ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AFRO-CUBAN *BATÁ* DRUM AESTHETICS: DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP TECHNIQUE, SOUND, AND IDENTITY

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The Lucumí religion (also Santería and Regla de Ocha) developed in 19th-century colonial Cuba, by syncretizing elements of Catholicism with the Yoruba worship of *orisha*. When fully initiated, *santeros* (priests) actively participate in religious ceremonies by periodically being possessed or "mounted" by a patron saint or *orisha*, usually within the context of a drumming ritual, known as a *toque de santo*, *bembé*, or *tambor*.

Within these rituals, there is a clearly defined goal of trance possession, though its manifestation is not the sole measure of success or failure. Rather than focusing on the fleeting, exciting moments that immediately precede the arrival of an *orisha* in the form of a possession trance, this thesis investigates the entire four- to six-hour musical performance that is central to the ceremony. It examines the brief pauses, the moments of reduced intensity, the slow but deliberate build-ups of energy and excitement, and even the periods when novices are invited to perform the sacred *batá* drums, and

places these moments on an equal footing with the more dynamic periods where possession is imminent or in progress.

This document approaches Lucumí ritual from the viewpoint of *batá* drummers, ritual specialists who, during the course of a *toque de santo*, exercise wide latitude in determining the shape of the event. Known as *omo* Aña (children of the *orisha* Aña who is manifest in drums and rhythms), *batá* drummers comprise a fraternity that is accessible only through ritual initiation. Though they are sensitive to the desires of the many participants during a *toque de santo*, and indeed make their living by satisfying the expectations of their hosts, many of the drummers' activities are inwardly focused on the cultivation and preservation of this fraternity. Occasionally interfering with spirit possession, and other expectations of the participants, these aberrant activities include teaching and learning, developing group identity or signature sound, and achieving a state of intimacy among the musicians known as "communitas."

AFRO-CUBAN *BATÁ* DRUM AESTHETICS: DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL
AND GROUP TECHNIQUE, SOUND, AND IDENTITY

by

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To Francisco "Pancho Quinto" Mora

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Elegúa for opening my paths, Changó the owner of the *batá*, and Aña the voice of the *batá*.

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keeping me on the prayer list for all these years), and especially Bonnie, my wife. As my toughest critic and closest advisor, I would not have been able to write a dissertation I could be proud of without you. It seems unfair not put your name on the cover, alongside my own. I hope you know in your heart that, in every way, I consider this final product as much yours as it is mine. Thank you, Bonnie, for all the sacrifices you made during the last nine years.

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CONVENTIONS

This dissertation uses words and phrases from three foreign languages:
Spanish, Lucumí, and to a limited extent, Yoruba. Throughout the text, these words
appear in italics and are accompanied upon their first appearance in each chapter with
a definition. If the definition appears within parentheses, as it does when the meaning
cannot be simply stated in the context of the sentence, it is preceded by an
abbreviation (Sp., Lu. or Yo.), which corresponds to the language (Spanish, Lucumí or
Yoruba, respectively).

Written Lucumí can be best described as an Hispanicized version of Yoruba.
While diacritical marks on Yoruba words indicate pitch, on Lucumí words they
function as they would in Spanish, representing a stressed syllable. I rely extensively
on the spellings provided in Lydia Cabrera's Lucumí-Spanish dictionary, Anagó
(Cabrera 1986). In those few instances where Cabrera omits a word, I choose spellings
that are easily comprehended by English-speaking readers. For example, the
Hispanicized Lucumí words *ñongo* and *güemilere* are Anglicized as *nyongo* and
wemilere, respectively.

The plural form of Lucumí words is identical to the singular form. In Spanish,
Lucumí nouns, like all nouns, are preceded by a definite article. *El* and *los* indicate
single and plural masculine nouns, respectively, while *la* and *las* indicate singular and
plural feminine nouns, respectively. Since English does not share this convention with

Spanish, I add an "s" to the end of Lucumí words to indicate the plural form. This convention is applied uniformly, but with one exception, the word *batá*.

