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AFRO-CUBAN DIASPORAN RELIGIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE AND SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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A Comparative Analysis of the Literature

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“The coercion and resistance, acculturation and appropriation that typify the Caribbean experience are the most evident in the Creolization of African-based religious beliefs and practices in the slave societies of the New World. African religions merged in a dynamic process with European Christian and Amerindian beliefs to shape syncretic theologies that provide alternative ways of looking at the world ‘in a certain kind of way.’ Powerful repositories of inner strength and cultural affirmation, the Caribbean’s African-derived syncretic religions and healing practices . . . have penetrated to the core of cultural development in the Caribbean, leaving deep imprints on every significant cultural manifestation of the various islands” (Paravisini-Gebert, 1997:2).

Introduction

The entire Caribbean region has experienced significant African cultural influences and is, in fact, perceived by some to be the outer edge of an African culture complex. African-based religious systems and magical rites have had a particularly profound impact and transcendence in Cuba, permeating Cuban culture, linguistics, art, and literature, in addition to its religious, historical, and ethnological dimensions. It has been said that one cannot understand Cubans without taking into account their African roots or influences. Our task is to describe the various religious systems, cults, and sects that germinated through the encounter of the African, European (in this case Spanish popular Catholicism) religions and, to a lesser extent, the native indigenous cultures. This paper analyzes the literature that has been produced up to now about each of these systems, comparing the relative abundance or scarcity of the literature devoted to each of them and the scholarly quality of the supporting research.
The term “diasporan religions” originated with American researcher and practitioner of Afro-Caribbean religions, Joseph Murphy, and here it is used to designate the whole spectrum of cultural and religious traditions of the black African diaspora that evolved in the New World with indigenous and Spanish influences, focusing solely on its Cuban dimension.

Research and study on the African diasporan religions has gained tremendous momentum in the last three decades. The hemispheric expansion and increasing significance of syncretic or juxtaposed religious systems that sprang from a merging of diverse African religious creeds, mythology, rites, and practices with Christian liturgy and popular beliefs has influenced many plastic, literary, and musical artistic efforts.

With the exception of Brazil, nowhere in the Western Hemisphere have these diasporan religions been more diligently examined, analyzed, and studied in-depth than in the Caribbean, with Cuba and its variant of Santería (or a Yoruba-based system) being one of the most prominently examined and showcased. The study of these religions has gained enormous significance, as their adherents and students have increased and their practice has spread throughout the United States, Venezuela, and elsewhere in the Spanish Caribbean and Latin America. Since the influence of African religious rites, dances, and musical instruments is so manifest in the Cuban musical arts and has been so thoroughly documented, here we have chosen to highlight primarily the impact of Afro-Cuban religions on the visual or plastic arts.
The expression “Santería,” literally, “the way of the saints,” is often used as an umbrella term for various forms of Afro-Cuban religious traditions, syncretized from the influences of all ethnic groups that reached the island. We will restrict the term here to the worship of the Yoruba-derived deities or *orichas*, which would be more properly termed Regla de Ocha or Religión Lucumí, as Santería is perceived as a somewhat pejorative term by devotees. The Lucumí/Yoruba pantheon of gods, reminiscent of Greek mythology, was juxtaposed or syncretized with those Catholic saints widely venerated in Spanish popular religiosity, whose general attributes, domain, or issues for which they are invoked were perceived as being similar.

The prevalence of the term Lucumí/Yoruba to embrace most of the Afro-Cuban diasporan religions is due in great part to the fact that, though the enslaved Africans who were brought to the island during colonial times -- beginning in the sixteenth century in the wake of the first Spanish conquistadors through the latter part of the nineteenth century -- were from numerous ethnic groups, the Yoruba peoples from West Africa, known in Cuba as the Lucumí (derived, according to most researchers, from the word Ulkumi, an ancient Yoruba kingdom), predominated at a certain period when these syncretic processes were being gestated. Also, from this part of Africa came the Ibo, the Efik from Calabar (known in Cuba as the Carabalí), the Fon (or Dahomean) and numerous other peoples. Outstanding, due to their great numbers and their having a powerful presence, were representatives of the Congo ethnic groups: Loango, Mondongo, and others who came from Central Africa.
As late as circa 1870, contraband slaves continued to flow into Cuba even after the slave trade had officially stopped. That is why in the first third of the twentieth century some older “negros de nación” (African-born slaves) could still be found who remembered well the traditions and customs of their homeland and were able to transmit them to their descendants. This fact greatly fostered the continuity of the religious systems, as well as our understanding of them today.

While the Afro-Cuban community absorbed much of the Hispanic culture and was exposed to its religious tenets and rituals, many of these practices were perceived by Africans and their descendants as complementary to their cultural practices, and not mutually exclusive. This process of mutual influences was termed by pioneer Cuban American studies researcher Fernando Ortiz as transculturation. Whether of Western African or Central African extraction or whether having shared influences in liturgy, rituals, deities and theologies that can be traced to common roots, preponderant traits among all of these religious complexes are their dynamism and their vitality. These characteristics result from the openness of African religious mentality, a permeability that allows other influences to be appropriated into their practices.

Surprisingly, African religions absorbed Hispanic religions and cultural influences without losing the integrity of their unique spirituality. According to Albert J. Raboteau, “African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief, and fundamental perspectives have remained vital on this side of the Atlantic, not because they were preserved in a ‘pure’
orthodoxy but because they were transformed. Adaptability, based upon respect for spiritual power wherever it originated, accounted for the openness of African religions to syncretism with other traditions and for the continuity of a distinctive African religious consciousness” (Raboteau, 1978: 4-5).

Another common characteristic that unites the African religious complexes is their worship of the spirits or ancestors, who pervade the whole environment. There is no separation between the spirit world and the tangible world. The spirit world, nature, and the human environment coexist in the same sphere. The use of African languages, the occurrence of spirit possession, and the practices of drumming and dancing are also unifying traits.

**Afro-Cuban Diasporan Religions: Definitions, Historical Background, Similarities, and Differences**

**Lucumi/Regla de Ocha/Regla de Ifá**

The ancient religious system of the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria known in Cuba as Regla de Ocha (for its fundamental Rule of Ocha) is characterized by a well-developed, structured mythology and a rich liturgy that merged with various popular Spanish Catholic practices and beliefs in a process of amalgamation or syncretism. The old Yoruba deities (*orichas*) were identified in their various attributes and manifestations (*caminos*) with diverse Catholic saints and various advocations of the Virgin Mary, such as Nuestra Señora de la Caridad, Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, and others. Thus arose the religious system that underwent a process of syncretization, producing a spontaneous, popular reconciliation of
different religious beliefs that were blended, consciously or unconsciously, or in many cases survived in juxtaposition, in what some authors refer to as parallelism.

Lydia Cabrera and other scholars theorize that the slaves fashioned their religion to a certain extent, as a deceptive tool to escape retaliation for practicing forbidden “heathen” rites, as enforced by white masters or Spanish Catholic authorities. They also attribute development of the syncretism to a logical consequence of the African cosmovision, coupled with the slaves’ subconscious psychological need to see their gods survive in a strange environment. On the other hand, current socio-political interpretations held by U.S. Afro-Cuban researchers such as Harry Lefever and other authors from present day Cuba, cast its origin as a conscious effort at cultural resistance to colonial oppression. This group attributes the persistence of the Lucumí religion to the hegemonic resistance dimension, a characteristic that is “intrinsic to the indigenous, critical hermeneutics of Yoruba belief” (Lefever, 1996:310).

