the Kingdom of Oulcoumi. The map also appears in an article by Dr. Castellanos (“From Ulkumí to Lucumí: A Historical Overview of Religious Acculturation in Cuba,” in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay [Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996], 39–50).

21. There are records of Yoruba slaves being in Peru in the seventeenth century but not in great numbers. Between 1605 and 1650, of 635 Afro-Peruvians, 17 were registered as Lukumí. Between 1615 and 1630, 5 Lukumí slaves entered Peru (see Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974], 41–43).

22. Moreno-Fraginals, “Africa in Cuba,” 190–91.

23. Yoruba religion is also known in the Caribbean island of Trinidad, and there are Yoruba influences in Haitian Vodou as well, although to a lesser degree. For additional information on Lukumí religion in Cuba, see Mercedes Sandoval, *La religion afrocubana* (Madrid: Playor, 1975); and Castellanos and Castellanos, *Cultura Afrocubana*. For Brazil, see Edison Carneiro, *Religiões negras: Notas de etnografia religiosa* (Rio de Janeiro: N. p., 1936); Edison Carneiro, *Candombles da Bahia*, 5th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1977); and Pierre Verger, *Notes sur le Culte des Orisas et Vodun* (Dakar: L’Institut Français d’Afrique Noire, 1957). For Trinidad, see George E. Simpson, *Religious Cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica, and Haiti* (Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1980).

24. The important place given to women in Yoruba religion has been examined recently by J. D. Y. Peel, “Gender in Yoruba Religious Change,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002): 136–66. Anthropologist Ruth Landes may have been one of the pioneers in this respect. Landes’s research focused on the importance of women in Yoruba religion in Brazil (see *The City of Women* [New York: Macmillan, 1947]). J. Lorand Matory also looks at some of these issues in his study of gender in the Oyo-Yoruba religion, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo-Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). See also Henry J. Drewal and Margaret T. Drewal, *Gelede Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); and Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

25. Literally, “mother of [an] *orisha*.” The term denotes a priestess that has ordained others into the Lukumí priesthood.

26. In the past, I (and others) spelled her name Efuché, Efushé, or Fushá, among various other

alternatives. It has come to my attention that the proper spelling is Efunshé, which may be an abbreviated version of Efunshetan, the name of an Ibadan palace wife, considered a great female entrepreneur in the nineteenth century (see Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, 18–19).

27. An *orisha* is a deity in the Yoruba/Lukumí religious system. As used in the text, the uppercased “Orisha” refers to the religion and the lowercased and italicized “*orisha*” to the deities.

28. Literally, “owner of [an] *orisha*.” The term is non-gendered and is used to refer to any individual ordained into the Lukumí priesthood.

29. Osvaldo Villamil, interview by author, Matanzas, 6 October 1999; Antonio David Pérez, interview by author, Matanzas, 11 October 1999, 16 August 2000 (Pérez is better known as “El Chino” and is a religious descendant of Obá Tero).

30. See David Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain, and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

31. Evangelina Torres Crespo (Lusimí), Soledad’s granddaughter, interview by the author, Havana, 25 June 1998.

32. Pérez, interview.

33. Oshabí became one of the most revered and respected *iyalorishas* in the history of the religion in Cuba; her importance in perpetuating Obá Tero’s traditions will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay.

34. Egguadó is the Hispanicized pronunciation and spelling of the Yoruba term.

35. *Ilé*, literally, “house,” can also refer to the *ilé osha* — “house of the *orishas*,” the Lukumí equivalent of a temple. The *ilé osha* serves both as a residence for the *olorisha* and as a place for religious worship.

36. Of these, the most widely known are Oduduwá, Yewá, and Olokún. Olokún is most often associated with Obá Tero, and even more so with her religious progeny Fermina Gómez (Oshabí), who was influential in the dissemination of this *orisha* to other areas of the island.