Titles of songs and *toques* (Sp. compositions for the *batá* drums) appear within quotations as plain font, with only the first word capitalized, unless the title includes the proper name of an *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon). When a song or *toque* is described extensively within any single chapter, this convention is dropped after its first appearance, to remove unneeded emphasis and distractions. For the remainder of the chapter, the song or *toque* title appears as regular text.

INTRODUCTION

Within the Lucumí religious drumming ceremony, known as a *toque de santo*, there is a clearly defined goal of trance possession. However, its manifestation is not the sole measure of success or failure. Rather than focusing on the fleeting, exciting moments that immediately precede the arrival of an *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) in the form of a possession trance, this thesis investigates the entire four- to six-hour musical performance that is central to the ceremony. It examines the brief pauses, the moments of reduced intensity, the slow but deliberate build-ups of energy and excitement, and even the periods when novices are invited to perform the sacred *batá* drums, and places these moments on an equal footing with the more dynamic periods where possession is imminent or in progress.

This approach to musical aesthetics aligns with the views of John Chernoff who claims "we can recognize African critical standards by what happens in the situation itself. In such a context, everything one does becomes an act of 'criticism'" (1979: 153). This concept resonates among the Lucumí, descendants of Yoruba slaves brought to Cuba, who still maintain a strong cultural connection to their African roots. The participants in this musical ritual have a wide array of expectations and desires. Through participation, or the lack thereof, attendees sing, dance and, by these means, continually evaluate the abilities and choices of the musicians.

The responsibility for directing musical activity during a *toque de santo* is shouldered by both the master *batá* drummer and the lead singer, known as an *apón*. When the *apón* calls a new song, the master drummer must immediately identify it and enter with an appropriate *toque* (piece of music in the *batá* repertoire). He is expected to supply variations, improvisations and, by working closely with the other two drummers, develop musical conversations among the three *batá*.[1] The drummer watches the dancers; he reacts; he intensifies; and he relaxes. The intimate relationship between the *apón* and the drummers, as they engage the initiates (and through him/her the *orishas*), is nearly universally recognized. However, existing ethnographic descriptions of this interaction tend to gloss over the specifics of this relationship, describing the music in vague terms. Many are similar to this description offered by Katherine Hagedorn as she describes a practitioner, a "child" of Eleguá, being pursued by the *apón* in an attempt to invite Eleguá (the guardian of the crossroads) to the ceremony:

> Suddenly the *akpwon* [*apón*] began directing his songs towards this man, and the drummers intensified their responses, playing loudly and quickly, playing onto him. The tension in the room became palpable, full of unpredictable energy. The man held his head, shaking it, his upper body bobbing up and down; he seemed to want to escape – from what? From the music? From the people? From some unknown pounding in his head? The *akpwon* [*apón*] began gesticulating, punctuating his words with an accusatory finger pointed in the man's face, palms open in supplication at the man's hips, bending toward the man and stomping at the end of each phrase, pursuing the man in a tight arc in front of the drums (Hagedorn 2001: 78).

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[1] Throughout the dissertation, I use masculine pronouns when referring to *batá* drummers to reflect the fact that, while anyone may play *batá abericula* (Sp. unconsecrated *batá*), only heterosexual men are permitted to perform, or even touch, *batá fundamento* (Sp. consecrated *batá*). This prohibition permits women to participate in secular performances, but generally excludes them from the sacred context. For a more comprehensive discussion on this subject, see Sayre (2000).

After reading such exciting ethnography, I am always left with questions. What really happened with the music? What song was the *apón* singing? Did he sing only one song? Did he move through a quick succession of songs? Was he searching for the right song, the one that would finally grab Eleguá and propel him into the room? Were his songs long with as many as ten lines or were they short, requiring quick call and response interaction between the *apón* and the chorus? What were the drummers playing? Did they have to change rhythms? Were they playing rhythms especially for *Eleguá* or were these the more generic rhythms that may be used for many *orishas* and songs? What variations did the master drummer employ? And what types of musical conversations developed between the drummers?