This socio-religious amalgam happened largely in an urban context as urban slaves made up a significant proportion of entire slave populations – one-third in 1825 and one-fifth in 1855 (Klein, 1967). Most Santería rites are genuinely African at their core and cannot be traced to Spanish folk Catholicism or to the brand of Kardesian Spiritism which was very influential in Latin America during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Finding correspondences between their belief in reincarnation and Spiritism’s presence of spirits and their evocation, the slaves allowed Spiritism some share of influence in this blend of
practices and beliefs. For example, some of Santería’s current healing rites, such as the use of cologne, glasses of water, and flowers, may derive from the Cuban brand of Espiritismo. (Brandon, 1990:38). Likewise, the use of cigar smoke and tobacco have been traced to native indigenous ritual practices, as tobacco is a New World crop.

Good research on this aboriginal influence from the earliest colonial times has been carried out in Cuba, where researchers such as Daisy Fariñas have traced and explored the Taino (Arawak) Indian retentions in Afro-Cuban religions. In spite of these extraneous influences, it is the core practices of initiation, divination, and sacrificial rites that are more genuinely Yoruba (Brandon, 1990: 210). The highest system of divination, the Table of Ifá, conforms very closely to Yoruba tradition.

Scholars such as George Brandon concur with Catholic Church theologians that few Catholic elements are directly traceable in the substance of the ideology or the core (fundamento) of the ritual system. A pivotal part of Yoruba/Lucumi’s worship, religious theology, and entire vision of the world is a life-force (aché) that imbues all beings, animate or inanimate. This is the vital energy that is captured in the sacred stones (otanes), whose power is revitalized by bathing them in the blood of animals sacrificed and consumed in the religious ceremonies. None of this conforms to Catholic practice, although Christ’s sacrifice of himself is reenacted in every celebration of communion during mass.
Most serious Lucumi religion scholars agree that prayer formulas in the Spanish language, the names of groups (cofradías) and saints’ day festivals, and the so-called velorios de santos or popular rituals like bembés, where the non-initiated can participate, represent mostly external, superimposed Catholic elements and not integral, internal elements.

Congo/Bantu: Palo Monte/ Mayombe

One of the variant forms of the Reglas de Congo, Palo Monte, or Palo Mayombe is the most common of the religious cults derived from the Bantu (Congo) of Central Africa, who occupied a vast territory from the southern part of Cameroon through northern Angola to Mozambique and also extended to what is now Congo-Brazzaville. It encompasses various Congo religious systems: Regla Conga, Biyumba, Musunde, Quirimba, and Vrillumba. There was also a later variant which admitted whites -- Regla Kimbisa del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje, established by Andrés Facundo Cristo de los Dolores Petit. This Rule, while expanding its membership and furthering Catholic influences in many of the rituals, as well as also expanding the cult to Yoruba orichas, was viewed as betraying Congo secrets to the ruling whites.

The emphasis of the Bantu/Congo religious practices lies in the magical or sorcery aspects of African beliefs, in tandem with healing practices. The name “Palo” denotes the sticks and branches from the forest (el monte) utilized in the elaboration of a sacred object (nganga) used for spells. Often maligned, practitioners of Palo (paleros) are accused of practicing black magic or witchcraft, with rites utilizing corpses and dangerous herbs and
spells for evil purposes. Palo involves a specialized cult of the dead with emphasis on magic practices such as pacts with the dead, typically made in a graveyard along with the creation of a nganga. This nganga is placed in a special iron cauldron filled with ritual objects of nature (bones and sticks) and imbued with magical powers. All of these practices and attributes of sorcery with the dead (trabajos con muertos) involve the idea of evil witchcraft and make Palo experts or leaders very much feared and regarded as dangerous. In Miami, as in Cuba, they have made the headlines by stealing corpses for use in their ngangas. The Africans themselves were implicated by this negative image as they capitalized, to their advantage, on the fear of their sorcery by the whites in power. All these magic rites have earned Palo the epithet of “the dark side of Santería,” the term encompassing in this instance not only the Regla de Ocha but also the Congo-based cults. The various forms of Palo Monte practices feature deities taken both from the syncretism of Catholic saints and the Yoruba orichas.

The Congo presence in Cuba was documented in colonial times in the eighteenth century, with Alejo Carpentier reporting the existence of a “Cabildo de Congos” in 1796. Bantú/Congo peoples continued reaching Cuba’s shores well into the last part of the nineteenth century and are second in importance only to the Yoruba, according to some sources. In contrast with the Reglas Lucumi, the Reglas Congas survived most strongly in the eastern section of Cuba, around Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. Congo influence, rites, and figures have since spread throughout the island, particularly in the ritual drawings of a cosmogram (traza or nganga-marking), which is traced while chanting sacred songs or mambos.
In Havana and its environs, Congo and Yoruba beliefs coalesced to beget a cult to Zarabanda -- the Congo counterpart of Oggún, the powerful god of metals -- another instance of syncretic processes among diverse African ethnic practices. Another example of syncretism is the fact that, although African dialects are used in their rituals, paleros also add some Arabic words to their chants and greet each other with the “Salaam alaikum” used in Islamic nations. For a complete examination of Congo religious practices, cosmology and structure, beliefs in death and the ancestor spirits, with interesting references to Cuban practice, see the documented monograph by Wyatt MacGaffey (1986), *Religions and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire*, or the informative study by Simon Bockie, (1993) entitled *Death and the Invisible Powers “the World of Kongo Belief,”* which has an extensive and up-to-date analysis of Congo ancestor worship.

Abakuá/Carabalí/Ñáñigo

Arriving on Cuba’s shores in large numbers, the Ekoí peoples of the Calabar Coast of Africa made a lasting impact on the customs, folklore, popular language, and traditions of the island. This contribution is most evident in the creation and existence of the Cuban Abakuá (or Abakwa) Secret Society, whose members are also known as ſáñigos, and appears to be a direct legacy of the ancient Egbo society of the Ekoí and Efik ethnic groups of this particular coast in West Africa. Similar types of associations are very typical of this part of Africa where secret and mutual assistance brotherhoods are abundant and constitute a significant part of the ethnic tradition. The most powerful of these brotherhoods, the Egbo society, was transplanted to Cuba by these groups known in Cuba as Carabálí, because they originated in
the Calabar region of the African continent. Furthermore, the Eko claim to have started the whole concept of these societies, which were prevalent into the early twentieth century and still exist in Cuba.

To illustrate the extent to which the Carabalí customs prevailed in Cuba, we note that, according to well-known anthropologists, the initiation ceremonies for the seven grades through which the aspirant must pass before admission to deeper teachings or revelations of any except the lesser mysteries were carried out almost verbatim in nineteenth-century Cuba. Moreover, Cuban popular argot is interspersed with Abakuá-derived words, which have been carried over from ritual to common usage, even to the common slang term for woman, _jeba_, and epithets like _chévere_, which originally meant a brave, macho man and is now widely used to mean “swell” or “cool.”

In Africa, this strictly male association allowed only men to be admitted into the brotherhood, except for an occasional affluent or powerful woman who was allowed to become an honorary member of all grades but never achieved full membership or knowledge of the mysteries (Courlander, 1996: 570-575). However, in Cuba, restrictions for women were even stricter. No women were ever allowed to become members.

The ancient Eko societies also bore resemblance to the Spanish civil associations (cabildos) prevalent in Seville and other parts of Andalucía, a fact that facilitated their
transport and subsequent syncretism and transculturation. Thus, the stage was set for a merging of the two traditional institutions.