37. Peter McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 1997), 28.

38. As defined earlier, an *iyalorisha* is a priestess who has ordained others into the priesthood. She is seen as the individual’s religious mother. *Babalorisha* is the equivalent term for a priest. The terms differ from the generic *olorisha* (“owner of an *orisha*”), which is used to denote any priest or priestess.

39. The drums known in Cuba as “Egbado,” or Geledé, drums are recognized in many areas of Yorubaland and West Africa and are not exclusively Egbado. Lawal described the drums used for Geledé dancing in southwestern Yorubaland as an ensemble of four wooden, pot-shaped, or cylindrical drums (see *Gelede Spectacle*, 87–88). The Cuban Egbado drums likewise consist of four single-headed drums with tubular, chalice-shaped bodies. The membranes are kept in place by means of a loop made from a strong vine or metal, or the use of hemp cord or rope. These are supported by hardwood pegs that keep the loop and cords in place (Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Música Cubana [CIDMUC], *Instrumentos de la música folclórico-popular de Cuba*, 2 vols. [Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1997], 250).

40. Fernando Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana 3* (Havana: Dirección de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación, 1951), 412; CIDMUC, *Instrumentos*, 1:247.

41. Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*, 2d ed. (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1981), 451. Unfortunately, Ortiz does not give his source. It is not clear whether he actually saw the Olokún dance or whether informants interviewed during the research told him of its existence.

Oral tradition recounts that the Egbado drums that Ortiz discussed were brought to Matanzas by Obá Tero when she left Havana. In the 1970s Cuban investigators concluded that the drums had been in Matanzas, in a house at 57 Salamanca Street, since at least the first decades of the twentieth century, but that they were probably brought there much earlier. After Obá Tero’s passing, the

drums were inherited by Oshabí, who attended to them until her death, at which time they were passed down to her children. Victor Torrientes, the oldest child, was in charge of them. After his death, they were subsequently passed on to other family members until they ended up with Eugenio “Pucho” Lamar (Eshú Dina). Oshabí and her daughter, Celestina Torrientes (Olufandé) had ordained Eshú Dina in the 1940s. By the time they came into Eshú Dina’s possession, the drums were in a very precarious state due to a variety of factors. Eshú Dina removed them from Oshabí’s house because he feared that the house might one day come tumbling down. During his lifetime, he kept the drums in his own house.

Eshú Dina passed away in 1998, and after much, often-heated debate among various groups who were interested in taking possession of them, the drums were returned to Oshabí’s home on Salamanca Street. Currently, Antonio Pérez, better known as “El Chino,” resides there. Pérez, who is not ordained, has experienced a great deal of animosity from the religious community, and especially the drummers. Pérez has been adamant about the proper care of the drums and covers them with a white cloth, as they are supposed to be treated when not in use. Not only does he reside in Oshabí’s house, but he has also been charged with caring for Obá Tero’s *orishas* that remain in the house as historic and religious relics and are much valued by her descendants. Customarily, when an *olorisha* dies, a mortuary rite known as *etutu* (*itutu*) is held to allow the oracles to determine if the departed’s *orisha* will accompany her or remain with a religious or blood descendant. *Orishas* have been known to stay with the *ilé osha*, that is, in the physical house where the deceased lived, and not with any specific individual. This was the case with Obá Tero’s and Oshabí’s *orishas*.

42. *Cabildos de nación*, or African ethnic associations, were greatly influential in the retention of African culture in Cuba. *Cabildos* were based on the Spanish *cofradías* (guilds or fraternities) that were first organized in Seville around the fourteenth century. These *cofradías* were placed under the tutelage of a Catholic saint and held their meetings in the saint’s chapel. Fernando Ortiz states that the guilds were originally organized during the reign of Alfonso el Sabio, who, after the creation of the Spanish legal code known as *Las Siete Partidas*, wanted to “give order to matters ecclesiastical and civil” (see Ortiz, “Los cabildos y la fiesta afrocubana del Día de Reyes,” *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 16 [January–February 1921]; reprint, Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992, 5). See also Isidoro Moreno, *La antigua hermandad de los negros de Sevilla: Emicidad, poder y sociedad en 600 años de historia* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1997). Like Ortiz, Moreno agrees that these associations were the precursors to the Afro-Cuban *cabildos*. Philip Howard has also adopted this view and has pointed to the existence of comparable institutions in Africa (Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998]).