Many existing ethnographic descriptions of Lucumí music, like the one cited above, lack substantive treatment of the musical sounds. Even more conspicuously absent are the musicians', practitioners', and *orishas'* thoughts about those sounds. For example, on what did the drummers base their musical decisions? How were they influenced by the dancer and by the *apón* who was chasing him around the room? How were they affected by the practitioners' choral responses? Were there expectations for the music resulting from the context (i.e. day of the week, day of the year, specific purpose of the ritual)? Were there individuals in the room the drummers intended to impress? Were there novices mixed among the master drummers whose skills would inhibit certain musical desires? Finally, how did the performers/practitioners/*orisha* feel about that particular performance and what, specifically, influenced their opinions? An investigation into the aesthetics, broadly

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envisioned as ways of thinking about creative forms (Kaeppler 1971: 175; Herndon and McCloud 1990), begins with an examination of these questions.

Approaching this investigation as a percussionist as well as an ethnomusicologist, my interests naturally favor the activities and views of the *batá* drummers, my practical performing skills providing me with an intimate view of their world. *Batá* drummers are not merely hired musicians; they are ritual specialists who, during the course of a *toque de santo*, exercise wide latitude in determining the shape of the event. Known as *omo* Aña (Lu. children of the *orisha* Aña who is manifest in drums and rhythms), *batá* drummers comprise a fraternity that is accessible only through ritual initiation. Though they are sensitive to the desires of the many participants during a *toque de santo*, and indeed make their living by satisfying the expectations of their hosts, many of the drummers' activities are inwardly focused on the cultivation and preservation of this fraternity. Occasionally interfering with spirit possession, and other expectations of the participants, these aberrant activities include teaching and learning, developing group identity or signature sound, and achieving a state of intimacy among the musicians known as communitas.

Transmission, i.e. teaching and learning, occurs not only within the traditional student-teacher relationship, but is present among peers, whenever three drummers perform together. It is a continuing process, exaggerated by the heterogeneous aspects of the religious and musical systems, and the transient nature of the musicians who have been dispersed throughout North America while fleeing a harsh political and economic climate in Cuba. Within this oral tradition, learning is ever-present; it is a vital element of performance. This view is in line with Margaret Drewal's general

conculsions regarding Yoruba ritual, "In Yoruba ritual, the whole workshop/rehearsal/finished performance complex …is compressed into one event. The improvised ritual *is* [sic] worshop, rehearsal, and finished performance all at the same time. It is the occasion when masters continue to refine their skills and when neophytes learn in plain sight of everyone…. That is part of the attraction" (Drewal 1992: 89).

The development of group identity or signature sound is a central component of Cuban *batá* drumming aesthetics. The *toques* (Sp. drumming pieces) are metaphorical representations of the *orishas* and their stories, and deserve retelling in dynamic and engaging ways. Drummers are valued not only for knowing the correct way to play a *toque* and appropriate usage, but are admired for their creative interpretations.

Communitas, a concept closely associated with aesthetics (Herndon 1990), is a condition where individuals lose direct consciousness of self, and experience a sense of sharing and intimacy with others (McNeill 1995; Turner 1967, 1969). While all the participants in Santería ritual may experience this state, my usage is concerned specifically with the bonds of drummers.

In this dissertation, I shift the focus of aesthetic studies away from the highly charged musical environment that accompanies the incidence of trance, and extend it throughout the entire *toque de santo*, examining moments of the ceremony that are often overlooked but nonetheless address the multiple needs of the participants. Specifically, I adopt the viewpoint of the *batá* drummers, who simultaneously satisfy the expectations of their hosts while meeting their own need to maintain and develop

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their group. In this vein, many of the activities within the ceremony are multi-faceted and open to interpretation depending upon one's knowledge and viewpoint.