In Cuba, the Abakuá society was a *cabildo* whose membership cut through various cults or ethnic groups. A practitioner of Santería could also be an Abakuá brother (*ecobio*) because membership, besides conferring a certain prestige, also offered an opportunity for mutual assistance. Membership required a period of testing, instruction, initiation, and a complex set of obligations, duties, and responsibilities within a rigid formal structure. Rites included singing, dances, blood and other kinds of offerings, ablutions, processions, use of African languages, and drum playing. Prevalent in Havana, nearby Regla, Guanabacoa, and in the port of Matanzas and the city of Cárdenas in that same province, members of the Abakuá societies took prominent parts in the Havana carnival dances where they danced in folk dance groups (*comparsas*). Their secret symbols (*anaforuanas*) have been amply documented by Lydia Cabrera and their musical instruments by Fernando Ortiz.

The term Abakuá originates from the region of Akwa, where a similar antecedent society, that of “Leopard-men” of the Efik/ Efor, flourished in West Africa and wielded considerable power up to the early twentieth century. Remarkably, as the traditions were handed down in Cuba, they retained their vitality and dynamism, due in part to the constant influx of new slaves from the Akwa region. The slave trade dragged on in Cuba into the latter part of the nineteenth century, with the last contingents smuggled in around 1870. The Calabari were one of the last ethnic groups to be transported to the island, and their first
society in Cuba was founded in 1836. For all the above reasons, the Egbó vocabulary has been surprisingly preserved, as have the rites and costumes of ceremony participants. Even the music, singing, and drumming is recognizable as an inheritance from the Efik and Ekoi peoples. It is a complex, hierarchical society with clearly defined functions, bound together by strict initiation oaths; authority resides in the king (iyamba, jefe). Surprisingly, the numerous officers in the ceremonies in Cuba have preserved the same titles as in Africa, up to and including the priestly morwa, who evokes, controls, and guides the visiting spirits, although rites exhibit some elements of syncretism with Catholic practices.

A very detailed description of the rites of this society as compared with those of the original Egbo of the Calabar Coast is found in Harold Courlander’s *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore* (1996), both from the accounts of a British historian/anthropologist, Percy Amaury Talbot, who travelled extensively in Africa and wrote about his first-hand research in his book *In the Shadow of the Bush: A Study of the Ekoí of Southern Nigeria* (1912), and also from Courlander’s own (or Talbot’s) observations of an actual Abakuá initiation in Guanabacoa, near Havana (Courlander: 1944). It also provides informative narratives on the Egbo Society and the Efik rites.

A distinct feature by which many noninitiates would recognize Abakuá-based ceremonies is the ever-present diablito or demon-like figures (iremes) who represent visiting spirits from the dead or invisible world, which is ever present and interacts with the real world in all African traditions and religious cultures (Courlander, 1996: 20-21).
According to Roger Bastide, the great French ethnologist who delved deeply into African religions, these traditions and rites have survived nowhere else in the Americas -- only in Cuba (Bastide, 1972: 109).

Excellent discussions on the Cuban Abakuá associations are provided by Fernando Ortiz, Lydia Cabrera, Juan Luis Martín, and current authors such as Enrique Sosa, Rafael Núñez Cedeño, and Rogelio Martínez Furé.

*Other Afro-Cuban Religions: Arará and Haitian-Derived Voudun*

To a lesser extent, Afro-Cuban religious complexes have also undergone the influence of other ethnic groups. From the Dahomey region of Africa, Haitians transplanted Voudun (or Voodoo, meaning spirit, deity, or image) their syncretic, highly complex religious system. It encompasses diverse cults in which Dahomean deities and traditions predominate. These Dahomean, Fon-speaking ethnic groups were transplanted to Cuba in the years between 1770 and 1820 among the slaves of the French plantation owners who fled there due to the revolution in St. Domingue, Hispaniola.

Voudun religious influence was reinforced in the twentieth century when many Haitians migrated to Cuba as sugarcane laborers. By this time, there had also been slave imports from the Dahomey/Ewe/Fon ethnic groups who had created their own distinct form of Reglas Ararás.
The religious system that ensued was simpler and did not include a conglomerate of as many religious cults as Haitian Voudun, but it was sufficiently similar so that the incoming Haitians could identify with it. In Cuba, some Ararás and Lucumís (Yoruba) came to regard each other as colleagues, and many spoke both languages, Fon and Lucumí (MacGaffey and Barnett, 1962: 206).

Arará religious cults, who traced their origins to the Ewe-Fon of Dahomey, featured an elaborate pantheon of gods known as *luases* (like the Voudun *loas*, meaning mysteries), many of whom were borrowed from or merged with the Yoruba deities. In veritable African syncretic fashion, Arará religious practice also shows traces of Congo influences. Though now rarely practiced in their original form, the Arará thrived in Matanzas, where there were many African enclaves that survived until recently, and in Santiago de Cuba, where Haitian influence was strong. Reminiscences of their Ewe/Fon origins are still found in the instrumental ensembles of the music derived from the Arará tradition. Voudun, on the other hand, was prevalent first in the mountainous, rural areas, but it has now spread to the suburbs of cities such as Camagüey and Santiago. These Dahomean religious beliefs preserved in the Arará rites were named from a cognate of the Haitian Dahomean “Rada,” derived from the town of Allada in Dahomey.

**Research and Studies: Review of Significant Works**

Prior to the abolition of slavery dating from 1880 to 1886, which was gradual (because a legal mechanism called *patronato* provided that the slaves were under tutelage or
virtual slavery until their eventual freedom), published works on Cuban religious systems unfortunately are scarce. Only a few accounts survive from travelers, such as the one by Dominican Friar Jean Baptiste Labat (1663-1738), a missionary who resided in the French West Indies. In Labat’s *Nouveau voyage aux iles de l’Amérique*, published in France in 1722, he regards the slaves as preserving in secret all of the “superstitions of a pagan cult mixed with practices of the Catholic faith” (Labat 1722, 1979). Other accounts largely described the dances, drumming, singing, and public gatherings of the African slaves, which they characterized as “savage and wild,” not discerning their religious, ritualistic character. Decrees and proclamations from the Spanish military administration, forbidding these gatherings, regulating drum dances in the sugar plantations, ruling their forced supervision, and limiting slave participation, have also been uncovered by research. Abakuá societies and Congo rites were referred to and documented as early as 1882, usually in negative ways, in legislation restricting their freedom or appearance in public celebrations.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, real Afro-Cuban studies began with the work of its pioneer, the revered scholar Fernando Ortiz, who spearheaded this breakthrough in 1906. He pursued impressive, voluminous studies until his death in 1968. Following his lead, from 1930 to 1991, Lydia Cabrera contributed her prodigious oral history research with direct descendants of “negros de nación” devotees of Afro-Cuban religions, including the members of the Regla de Ocha, the Abakuá Secret Society, and the Palo Monte/Mayombe. Rómulo Lachatañeré, another Cuban ethnologist, carried out research in the late 1930s to 1952 and produced the well-documented *Manual de Santería* and works in the form of
essays and monographs on Regla de Ocha, Palo Mayombe, and the Abakuá society. His various essays appear in *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, which was published until 1933 and then superseded by the journal *Estudios Afro-cubanos*, a forum for Afro-Cuban topics published by The Society for Afro-Cuban Studies, founded by Fernando Ortiz in 1938. Essays published in this journal have been reprinted in *Actas del Folklore Cubano* or as monographs by the present Cuban government. This title continues as a veritable mine for Afro-Cuban studies publications.