43. Both are believed to be the progenitors of the Oyo *batá* drumming tradition in Cuba.

44. Fernando Ortiz, *Los Tambores Batá de los Yorubas* (Havana: Publicigraf, 1994), 147.

45. Milagros Palma (Kashé Enjué), interview by author, Matanzas, 6 October 1999.

46. Ortiz, *Los Tambores*, 147.

47. Pérez, interview.

48. Personal communication with Israel Moliner, official historian of the city of Matanzas, 6 October 1999.

49. The *babalawo* (literally, “fathers of the mystery”) are the priests of Orunmilá, patron divinity of the Ifá oracle. One of the *babalawo*’s roles is divining for Orisha devotees. For further reading on Ifá, see William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

50. Other scholars have identified Adeshina as an Ijeshá (see John Mason, *Olookun: Owner of Rivers and Seas* [Brooklyn: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1996], 18). My sources insist that he was Oyo and not Ijeshá. Esther Piedra, currently the oldest member of the Ijeshá *cabildo* in Matanzas, was married to Adeshina’s grandson, Rolando Cartalla, who passed away in 1999. This

is probably why he has been mistakenly associated with the Ijeshá people. Rolando's widow confirms that Cartalla was related to the Ijeshá *cabildo* through his marriage to her, and not by birth (Esther Piedra, interview by author, Matanzas, 18 August 2000).

51. Esther Piedra, interview.

52. Ortiz, *Los Tambores*, 146–47; and Pedro Cosme, interview by author, Regla, 30 September 1999.

53. Archivo Histórico Nacional de Cuba, Fondo de Gobierno General, legajo 268, numero 13545: "Padron de Contribucion Extraordinaria para Subsidio de Guerra . . . Correspondiente al Pueblo de Regla, 1872–1873."

54. *Censo de 1881 – Regla, Tomo II*, Museo de Regla, Havana (consulted September 1999).

55. Most sources agree he was well over one hundred years old when he died.

56. Personal communication with Israel Moliner, official historian of the city of Matanzas, 6 October 1999.

57. Esther Piedra, interview; Julio Suarez Oña (Ewi Moyó), interview by the author, Matanzas, 6 August 1999 (Ewi Moyó is a priest of Aganjú and Olubata [literally, "one who owns drums"]).

58. Pérez, interview. Another variant states that Obá Tero was the *ojigbona*, or second sponsor, and that Ña Inés (Yeyé T'Olokún) was the ordaining priestess (Angel de León [Oloyadé], interview by the author, Regla, 24 September 1999).

59. Esther Piedra, interview. Piedra says that she believes he resided there until 1892, when he moved to Havana.

60. R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Educational, 1946), 21.

61. The term "Santería" has gained acceptance in the last fifty years; earlier it was considered derogatory and had denigrating connotations. Still, I prefer the older term Regla de Osha (or simply, the Lukumí religion), which is more in line with the religion's dogma and ideology.

62. John Mason was told by his sources that she was an Egbadó native, but when I interviewed the grandchildren, they insisted that she was from Oyo. Mason, *Olookum*, 18.

63. Congo is a generic term used in Cuba to refer to Africans of Bantú origin.

64. Manuel Fernández Santalices, *Las calles de la Habana intramuros: Arte, historia y tradiciones en las calles y plazas de la Havana Vieja* (Miami: Saeta Ediciones, 1989), 37. Albear died in 1887 and was never able to see the final result of his massive project.

65. Candelario Zurria Albear and Martin Zurria Albear (Latuán's grandchildren), interview by the author, Buena Vista, Cuba, 20 March 2001.