Considering my pluralistic and fluid approach that defines aesthetics as ways of thinking about creative forms, my contribution should not be read as an overview of Cuban *batá* musical aesthetics. Rather, I offer it as a demonstration of one way to focus the lens of inquiry by illuminating simply how the cultivation and preservation of the drumming fraternity, pervasive at all levels of musical structure, is essential to understanding Cuban *batá* musical aesthetics. To achieve this, I draw upon writings that connect aesthetics and the concepts of "homology" (Keil 1979), "metaphor"(Feld 1981, 1988); and "iconicity" (Becker and Becker 1981) and writings that examine the general nature of aesthetics (Becker 1974; Armstrong 1971; Geertz 1983). Since there are no works directly addressing *batá* aesthetics, I also examine some of the many important contributions to our current understanding of both Yoruba and Lucumí visual and theatrical arts (Abiodun 1994; Brown 1996; Drewal 1992; Drewal, Pemberton III, and Abiodun 1989; Flores-Peña 1990; Flores-Peña and Evanchuk 1994; Lawal 1974; Thompson 1973, 1966). I am further influenced by the strong views of my informants regarding aesthetics, especially Angel Bolaños (2003, communication), Pancho Quinto (1998-2003, multiple communications), and David Font (2002-2003, multiple communications).

Outline

Several threads of thought are woven throughout this entire document, serving to unify the multiple approaches of the chapters. First and foremost is the concept of

conversation. On every conceptual level, *batá* drumming creates conversation. This is most apparent in *toque* structure. But *batá* drumming can also be seen as a conversation between the secular and sacred contexts, the teachers and their students, the three drummers, the *apón* and master drummer, and the drums and the *orisha*, in the form of surrogate speech. Second is the concept of play, that drummers play with *toques* when they improvise, that music is a form of play, and more importantly, that musical play is an effective tool for teaching, honing technical skills, and developing an intimate bond among musicians.

Chapter One begins with a concise overview of the Lucumí religion and addresses music's role in ceremonies known as *toques de santo*. It focuses on the historical events that led to the creation of two distinct, yet connected contexts for the music, the sacred and the secular, emphasizing how the contexts mutually inform one another. This discussion validates my decision to use commercial recordings and secular lessons, in addition to observations at *toques de santo*, to formulate my views of *batá* aesthetics. Finally, this chapter introduces the reader to the master drummer, Angel Bolaños, and his views on aesthetics. An engaging speaker, Bolaños addresses many of the main points that I develop in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two introduces the *batá* repertoire and the concept of the *toque*, a drum composition that often contains multiple sections. Specifically, it addresses the structure of a *toque* and highlights some of the difficulties with perceiving and notating the form. Among the essential ideas presented in this chapter is a key to the notational system used throughout the dissertation. The second half of the chapter closely examines two important scholarly works that address structure and form, and

examines the divergent views of the authors. This section introduces the concept of conversation and demonstrates the multiple layers of meaning that are encoded within the structure of a *batá toque*.

Chapter Three begins to delve into the expansive *batá* repertoire, providing insight as to how *batá* drummers locate sources of meaning within *toques*. One commonly accepted division of this repertoire splits *batá toques* into two major categories; the first is comprised of all *toques* traditionally associated with the *oro igbodú* (Lu. first phase of a *toque de santo*), while the second encompasses all the remaining *toques*. I then introduce an alternative way of categorizing the repertoire by viewing each *toque* within a continuum that ranges from dedicated *toques*, identified with particular *orishas*, to generic *toques*, which accompany the songs of most, if not all, *orisha*. After presenting the first view of the repertoire, I continue with the second by exploring the imitative quality of the *batá*. In this section, I focus specifically on linguistic, metaphoric and associative elements, and explain why the meanings of *toques* are fluid and sensitive to context.

Chapter Four introduces the *batá* pedagogical system, which like the repertoire discussed in the previous chapter, is metaphorically linked with Yoruba-Lucumí mythology. I focus on how non-lexical verbal communication, the spatial relationships among the performers, and the structure of the musical system allows transmission to occur *in situ* during ritual performance. This chapter introduces a hierarchy by illustrating how the master drummer, holding the *iyá* drum, teaches the two smaller drums in the ensemble, i.e. the *okónkolo* and the *itótele*. Novice drummers are often invited to perform at *toques de santo* long before they have mastered the repertoire.

This learning system often exchanges flawless performances for highly valued educational opportunities. As teaching and ritual performance occur simultaneously, my observations about methods of communication are equally applicable to both realms. As a result, there is an undisputable link between transmission and aesthetics.