Concurrently, during the 1930s and the 1940s, the Negrista Movement, patterned after the Indigenista movement, which involved the rest of Latin America, made a lasting contribution to Afro-Cuban themes in the literary field, with poets such as Nicolás Guillén and Emilio Ballagas, novelists such as Alejo Carpentier, and essayists such as Ramón Guirao and José Zacarias Tallet, all of whom produced a wealth of literary pieces directly influenced by African-derived religions.

Noted foreign researchers and anthropologists made their mark studying the African heritage in Cuba; for example, William Bascom, among his other discoveries and contributions, proved through meticulous comparison that Yoruba customs had been incorporated into Cuban religions almost substantially intact. Roger Bastide, the French ethnologist, broke ground with his *Amériques Noires*, while Melville Herskovitz also delved into African syncretism and its ramifications.
The 1960s proved to be another watershed for Afro-Cuban studies. In Cuba, Afro-Cuban religions were first eyed suspiciously as anti-Marxist practices but then tolerated as a religious tradition that did not pose a great threat to the Revolution, since it was not institutionalized and, furthermore, ran counter to Catholic hierarchy and beliefs, which the new atheistic system was trying to eradicate. Afro-Cuban religions were later fostered for their folkloric and tourist attraction values. Their existence and study were further enhanced to cater to Cuba’s new Afro-centric foreign policies. Cuban Afro-religious studies proliferated in Cuba, with researchers such as ethnologists Argeliers León and Isaac Barreal, who explored the ethnologic and musical dimensions; José Luciano Franco, Natalia Bolívar and Miguel Barnet; and Rogelio Martínez Furé, who in his *Dialogos Imaginarios* did serious research with the ethnic groups and associations still surviving in Cuba. Many of these authors either continued research started before the Revolution or published their work under the new government and more auspicious circumstances. Tomás Fernández-Robaina, besides other works on Cuban black issues, compiled two extensive, well-researched bibliographies, which were published by the Cuban National Library.

In the United States, Afro-Cuban religions, which existed before 1959, received new impetus with their second diaspora, this time across the Florida Straits as exiled Cubans brought these rites to its shores. Besides Lydia Cabrera, who republished many of her works in the United States and wrote new ones, two of the researchers she mentored, Mercedes Cros-Sandoval and Isabel Castellanos, continued her work from diverse angles: the former largely from the anthropological, social, and medical aspects and the latter mainly from the
cultural historical. Rafael Martínez, an anthropologist; Miguel Ramos, a researcher using contemporary ethnographic research methods also privy to an insider’s view as he is an oriate (master of ceremonies) for initiation rituals for Regla de Ocha; Raúl Cañizares, who chronicles recent U.S. trends and transformations; and a plethora of other Cuban exiles contributed to the development and elucidation of Afro-Cuban themes.

An added surge was felt with the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, which brought many more Afro-Cuban religious devotees to the United States, expanding the diaspora. This was soon followed in the 1990s by the influx of rafters (balseros). Not only the written word but also many artistic works in the forms of sculpture, ornaments, paintings, decorations, shrines, and altars proliferated.

In the United States, a growing number of high quality monographs, well selected bibliographies, studies, and essays in journals and collective works provide deeper insights into the various Afro-Cuban religious complexes.

In the meantime in Cuba, a new generation of writers arose, mostly around the Casa del Caribe, a Center for Caribbean Studies in Santiago de Cuba, and began to explore ethno-religious topics not as well examined previously, such as the Voudun derivatives in Eastern Cuba. Among these, we cite and annotate works by Jesús Guanche, Joel James Figarola, Rafael Duharte, and José Millet. Another group of researchers, including Daisy Fariñas, as part of a series *Estudios Socioreligiosos* (Social and Religious Studies) published in Havana,
also examined less documented issues, such as native Taíno Indian influences in Afro-Cuban religions and Spiritist practices.

Afro-Cuban studies in the United States are no longer the domain of Cuban writers. Many North Americans of various extractions, whether African, Anglo, or Puerto Rican have also examined, analyzed, and studied these topics. George Brandon, who conducted field research in Africa and Cuba; Joseph Murphy, who has examined Lucumí religion thoroughly since his dissertation in the 1980s; Harry Lefever, delving into the sociopolitical hermeneutics of Yoruba resistance to cultural penetration; Migene González-Wippler, whose works, albeit popular and anecdotal, have contributed to the dissemination of oricha worship; Judith Gleason, with her insightful studies on Oyá, the powerful deity who controls death, and on Ifá divination -- all have made significant contributions to Afro-Cuban religious literature.

We would like to mention here that concurrent with this more formal literature, starting in the 1920s, mostly Regla de Ocha practitioners, who had until then adhered to oral traditions, began saving written annotations (libretas) of their religious rites, formulas, prayers, and other details of their worship, as recorded in Un caso de tradición oral escrita (León, 1971). These Afro-Cuban versions of sacred narratives patakís, which assist in the interpretation of the Ifá oracle, were disseminated in the United States and in parts of Latin America and constitute another form of literature, ritual or liturgical texts taking the place of sacred scriptures and derived from oral sources or rewritten by the practitioner. A good
example is Andrés Rogers’ *Los caracoles, historia de sus letras* (1973), containing rituals, incantations, offering of sacrificial gifts (*ebbó*), and other narratives.

Whether scholarly, popular/commercial, or in the guise of sacred notebooks for the priests and oriates, the literature on Afro-Cuban religious complexes is constantly growing with the continuity and change inherent to the subject.

**Afro-Cuban Religious Systems: Influence on the Arts**

Afro-Cuban diasporan religions have been the source of artistic inspiration for Cuban artists ever since the renowned sculptor and painter Wifredo Lam (1902-1982) started producing his African-influenced works. A disciple of Pablo Picasso and follower of surrealism, Lam stands out for his Yoruba-inspired works, also featuring traces of Palo Monte and Abakuá influences. Fernando Ortiz himself was one of the first to recognize this trait and praise Lam’s intrinsic African values and content, though some critics claim that his Afro-Cuban inspiration has been filtered through the French primitivist influence. They regard his work more as having a European aesthetic than truly Afro-Cuban. Lam is perceived as interpreting themes in a more universal way in his sculpture and paintings. It is said he did not, for example, utilize real Afro-Cuban *oricha* colors and elements. Recent critic Julia Herzberg disputes this criticism in her authoritative analyses of his works, as in the essay “Rereading Lam” (1996); and Gerardo Mosquera, also the author of many critical essays on Afro-Cuban-inspired works, points out Yoruba/Santería and Congo/Palo elements, comparing Lam’s paintings to the latter’s *ngangas* (Mosquera, 1996: 230).
In reviewing current publications on the artistic influence of Afro-Cuban religion, which runs so deep as to warrant one Cuban ethnologist’s calling it a virtual “possession” of the arts by the African deities, we found that in the 1960s, Fernando Ortiz deplored that its influences on art were not as well-analyzed as other aspects of Afro-Cuban religion. This gap has been narrowed by an outstanding compilation of essays, *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Arts* (1996), edited by Arturo Lindsay, wherein he and other critics such as Ricardo Viera, Mary Jane Jacob, David H. Brown, and Randall Morris did very authoritative interpretations of the artists and their work. In addition, interesting and well-documented essays and monographs on African Yoruba and Congolese arts were contributed by art critic and professor Robert Farris Thompson, comparing tendencies and influences in the Americas and Africa, along with art historian Babatunde Lawal, who explores the ancestral connection between the two art aesthetics, and Henry Drewal, who has showcased the splendid use of beadwork in Yoruba ritual costumes and ornaments in Africa, Brazil and Cuba in exhibits in California and in the Miami Museum of Art in 1999.