66. Candelario Zurria Albear and Martin Zurria Albear, interview. See also Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 176–77. This comment most likely refers to the period 1880–1888. The abolition law passed in 1880 established 1888 as the date for the termination of slavery. It was during this period that an apprenticeship system was implemented, which was supposed to lay the foundations for the eventual emancipation of the slaves. Slaves were to pass through a transitory stage that would prepare them for their eventual entrance into society as salaried workers by 1888. The system was unsuccessful, though, and by 1883, only 10 percent of the total population of the island was registered as slaves.

67. Candelario Zurria Albear and Martin Zurria Albear, interview.

68. Candelario Zurria Albear and Martin Zurria Albear, interview.

69. Literally, "king, head of the oracle." The title applies to a specific category in the Lukumí priesthood. The Obá Oriaté is the master of ceremonies for Lukumí rituals, and especially for ordination rituals.

70. Candelario Zurria Albear and Martin Zurria Albear, interview.

71. The Obá Oriaté Lázaro Ramos (Okandenjé), interview by the author, Miami 2000.

72. The Obá Oriaté Rodolfo “Cuco” Rodríguez (Igbín Koladé), interview by the author, Havana, 1977; Obá Oriaté José Manuel Grinart (Oyá Dina), interview by the author, New York, September 2000.

73. Lydiá Cabrera, *Anagó-Vocabulario Lucumi (El Yoruba que se Habla en Cuba)* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1970), 101.

74. Hugo Cárdenas (Obá Oriaté Eshú Miwá), interview by the author, Havana, June 1998.

75. Manuel Mederos (Obá Oriaté Eshú Onaré), interview by the author, Miami, 27 January 2000; Pedro García (Obá Oriaté Lomí Lomi), interview by the author, Pogolotti, Cuba, 13 August 2000.

76. Roque “El Jimagua” Duarte (Obá Oriaté Tinibú), personal communication, Miami, June 1998.

77. Lusimí, interview. Soledad Crespo’s descendants, five generations later, continue to employ Lukumí names extraofficially.

78. This would explain the lack of other descendants. Odé Deí was also childless. Nonetheless, both Efunshé and Odé Deí had many religious offspring, which possibly compensated for the lack of biological children. Like her mother, Odé Deí became a very respected *olorisha*. In the 1950s, Cabrera called Odé Deí the last *apuonlá* (“great singer”) of that era. Odé Deí was the *ojigbona* — assistant to the *iyalorisha* — at the time of Nemensia Espinoza’s (Oshún Miwá) ordination in 1926. Efunshé participated in the ordination and died shortly thereafter. Affected by a period of dementia in her latter years, Odé Deí lived with Oshún Miwá until her death in the 1970s because she had no children or relatives to care for her.

79. Pedro García (Obá Oriaté Lomí Lomi), interview by author, 13 August 2001; Nina Pérez, (Igbín Koladé), interview by author, Cudahy, California, December 2000.

80. My *orisha* lineage descends directly from Efunshé. In 1983, when I interviewed my *orisha* grandfather, Eladio Gutiérrez (Obá Oriaté Eshú Bí), he stressed that our lineage descends from Yewá. The association with Yewá may have been influenced by her direction of the Cabildo San José 80, which sources indicate was under the tutelage of Yewá.

81. Mason, *Olookun*, 18.

82. Rodolfo “Cuco” Rodríguez (Obá Oriaté Igbín Koladé), interview; José Manuel Ginart (Obá Oriaté Oyá Dina), interview.

83. María Eugenia Pérez (Oshún Niké), interview by author, Havana, September 1999. Pérez was ordained by one of Efunshé’s *omó orisha* in 1923. Efunshé was present at the ordination, one of the last ordinations she attended, and Latuán acted as Obá Oriaté.

84. Amador Aguilera (Omí Laí, Obá Oriaté Olubatá and priest of Orishaokó), interview by author, San Miguel del Padrón, June 1998; Oshún Niké, interviews, September 1999 and March 2001.

85. This *cabildo*, located on 80 San José Street in the Jesús María section of Old Havana, is known by its physical address (Gilberto Martínez [Babá Funké], interviews by author, Carolina, Puerto Rico, 1982 and 1983; Babá Funké traces his lineage to Latuán).