Chapter Five introduces the concept of a drumming fraternity. It draws upon my many years of experience as a drummer in this tradition to analyze specific observations made during a two-week period in January 2003, while I interacted with a Havana-based ensemble that was in the process of expanding its membership. Building upon the pedagogical ideas introduced in the previous chapter, it examines how the fraternity works together, as a community, to nurture the musical abilities of novice drummers. It goes beyond simply addressing hierarchical student-teacher relationships by examining peer-to-peer interactions that allow ensembles to develop their sense of cohesion, identity and ability to achieve a state of communitas.

Whereas Chapter Four addressed the process of learning the two smaller drums, Chapter Six deals with learning the lead drum, the *iyá*. Because the nature of learning the *iyá* is less standardized than learning the *okónkolo* or *itótele*, I avoid making sweeping statements regarding the mechanics of learning specific *toques* and rhythms. Instead I focus on an individual, and present the teaching and playing style of master drummer Francisco "Pancho Quinto" Mora. In this chapter, I discuss how players are admired for their individual sound and style, and demonstrate how Pancho Quinto's personality manifests itself in both his playing and teaching.

Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 deal explicitly with the development of ensemble identity and signature sound. Whereas Chapter 3 addressed the entire repertoire with a

broad brush, these chapters place one seemingly simple rhythm under close scrutiny, and tease out the details and nuances that show how individuals and groups distinguish themselves within a sight set of rules. To achieve this, I analyze three recorded performances of a *toque* known as "Nyongo."

Ethnomusicological Studies of Lucumí Music

All investigations of Afro-Cuban music and culture must come to terms with the monumental works of Fernando Ortiz (1950; 1952-55). The most prolific Cuban music scholar of his time, Ortiz introduced the world to Afro-Cuban music with his writings and public performances, influencing both scholars and aspiring drummers alike. In New York, prior to the heavy migration of Cuban refugees in 1980, his transcriptions provided the foundation for a generation of North American drummers who were seduced by Lucumí music but lacked access to bona fide Cuban masters.

With limited access to the island nation due to the political friction between Cuba and the United States, scholars outside Cuba largely ignored Lucumí music. By contrast, Cubans have aggressively documented their own traditions often under the auspices of the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Música Cubana (CIDMUC) (Manuel 1991: x), with important contributions being made by well-known Cuban authors including Argeliers León (1964) and Rogelio Martinez Furé (1979a; 1979b). However, their Spanish language offerings appear in obscure publications and are often difficult to locate both inside and outside Cuba. In the early stages of my research, I discovered uncanny similarities between Furé (1979a) and a publication by the North American anthropologist Roberto Nodal (1983). If one compares an English

translation of Furé's article "Tambor" (1991a), with Nodal's article "The Social

Evolution of Afro-Cuban Drum" (1983), one can see that both of these publications

possibly draw from Furé (1979a). Nodal, however, makes no reference to this obscure

Spanish language article. This example is indicative of the difficulty with which

Cuban publications are obtainable both inside and outside Cuba. Perhaps Nodal

believed that few Western scholars would ever see Furé's informative work, and

neglected to cite it. This, of course, changed when Manuel collected the works of

Cuban and North American scholars under one cover and provided scholars of Cuban

music an invaluable resource (Manuel 1991).

While scholars like Harold Courlander (1942) and Joseph H. Howard (1967),

provide valuable descriptions and classifications regarding musical instruments,

serious investigation by non-Cubans into Lucumí music as a cultural and social

phenomenon begins with Robert Friedman's *Making an Abstract World Concrete:*

Knowledge, Competence and Structural Dimensions of Performance among Batá

Drummers in Santería (1982). His fieldwork, conducted in New York, focused on his

experiences with master drummer Julio Collazo in 1978-79 prior to the mass arrival of

Cubans in 1980. Friedman's conclusions heavily inform my investigation, particularly

in Chapter Two, where I draw upon his observations of "rhythmic structure"

(Friedman: 136-43) and in Chapter Five, where I examine and further develop his idea

that *toques de santo* are comprised of multiple "thematic acts" (Friedman: 164-214).