In this context, we enumerate a few who exemplify current trends and followed in Lam’s footsteps, sometimes going deeper into African roots than he did, breaking ground and creating innovations on African themes and concepts of art. Going one step further than his master, Manuel Mendive (born 1944) gave us the “first direct expression ever produced in Afro-American plastic art from within its religious-cultural space” (Mosquera, 1996: 237). A practitioner of both Santería and Palo, Mendive projects his beliefs in his work as an educated artist.
Also among Lam’s disciples, Juan Boza (1941-1991) stands out as another artist who demonstrated more profound Afro-Cuban religious influences. Boza, a priest in the Lucumí religion, pursued his craft in Cuba and later migrated to New York. There, he flourished as his style was revitalized by reinventing himself and rediscovering his African and Cuban roots. Boza’s aesthetic foundation is based in Afro-Cuban/Yoruba cosmovision, though he also exhibits characteristics of the Palo Mayombe and Abakuá traditions (Morris, 1996: 184-187). The Lucumí influence is evident throughout his work in drawings, prints, altars, and photographs of the tronos of the orichas, elaborate and artistic thrones for the gods which he created with colorful and exuberant originality, breaking ground in Afro-Cuban iconography.

Another prominent artist, a follower of Palo Monte, is José Bedia, whose work was recently exhibited in Miami at the Florida International University Art Museum. Migrating from Cuba to Miami via Mexico, Bedia was part of the new crop of artists who came of age at the end of the 1970s in Cuba -- born after and products of the Revolution. Largely university trained, this group of artists has a long and deep tradition rooted in Afro-Cuban religious cults (Mosquera, 1996: 244). Most of these artists joined the ranks of the exiles and brought their innovative concepts and art forms with them. True to the characteristics of this group, Bedia has strong roots in Cuban life and believes that “to understand Cubans it is important to understand the island’s African heritage” (Lindsay, 1996: 216). His stark figures of the Mayombe spirit world, ever present in this life, and his ngangas or prendas de palo, sacred magical objects containing the spirits, are powerful, impressive, full of real meaning, and make a strong impact on viewers. Bedia is just one of the examples of this new Cuban
art style, closer to the African view of the importance of the mystical forces behind the objects portrayed.

By celebrating his religious beliefs and molding them into his works, Osvaldo Mesa, a black Cuban artist who lived in Baltimore, made original artworks by wrapping, hanging, and stretching painted canvases over Santería objects. Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) produced her “silhouette series,” featuring figures carved in rock, incised in clay beds, and molded from mud. An admirer and an avid reader of Lydia Cabrera’s works, Mendieta has been compared to Frida Kahlo for her ardent feminism. Fascinated by Yoruba lore she heard from her servants in Cuba, Mendieta was further drawn to certain characteristics of Santería practices: the Lucumi religion’s earth-centered creed; philosophy and mythology in which male and female orichas have great importance; some male deities with female manifestations; female and male priests having equal status; and, while up to very recently the babalawos’ or high priests’ initiation was restricted to males, many rituals are highly female dominated. Mendieta also utilized the anaforuana (sacred signs as described by Lydia Cabrera in her book of the same title) that were used by the Abakuá to sanctify a location. Her artistry and works have been analyzed and recorded in essays and monographs.

Cuban-born U.S. artists inspired by Afro-Cuban themes have been the subjects of essays and studies in *African Arts* and other reputable artistic forums, with important exhibitions of their work taking place in key cities renowned as art centers. This is the case of Alberto del Pozo (1945-1992). Working in New York and Miami in painting and theatre
design, this Santa Clara (Las Villas Province) native has contributed colorful, creative renditions of the Yoruba orichas, portraits framed in innovative, decorative signs and colors that represent their attributes. An excellent collection of his paintings of the Yoruba deities, numbering about 17, was donated by the artist’s family to the University of Miami Richter Library’s Cuban Heritage Collection after his premature demise.

The influence of Cuban religions is “prevalent in creative work of individual artists expressing or recreating several aspects of their rich religious and cultural heritage” (Viera, 1996; 174). The fact that these artists evidence African influences “through powers of creative transformation” in their artwork suggests traces of “cultural traditions that reveal ways of seeing objects and perceiving things in a conscious or unconscious way with a different cosmovision” (Thompson 1983:6), a characteristic that imbues their work an authentic African outlook. These artists have been truly “possessed by the orichas, egguns, nkisis, and nfumbes” that inhabit the vast jungle of Afro-Cuban worship (Bolívar, 1994).

This confirms Isabel Castellanos’ observation, “Like old wine poured into new vessels, the traditional spirit of Africa animates the way these modern Cubans . . . view reality.” These African diasporan religions are no longer solely an African patrimony: all these beliefs have been merged into an Afro-American faith. Products of an “intense transculturation,” they are to be “found at the root of many aspects of Cuban contemporary society: music, literature and art . . . From Africa to the Caribbean . . . and from there to Cubans and now to Cuban Americans and to other populations in the United States, the
process of cultural transformation and synthesis inexorably marches on” (Castellanos, 1996: 48-49).

**Methodology and Organization**

The annotated bibliography that follows is based on important bibliographies, such as the very comprehensive and documented classified work done by John Gray in 1989, *Ashé: Traditional Religion and Healing in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Classified International Bibliography*, and the *Bibliography of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies*, compiled in 1977 by Harold Turner. Also consulted were Patrick Ofori’s *Black African Traditional Religions and Philosophy: A Select Bibliographic Survey of the Sources from the Earliest Times to 1974*, published in 1975, and Irving Zaretsky and Cynthia Shambaugh’s *Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship in Africa and Afro-America: An Annotated Bibliography*, published in 1978. In Spanish, we relied on Tomás Fernández Robaina’s two Afro-Cuban bibliographies annotated below. No new extensive and comprehensive bibliographies were found; therefore, current, updated entries were taken from bibliographical references in the various works consulted and from such standard works as the *Handbook of Latin American Studies* (now available online) and the *Hispanic American Periodicals Index* (HAPI-ONLINE). *Dissertations Abstracts International* was used for relevant masters and doctoral theses on Afro-Cuban religion and OCLC WorldCAT for books. Monographs and articles that the author was unable to obtain in time for this publication are included if they were deemed significant but not annotated.
Annotations are largely original, although we have used modified author or publisher abstracts whenever they were available. Although recognizing that we have included publications with varying degrees of scholarly quality -- some exhibit popular treatment in that they are basic “how to” manuals geared to divulging diverse religious practices, while many others arise from strict anthropological methods -- we have included numerous entries in the hope that the annotations, though admittedly more descriptive than critical, will guide the reader as to the intrinsic value of the work. Our goal can best be characterized in the words of Miguel Barnet, the Cuban ethnologist who has written extensively on these topics: our task, just as he defines his, is “desbrozar la maraña del monte cubano, donde los elementos Yoruba y Bantú, vivos aún hoy, y en su más espléndida floración, aparecen aquí colocados en estructuras asequibles para el lector profano”; that is, “to clear the intricate maze of the Cuban wilderness where the Yoruba and Bantú elements, still alive today, and in their most splendid flowering, are offered here, placed as accessible concepts for the non-initiated” (Barnet, 1995: 5).