86. Lazaro Ramos (Obá Oriaté Okandenijé), interview.

87. Hugo Cárdenas (Obá Oriaté Eshú Miwá), interview.

88. Amador Aguilera (Omí Laí, Obá Oriaté Olubatá and priest of Orishaokó), interviews by author, San Miguel del Padrón, Havana, June 1998 and September/October 1999.

89. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 226–27; Law, *Oyo Empire*, 92–95; Law, “The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yoruba Historiography,” 113–17.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Rodolfo “Cuco” Rodríguez (Igbín Koladé), interview by Angel Riana (Talabí), Havana, 1977.

92. Adelfa Teran (Obá Oriaté Igbín Koladé and Priestess of Obatalá), interview by author, Miami, 26 December 1999; Francisca Sotomayor (Osha Inle, Priestess of Obatalá), interview by author, Jovellanos, Cuba, 14 August 2000 (Ines Sotomayor Sotomayor is the granddaughter of one

of Lydia Cabrera's principal informants in Jovellanos, who is herself an *olorisha* of *santo parado*); Armando Cabrera (Obá Oriaté Eshú Tolú and Priest of Elegbá), interview by author, Cárdenas, Cuba, 14 August 2000; Felix "Cheo" Gonzalez (Oshún Yumí), interview by author, Cárdenas, Cuba, 15 August 2000.

93. Law, *Oyo Empire*, 104, 139–40.

94. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 24 n. 1. Use of the word "saint" by Lukumí *olorishas* is very common and results from the parallelisms between Yoruba *orishas* and Catholic saints, a process often referred to as *syncretism*. This is a subject for future discussion, as past literature has often equated syncretism with religious fusion, something that is obviously not necessarily so in the case of the Lukumí. For similar reasons, I decline to use the term "Santería" in my writing, since it has pejorative connotations.

95. See Miguel Ramos, "The Empire Beats On: Oyo, Batá Drums, and Hegemony in Nineteenth-Century Cuba," Master's thesis, Florida International University, 2000; Abraham, *Dictionary*, 21; Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 63.

96. Raul Mojica (Obá Oriaté Osha Inle and Priest of Obatala), interview by author, Jesús María, Havana, 19 September 1999. Sadly, Mojica passed away in January 2001 after a long battle with cancer.

97. Lydia Cabrera Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami, Miami, Fla. This was one of hundreds of notes taken by Cabrera that she apparently had to take hastily, as it is probable that many of her sources were hesitant to contribute to her research due to the many stigmas of the era.

98. Angel de León (Obá Oriaté Oloyadé), interview by author, Regla, 24 September 1999.

99. Raul Mojica (Obá Oriaté Osha Inle and Priest of Obatala), interview.

100. Unfortunately, these differences cannot be elucidated without revealing ritual secrets that can only be disclosed to the duly ordained.

101. Oní, literally meaning "owner of," is a title given to Shangó's and Yemojá's *olorishas*.

102. Law, *Oyo Empire*, 104, 139–40.

103. Rodolfo "Cuco" Rodriguez (Igbín Koladé), interview by Angel Riana (Talabí), Havana, 1977.

104. Lukumí myths portray Obatalá and Yemojá as Shangó's parents, and Oshún as his favorite wife.

105. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 21; Law, *Oyo Empire*, 127–29.

106. Personal communication with Candomblé *olorishas*, especially Maria Mello, *iyalorisha* of Obatalá, and Gilberto Ferreira (Ogan), consecrated to Eshú (Elegbá).