A decade after Friedman, Steven Cornelius also conducted his fieldwork in

New York City (1989). Unlike the earlier scholar, who appears to be under restrictions

by his informants not to credit his interviews or include transcriptions of rhythms

because they are considered private knowledge, Cornelius incorporated significant amounts of transcription, which he later published in a book with his primary informant John Amira (1992). In this book, the co-authors provide a complete transcription of the *oro igbodú*, a ritually essential portion of any Lucumí ceremony that generally consists of over thirty minutes of *batá* drumming. The views of Amira, Cornelius and Friedman regarding *batá* music structure and form are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Like the previous authors, Maria Teresa Velez's dissertation (1996) and related book, *Drumming for the Gods*: *The Life and Times of Felipe García Villamil* (2000) are also based on research conducted in New York City. When this work is viewed alongside Francisco Crespo's Master's thesis, *Learning the Fundamentals of Batá Drumming with Pedro Orta* (Crespo 1997), we witness a growing body of literature that explicitly documents individual Lucumí culture-bearers. These studies are extremely valuable, yet have the potential to be misleading. Lucumí religion and music are heterogeneous traditions. By studying the performance or teaching styles of an individual drummer, we are promised deep insights, but we must be careful not to allow individual experiences to become the standard by which all other musicians are understood. Without considerable breadth of exposure, a researcher may be unable to ascertain which observations are more general in nature, i.e. applicable to the cultural system at large, and which observations are idiosyncratic, i.e. applicable to a city, generation, community, ensemble, or even individual. Like Velez and Crespo, I appreciate the depth of knowledge and intimacy that comes from documenting the lives of individuals in the tradition and, in Chapter Six, deal extensively with my

relationship with Havana master drummer Pancho Quinto. However, with respect to transmission, I take a more comprehensive approach than Crespo by comparing my intense studies with Pancho Quinto against a variety of other teachers and drummers.

By the 1990s, political tensions between Cuba and the United States had significantly relaxed, permitting scholars to gain easy access to musicians on the island. The most recent publications include Katherine Hagedorn's dissertation *Anatomía del Proceso Folklórico: The "Folklorization" of Afro-Cuban Religious Performance in Cuba* (1995) and subsequent book *Divine Utterances* (2001). These works address the inter-relatedness of Lucumí music in both the secular and sacred contexts. Approached historically by looking at the process of folklorization, and situated in the present-day as it examines the implications of folklorization on current Lucumí musical practices, these works provide an important precedent and justification for relying on my experiences in both contexts as I develop my views on aesthetics.

Other recent publications include Miguel Ramos' Master's thesis in history *The Empire Beats On: Batá Drums and Hegemony in Nineteenth Century Cuba* (2000) and Kevin Delgado's dissertation *Iyesá: Afro-Cuban Music and Culture in Contemporary Cuba* (2001). Together, these two works inform my discussion in Chapter Three, where I address the ability and ease with which the *batá* imitate language, songs, natural phenomena, and the percussion styles of other ethnic groups, including the Iyesá.

Percussion Performance in the University and Conservatory

While organizations like the Percussive Arts Society (PAS) have kept pace with the diversity of traditions that employ percussionists by focusing equally on drum set, keyboard, marching, symphonic, and world percussion, university and college percussion programs tend to be more conservative. They generally require competence on keyboards, timpani, snare drum and jazz drum set, and focus on both symphonic and small ensemble repertoire, leaving world percussion largely un-addressed. This imbalance is disconcerting as percussionists are now expected to be versatile in all areas.

World music traditions offer a variety of challenges and opportunities for percussion students. However, these opportunities are often overlooked in academia. Exposure to non-western instruments is usually in the form of percussion ensemble or other ensemble literature, where western composers try to expand their palette of timbres. Though these experiences sometimes require students to master new sound production techniques, they rarely introduce percussionists to new systems of learning and interaction.

While many of the threads in this dissertation are theoretically oriented, it is also saturated with practical knowledge that can provide hand drummers with a springboard for approaching this musical tradition. For example, Chapter Three addresses the vast repertoire and provides a means for understanding how each individual rhythm relates with respect to the whole. Chapters Four, Five and Six discuss the learning process, sharing the experience of learning this music within its context. Further, I provide a heavy emphasis on notation, complementing existing

sources (Ortiz 1950, Ortiz 1980, Amira and Cornelius 1992, Summers 2002, Davalos and Coburg 2002). This is evident throughout the chapters, as well as in the appendix where I include transcriptions of several well known recorded performances.