This selected annotated bibliography aims to be the researcher’s guide to a safari through the rich, exuberant jungle of the existing literature on Afro-Cuban religious systems, drawing a map that will aid readers, initiated or not, in researching and studying this complex subject, perhaps even motivating them to make their own contribution to a more thorough exploration, better understanding, and dissemination of the historic roots and the transformations that these systems have undergone over the centuries, since they were first introduced by the enslaved Africans.
Conclusions

Since it is the Yoruba culture that has been dominant as the principal influence on Afro-Cuban diasporan religions, my bibliographic research has confirmed that it is Santería /Regla de Ocha that has reigned supreme in Afro-Cuban research and scholarship. The Congo-based religious complex, though the second in importance in Afro-Cuban practice, has largely been studied, researched, and analyzed mostly in tandem with the Yoruba cults. This is due in part to its reputation as the “darker side of Santería” and also to the affinities shared by the two cultures (santeros often being initiated as paleros, the two traditions being considered as different or complementary sides of the same coin and not mutually antagonistic).

Abakuá secret societies have been widely researched from their African origins to their existence in Cuba, as they were the precursors of many labor unions (gremios), meeting places and breeding grounds for insurrection, for conspiracy in the struggle for independence, not only of slaves but of Cubans wanting to be free from Spanish dominance. They have made a significant imprint on Cuban language and on the culture through its utilization of their characteristic symbols. As such, Abakuá secret societies, next to the Yoruba religion, have been researched in-depth, and their existence and traits have been extensively publicized and disseminated in the literature.

The Arará- or Dahomean-derived cults have been less emphasized and covered as a phenomenon of syncretism separate from the other cults (reglas) mentioned. This is perhaps
due in part to their perceived “external or foreign” extraction from Haitian-derived Rada sects or to their lesser significance in the Havana area. More studies on Arará and Voudun sects are being conducted currently from research facilities in Eastern Cuba.

The author has included in the selected annotated bibliography representative works that present diverging points of view, research methods, writing styles, formats, disciplinary approaches, and kinds of treatment. The composite view presented by the varied works results in a kaleidoscopic vision of Afro-Cuban diasporan religions from every conceivable facet and angle: scientific and popular, anthropological and artistic, erudite and superficial, and a religious/theological perspective, given by the Catholic Church’s pronouncements and the African theological approach of E. Bolanji Idowu, a Nigerian Methodist minister. From texts by Marxist followers to devout adherents, this eclectic compilation constitutes a broad range of positions, methodologies, perspectives, and interdisciplinary approaches, showing the various ways in which these themes are being pursued in the present, no longer the exclusive domain of anthropologists, historians, and theologians.

Although traditionally the impact of Afro-Cuban religious systems in music, dance, theater, customs, language, and literature has been widely examined and showcased, its artistic dimension has not been, until recently, extensively analyzed in-depth. To complete the panorama of Afro-Cuban religions’ alternative ways of looking at the world, we have provided a brief excursion into the literature of the arts, dealing with an increasing number of
plastic and visual artists who have delved into the sacred recesses of these rites to draw inspiration for their artwork.

Like the writers, scholars, and researchers who have read and composed the written word, these artists have incorporated, in their canvases and statues, ancient cosmovisions in innovative ways, thus showcasing the continuity as well as the changes in African diasporan religious complexes.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge here my indebtedness to my friend and colleague Diana G. Kirby, a librarian/anthropologist, for introducing me to the research of AfroCuban religious traditions. By actively seeking my collaboration as co-author and requesting my input into her earlier works, she spurred my interest in these themes. I was deslumbrada (dazzled), like Lydia Cabrera was throughout all of her life, by the richness of Afro-Cuban mythology, the complexity of the rites and liturgy, and the wealth and scholarship of the bibliographic materials available. As an exile attempting not to be completely absorbed by my environment, I admired the Afro-Cubans’ endurance and proud resilience in the preservation of a cultural heritage I feel is partly mine. Lastly, I would like to appreciate the selfless commitment and gracious assistance of my student assistant and computer expert, Elayne Ramos.


Labat, Jean Baptiste. (1722, 1979). *Viajes a las islas de la América*. Selección y traducción de Francisco de Oraá. La Habana: Casa de las Américas. (First published in Paris in 1722 in French as *Nouveau Voyage aux iles de l’Amérique*.) Dominican Friar Jean Baptiste (1663-1738) traveled extensively in the West Indies and documented and described black slave witchcraft practices and other Afro-Caribbean customs as he perceived them.


I. General: Basic Background Works on African and Afro-Latin American Religious Systems


Clark, Juan M. (1986). *Religious Repression in Cuba*. Coral Gables, Fla.: North-South Center for the Cuban Studies Project of the Institute of Interamerican Studies, University of Miami. Contains references to Afro-Cuban religions and treatment of its practitioners by the Cuban government.


Greenfield, Sidney M., and Andre Droogers. (1999). Syncretism in Africa and the Americas. Blue Ridge Summit, Pa: Rowman & Littlefield. “Divided into four sections, the book focuses on religious syncretism in Brazil, Cuba, and other parts of the Caribbean and West Africa. Greenfield and Droogers have brought together an array of outstanding international scholars whose rich and varied essays on specific geographical locales and customs comprise an innovative and comprehensive view of the transference of religious traditions and their continuity and reformulation on two continents.” [Publisher’s Abstract]


study of Afro-American societies/cultures that entail examining the basic conditions under which migrations of enslaved Africans occurred. Mentions Afro-Cuban divinatory practices. Contains a good bibliography and new preface. Originally published in 1976 as An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past.


**II. Works on Various Afro-Cuban Religions**


*Bibliografía de temas afrocubanos*. (1985). Revisión técnica, Tomás Fernández Robaina; edición, Marta Trigo Marabotto y María Luisa Acosta. La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí. Depto. de Investigaciones Bibliográficas. An extensive bibliography covering Afro-Cuban topics in all disciplines, including religious practices and cults. Participation is one of the main elements in Afro-Cuban religions.
The roles, differences, and similarities in songs, dance, and music among three variants of Afro-Cuban religion, including Santería, Palo Monte, and Abakuá. Text in Spanish.


*Encuentro sobre Pastoral con Grupos Afroamericanos.* (1980). Cartagena and Bogotá, Colombia: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano. Historic vision of the black African world includes religion only, with a description of the various cults and the Catholic Church’s position regarding them. Text in Spanish.

Fernández Robaina, Tomás. (1968). *Bibliografía sobre estudios afro-americanos*. La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí. Using valuable archival material (books, manuscripts, and documents from the National Library), this is a very comprehensive bibliography on Afro-Latin American topics, among which religions and anthropology are well represented. Text in Spanish.


Howard, Philip A. (1998). Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century. Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press. Well-documented scholarly work, supported by in-depth research in archives in Spain and Cuba, studies the mutual aid organizations established by Africans in Cuba to improve their economic, social, and political statuses. Chronicles the celebrations and worship of each ethnic group and their use to person, language, customs, and religious heritage.


Ortiz, Fernando. (1965). *La Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba / Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba/ Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*. La Habana: Editora Universitaria. 5 vols. Comprehensive account of Afro-Cuban music, dance, and theatre, written by the best known Cuban folklorist/anthropologist/writer/ethnographer. The first book is a social history of Cuban music, its evolution, function, and manifestations. The second book deals with Afro-Cuban dance and theatre, including ritual dance and pantomime; and the third describes musical instruments, their use, and origins. Text in Spanish.


___________. (1992). Los cabildos y la fiesta afrocubanos del Día de Reyes. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales. Explains the origins and importance of the religious/mutual aid confraternities, their role in transculturation, and describes the African rituals carried on in the traditional Feast of the Three Kings under the guise of Catholic celebrations. Text in Spanish.