107. Most of the elders interviewed throughout the years, including some ordained in the *kariosha* tradition at the turn of the century, were provided with various *orishas* at the time of their ordination. María Eugenia Pérez (Oshún Niké), the oldest *iyalorisha* in Havana, was born in 1904. Oshún Niké was ordained on 23 July 1923 by Luisa Arango (Shangó Ladé), herself one of Efunshé's *omó orishas*. Latuán was the Obá Oriaté. Oshún Niké was provided with Elegbá, Ogún, Oshosi, Obatalá, Yemojá, Shangó, and Oshún, her tutelar *orisha*. Deceased *olorishas*, all ordained during the same period, including Aurelia Mora (Omí Dina), Basilia Cárdenas Massip (Omí Dina), and Nemensia Espinoza (Oshún Miwá), were also provided with various *orishas* at ordination. José Roche (Oshún Kayodé) and Josefina Aguirre (Oshún Gere) were ordained by Tranquilina Balmaseda (Omí Sanjá) in 1896 and 1906, respectively, and were also provided with various *orishas*. All these *olorishas* descend from Efunshé. Sadly, Oshún Niké passed away this spring.

108. Osvaldo Villamíl, interview; Pérez, interview.

109. R. C. Abraham, in his *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, refers to the "most senior titleholder everywhere among the Egungún" as Aláàpinni (50).

110. Bárbaro Cansino (Ojulenso), conversation with author, Simpson, Matanzas, August 2001.

111. Ojulenso, conversation.

112. I must recognize the valuable input given by Babalorisha Temujin Ekünfeó (Obalorún). He suggested the possible link between Eroméle and Imálà and pointed me in the right direction, as I was at a loss. Obalorún studied anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh and researches African and African American folklore and culture.

113. Abraham, *Dictionary*, 177.

114. Some sources have testified that in Cuba some Erómeles had ceased to worship Yemojá and Olokún altogether. What is clear from all sources is that Ikudaisí refused to acknowledge these two *orishas* and blamed them for his lot and enslavement in Cuba. In fact, when he replaced his *orishas* in Cuba, he did not replace his Yemojá or his Olokún. Though he knew through divination that Oshabí was a child of Yemojá, he refused to ordain her to her “true” *orisha* and chose to ordain her to Oshún. At that time, it was inadmissible for an *om’orisha* to question the decisions made by their *iyá* or *babálorisha*. Oshabí had no input whatsoever in the matter.

115. When possession ends, the mount will not remember anything that took place.

116. Pérez, interview.

117. Letter from Francisco Pereyra Mendes, director of the Portuguese port at Whydah, 22 May 1726, quoted in Law, *Contemporary Source Material*, 15.

118. For more in-depth accounts, see Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Law, *Oyo Empire*; and Law, *Contemporary Source Material*.

119. The shared practices were later extended to Havana, where a similar diffusion was reluctantly taking place, although at a much slower pace. In Havana the Arará presented a stronger resistance to the foreign influence. According to sources, varied degrees of friction between the two ethnic groups continued in Havana essentially until the eve of Fidel Castro’s revolution and possibly beyond Abelardo Hernández [Oshún Funké], interview by author, Miami, January 2000.

120. Interestingly, these two oracles were known to the Arará in Africa, though in Cuba, oral tradition strongly affirms that the Arará obtained these from the Lukumí. It would seem that by this period, possibly the Arará had lost knowledge of these oracles. In theory, this is a sensible assumption, as in all probability Arará soldiers outnumbered the members of the Arará priesthood among the slaves brought to the island. In all probability, then, the Arará ritual knowledge may not have been as vigorous.

121. To this day, the Lukumí perform an annual divination rite on the first of January to consult the deities on the nature of the coming year. Often, the oracles prescribe *ebó* (sacrifice) to, whenever possible, appease the negative forces of the universe and avoid misfortune.

122. Hector Hernandez (Obá Oriaté Omó Oshosi), interview by author, Matanzas, 5 October 1999; Milagros Palma (Kashenjué and Arará priestess of Makeno, the Arará equivalent of Obatalá), interview by author, Matanzas, 4 October 1999 and August 2000. Presently, Palma is the oldest Arará priestess in Matanzas.

123. Bernard Maupoil, *La Géomancie à l’ancienne côte des esclaves* (Paris: Institute D’ethnologie, Musée de l’Homme, 1943).

124. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 313.

125. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers, 1989), 2.