Sosa, Juan J. (1999). Sectas, cultos y sincretismos: una reflexión teológico-pastoral sobre los movimientos religiosos que, al margen de la Iglesia, predominan entre los católicos hispanos de los Estados Unidos, especialmente aquellos que proceden del Caribe. Miami: Ediciones Universal. Geared toward the clergy and those performing pastoral duties in the United States, it integrates under one cover the Catholic Church’s view on syncretic religious phenomena by including pertinent documents and official statements. Contains good explanatory essay.

III. Afro-Cuban Religions

Yoruba/Lucumí-Based Religion (Regla de Ocha, Regla de Ifá: a.k.a. Santería)


the understanding of Cuban Santería.


________. (1990). *Los orishas en Cuba*. La Habana: Ediciones Unión. Described as a “vademecum” of Regla de Ocha to serve the initiated as well as the unbeliever, this is the work of a well-known Santería researcher in Cuba. Her investigations are backed by years of work with her informants, *babalows* and other practitioners, and by consulting archival collections in Cuba. This study is complemented by a vocabulary with comments and a detailed description of offerings, dances, herbs, and clothing. Text in Spanish.


___________. (1993). Santería from Africa to The New World: The Dead Sell Memories. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press. Based on his 1983 doctoral dissertation and extensive field work in Ghana, Cuba, and finally New York City and the Oyotunji Village in South Carolina, this is a well-documented, highly scholarly, historical, and ethnographic study on Santería. Starting from Santería’s African origins, the book covers the development of Santería in several phases, from early Santería (1760-1870); Santería proper (1870-1959); to contemporary Santería and what the author calls “Santerismo” and its later U.S. transformation into Orisha-Voodoo.


___________. (1954, 1983). 5th ed. El Monte: Igbo Finda, Ewe Orisha, Vititinfinda: notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los negros criollos y el pueblo de Cuba. Miami: Ediciones Universal. (Original ed. 1954). Based on the author’s observations of Santería rituals during the 1930s and 1940s in Cuba, this is a widely acclaimed work on African religious worship among the descendants of Yoruba slaves in Cuba and is the “Bible” of Santería studies. Contains illustrations and black and white photographs, as well as detailed subject and herbal indices. Text
in Spanish.


Cañizares, Raúl. (1992). Transportability and Dissimulation in Santería: A Study in Cultural and Religious Survival. Doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida. Study that documents the historical connection between Santería practice and political leadership. By examining the Cuban Constitution and the oral testimony of many older practitioners, the author explores the sometimes repressive and sometimes very open reaction to Santería practices by the Cuban government.

____________. (1993). Walking with the Night: The Afro-Cuban World of Santería. Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books. Examines the structural changes and other transformations in U.S. Santería with regard to leadership patterns and rituals, as well as perceived current trends.


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Elizondo, Carlos. (1979). *Manual del italero de la religion lucumi.* Union City, N.J.: [s.n.] A handbook of Santería that can be found in many botánicas, or religious retail stores, in Miami and other cities with large Cuban communities. Text in Spanish.


Flores-Peña, Ysamur, and Roberta J. Evachuk. (1994). *Santería Garments and Altars: Speaking without a Voice.* Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi. Folklorists and practitioners detail how multicolored cloth, beads, sequins, and shells are used to create altars and clothing to represent the primordial themes of the religion, which they characterize as having originated with but now separate from African practices.


Granda, Julio Omar. (1995). *A Materialist View of Santería and the Expense Associated with the Initiation.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University. “This thesis will only briefly deal with the topic of animal sacrifice [but additionally] it will focus on a side of the religion that does not attract as much publicity, the initiation. More precisely, the focus will be the expenses accrued by the initiates into this religion.” [Dissertation Abstract]


de Ciencias Sociales. Concentrates on this deity of the sea, her attributes, manifestations, special rites. Text in Spanish.


Lefever, Harry G. (1996). “When the Saints Go Riding In: Santería in Cuba and the United States.” The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 35(Sept.): 3-27. A brief study on Santería that posits the argument that “Santería can be understood as a textual rewriting and rereading of the biographies, the histories, and the social contexts of its adherents. Using the opposition, reversionary, and subversive hermeneutic principles inherited as part of their West African cultural heritage, the creators and followers of Santería developed their religion as a counterhegemonic challenge to the social, economic and political order that controlled their lives.”


Afro-Cuban religion.

Martín, Juan Luis. (1930). *Ecué, Changó y Yemayá: ensayos sobre la sub-religión de los afro-cubanos. La Habana Cultural*. An early essay interpreting and comparing Afro-Cuban religions, including Palo as “black” magic and Santería with descriptions of rites and ceremonies. Text in Spanish.


Mason, Michael A. (1994). “I Bow My Head to the Ground: The Creation of Bodily Experience in a Cuban-American Santería Initiation.” *Journal of American Folklore* 107 (Winter): 23-39. “Although much scholarship in performance-oriented folkloristics has focused on ritual, little attention has been given to the role of the body in such enactments. In an initiation in the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, the formal gestures executed by the neophyte’s body show membership in, and commitment to, the religious community. The meaning of the gestures lies not so much in abstract formulations and concepts but in their performances within ritual context.” [Abstract]


Caribbean Studies 10 (1-2): 50-65. Focusing on the historical backgrounds of Santería, this brief study deals with the myth of the Ilé-Ifé kingdom and its importance in Yoruba self-identification, the rise and fall of the Oyó kingdom, Yoruba decline and slave trade, social structure, and cultural traits.


Miller, Ivor Lynn. (1995). Belief and Power in Contemporary Cuba: The Dialogue between Santería Practitioners and Revolutionary Leaders. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University. This dissertation documents the historical connection between “Santería practice and political leadership. In spite of thirty-five years of Marxist-Leninist ideology and education in Cuba, the contemporary population is profoundly religious. While Castro’s regime has ousted both Catholic and Protestant Church clergy as representatives of imperialist institutions, a question remains as to the status of Santería practice and practitioners throughout the Revolution.” [Modified Dissertation Abstract]


African roots through transculturation in Cuba to its manifestations in the United States today. Addresses the problems of transformation of Yoruba religion by the Cuban environment and the “relationship between this transformed religion and the Catholicism of colonial Cuba.”


Puig, María Elena. (1997). Perceived Social Support, Subjective Well-Being, and the Practice of Santería among Four Immigrant Waves: A Comparative Study of Cuban-Americans in Dade County, Florida. Ph.D. Dissertation. Barry University, Miami. Data for this study were collected from Cuban American respondents from four migration waves who practiced and did not practice Santería. Contrary to the literature and to the practitioners of Santería, results did not show empirical evidence to confirm that Santería practice provided a social support system or greater sense of
personal well-being. [Modified Dissertation Abstract]


_________. (1982). Ceremonias de Obaluaye: para iniciados solamente. Carolina, Puerto Rico: [n.p.]. A guidebook of worship of the Yoruba God Obaluaye. Among the most interesting aspects of this monograph is the warning appearing on the back of the title page stating that the contents should not be read by the un-initiated. Text in Spanish.


_________. (1982). Oro: Egungun; las honras de Egungun. Carolina, Puerto Rico: [n.p.]. Mourning rites, involving sacrificial offerings of food and animals, the special preparation of meals, and musical arrangements, comprises the range of ceremonies for honoring the recently deceased. Aimed at the interested layperson, this book is intended as a teaching aid for recent initiates and followers of Santería. Text in Spanish.


Ridsdale, Frank Edward. (1998). Santería and the Historical Construction of Political and Social Relations in Cuba. M.A. Thesis. University Of Western Ontario (Canada). “Questions how economic, social and political regional differences politically divided the country, affected race relations, contributed to Cuba’s independence from Spain, and were expressed in the 1959 Cuban Revolution. It also examines how these differences shaped Santería, an African-Cuban religion” and points out different ways in which its development was related to regionally specific political/economic/social context of its adepts. [Modified Thesis Abstract]


A handbook of Santería divination and magical spells. Illustrated.


__________. (1977). “Santería: Afro-Cuban Concepts of Disease and Its Treatment in Miami.” *Journal of Operational Psychiatry* 8: 52-63. The way in which the Afro-Cuban religious complex known as Santería has enabled Cuban nationals to adjust to the process of acculturation in Miami by expanding its influence in terms of the people who seek help in its rituals, counsel in its divination systems, and cure in the therapeutic practices of the santero priest, are described. The belief of the santeros in the therapeutic power of plants, herbs, and weeds is examined.

__________. (1979). “Santería as a Mental Health Care System: A Historical Overview.” *Social Science and Medicine* 13b (April): 137-151. An examination of Santería in attracting more followers. Concludes that Santería’s intrinsic flexibility, eclecticism, and heterogeneity have been advantageous in allowing functional, dogmatic, and ritual changes that enable it to meet the different needs of its many followers. In its continuing adaptation, Santería today has the potential to become a collaborating institution handling matters of the soul, while the orthodox health care system deals with matters of the mind. There is no conflict between the two in the eyes of either santeros (priests) or clients.


__________. (1995). “Afro-Cuban Religion in Perspective.” In Enigmatic Powers: Syncretism with African and Indigenous Peoples, eds. Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo and Andrés I. Pérez y Mena. New York: Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies. 81-89. Another contribution by the noted sociologist on the origins of Santería. It describes the African cabildos in Spain, the orisha identities in Cuba, the cult of the dead, the syncretization of the Catholic concept of guardian angel and the Yoruba eleda or protector spirit. It analyzes functional changes of the Yoruba religion in Cuba and the use of its pharmacological healing dimension by all classes during the colonial period. It discusses Santería outside Cuba and its new dimensions, followers, and trends.


Santiago, Miguel F. (1993). Dancing with the Saints: the Dance Experience in Santería. San Juan, Puerto Rico: InterAmerican University Press. Focusing on the dance aspect, this is an innovative examination of the religious ritual and the diverse modes of dance representing each deity.

Soledad, Rosalía de la, and María J. San Juan de Nobas. (1988). Ibó: Yorubas en tierras


IV. Bantú / Congo-Based Religions
(Palo Monte / Mayombe, Regla Kimbisa and others)


James Figarola, Joel. (1996). “La brujería cubana: el Palo Monte.” Revista Mexicana del Caribe 2: 100-137. The term “Cuban witchcraft” refers to Regla Conga or Palo Monte, the most complex of all Afro-Cuban syncretic cults. Originating in the Congo, this religious system is based on a monotheistic belief in Inzambi. The article attempts to uncover some of the more obscure aspects of Palo Monte rites. Nfumbis, nkisi, ndoquis, and mpungos are some of the key concepts to the internal logic of Regla de Palo Monte; the author bases his overview of the religion on these concepts, which open the door to a better understanding of Congo cosmogony, theogony, and liturgy in Cuba. The pact among the palero, the nfumbi, and the nganga is also explored, throwing light on one of Palo Monte’s richest practices, long overlooked by Cuban social sciences. [article abstract]. Text in Spanish.

essay explaining the origins and prevalence of the Congo beliefs and practices.


V. Carabalí-Based Religion
(Abakuá/Ñañigo Secret Societies)


La Regla Kimbisa del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje. Miami: Ediciones Universal. The story of Andres Facundo Cristo de los Dolores Petit, a Cuban black man who is said to have sold the secrets of the Abakuá religion to the white man in colonial Cuba. The Abakuá society is a syncretic religion that blends religious traditions of Calabar origin, Catholicism, Santería, and other spiritist influences. Contains a biography, descriptions of the temple, priesthood and ritual, initiation, oracles, and possession. Text in Spanish.

La lengua sagrada de los ñañigos. Miami: Ediciones Universal. Dictionary of the sacred Abakuá/Calabar vocabulary used by Cuban ñañigos in rituals, as preserved by the elders. Text in Spanish.


Los ñañigos: su historia, sus prácticas, su lenguaje, con el facímile de los sellos, que usa cada uno de los juegos o agrupaciones. (1882). Habana: Imprenta “La Correspondencia de Cuba.” One of the earliest historical documents about the Abakuá secret societies. Text in Spanish.


Pérez Pérez, Adriana, and Norma García Cabrera. (1993). Abakuá; una secta secreta. La Habana: Publicigraf. Brief explanation of the secret society, its rites, and impact on
Cuban traditions.


Roche y Monteagudo, Rafael. (1914). *Los ñañigos...la policía y sus misterios en Cuba.* 2nd ed. corr., aum. y adicionada con “La Policía Judicial,” procedimientos, formularios, leyes, reglamentos, ordenanzas, y disposiciones que conciernen a los cuerpos de seguridad pública. Habana: Imprenta y Papelería de Rambla, Bouza y Cia. Highlights the legal and police records of Abakuá Secret Society adepts. Text in Spanish.

Sosa Rodríguez, Enrique. (1982). *Los ñañigos: ensayo.* La Habana: Casa de las Americas. An essay on the Abakuá, discussing their characteristic of machismo, the sensationalism of the news media and racial prejudice that brought them a negative notoriety, and the white presence in the societies. Text in Spanish.


VI. Fon / Dahomean-Based Religions
(Arará, Voudun-Derived Syncretic Cults)

Andreu Alonso, Guillermo. (1992). *Los ararás en Cuba; Florentina la princesa dahomeyana.* La Habana: Ciencias Sociales. Documents the presence of this ethnic group and the foundation in 1887 of their *cabildo*, Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes in Matanzas, headed by Florentina Zulueta, an Arará slave, later freed by the aristocratic family that owned her. Text in Spanish.


VII. African and Afro-Cuban Religious Influences in the Arts


Bolívar Aróstegui, Natalia. (1994). Orishas, eggúns, nkisis, nfumbes y su posesión de la pintura cubana. La Habana: Pablo de la Torriente. Explores how Afro-Cuban deities of various religious systems and cults have inspired Cuban painters to the point of permeating their whole art. Text in Spanish.


Vivid descriptions of the “tronos de santo,” their decorations, use of fabrics, beads, and other ornaments. Profusely illustrated and documented.


or its form.


Visual Art of Cuba.” In Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art. Ed. Arturo Lindsay. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 225-258. Showcases the main artists who have exhibited African influences from Wifredo Lam onward, including Roberto Diago, Mateo Torriente, Agustín Cardenas, and Manuel Mendive to the New Cuban Art as exemplified in José Bedia, Ricardo Rodríguez, Belkis Ayón, and others. These artists exhibit the influences of one or more of the many African cults that exist in Cuba.


botanical content. The cult of the Yoruba God of Herbalism, Osanyin Elewe, in Nigeria, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and New York.


___________. (1997). “Sacred Silhouettes. (Afro-Cuban and Native American influences in J. Bedia’s work).” *Art in America* 85 (July): 64-71. The writer discusses the work of Cuba artist José Bedia. “Bedia developed the stylistic combination of African, Caribbean, and European motifs that were achieved by Wifredo Lam, Cuba’s most famous 20th-century painter. Bedia also enriched his own art via intimate involvement with Palo Monte and Afro-Cuban and Native American religion. The artist, who uses the mediums of painting, drawing, collage, and installation, favors sleek, long-limbed depictions of humans, animals, and human-animal hybrids, generally silhouetted against stark horizons.” [Abstract]


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