Though I do not maintain that Lucumí music, specifically, needs to be represented in percussion performance programs, I do contend that world percussion, as a whole, should play a greater role in the education of students of percussion.

The Batá in Contemporary Cuba and North America

Recollections of elder drummers reveal an era when *batá* playing was a closed system where only trusted members of their small circle were permitted to perform on their drums. Perhaps this is a vestige of the Yoruba tradition where a son inherited the right to learn the drums from his father or, equally likely, a result of religious persecution that forced Afro-Cubans to guard their traditions against outsiders. I sometimes find it difficult to reconcile this version of past events with the dynamic musical setting in which I have immersed myself in recent years. Now a member of this small fraternity of drummers, armed with rights and obligations that accompany the initiation known as "washing my hands," I have been warmly received and welcomed to play at every drum ceremony I have attended, both in Cuba and North America. Contrary to the perception that it is a closed tradition, I have developed a sense that it is disrespectful not to extend recognition and respect to those who have committed themselves to Aña (Lu. *orisha* who is manifest in drums and rhythms) regardless of their lineage.

If the *batá* musical genre was ever an insular tradition that encouraged ensembles to practice exclusivity, this was ended by modern political history. In the wake of the 1959 Revolution, thousands of Cubans immigrated to other regions in the Americas, establishing communities in Miami, New York and in the major cities of California. The exodus of cultural talent accelerated in 1980 during what is commonly referred to as the Mariel Boat Lift, and continues to the present day. Among the refugees are the adherents and musicians of the Lucumí religion, who have, to varying degrees, welcomed non-Cubans into the religion.

In Cuba, the Lucumí religion has proven to be a powerful cultural symbol for the Revolutionary Government. Since it is neither European nor American, Afro-Cuban cultural expressions are viewed as something uniquely Cuban. In the post-Revolutionary era, persecution has waned and staged performances of Afro-Cuban religious practices have grown dramatically. State sponsored troupes like the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional compete with legendary independent groups like Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and Yoruba Andabo on the international market. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Lucumí religion thrives both in Cuba or abroad. It has shifted from a secretive religion practiced by Cuban blacks to a public spectacle and world religion practiced by multiple races, ethnicities and nationalities.

There is currently a great deal of mobility and exchange within the *batá* drumming community. Many masters who reside in Cuba enjoy the privilege of international travel as they tour with a myriad of folkloric troupes. North American émigrés are often unsettled and drift between the various cities with Cuban populations (e.g. New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco). Others have

sufficiently established themselves and can afford yearly returns to Cuba. Several *batá* masters have even traveled to Nigeria, in search of their origins. Though I am familiar with historical sources that refer to a rather closed musical experience, this study is informed by current practices, which are generally inclusive and conducted with increasing transparency. It exists in the present and looks to evaluate current ideas of transmission and aesthetics. This naturally leads me into a discussion of my own experiences with the tradition, including my fieldwork.

Personal Experience and Fieldwork

I present the material here primarily to validate the many statements scattered throughout the chapters that are occasionally unsupported by a specific reference. I also express some thoughts on the "extramusical" lessons I received while slowly immersing myself into this musical culture, especially the notions of humility, personal sacrifice and the concept that *batá* drummers comprise an extended ritual family.

In October of 1994, recently enrolled in a Master of Ethnomusicology degree program at the University of Maryland, I set out to meet the members of the Afro-Cuban community in the Washington, DC – Baltimore, MD metro area. Unfamiliar with the Lucumí religion or its music, my interests drew me initially to the musicians of rumba, a secular style. My first contact was with Nelson Rodriguez, a former member of the group Cubanakán that had been organized in the early 1980s shortly after the arrival of Mariel Boat refugees. I found his telephone number posted on the

door of a local music shop, House of Musical Traditions, and pursued him as my first contact.

During the following weeks I continued to search for other contacts/informants. By late November, I arrived at the door of Steve Bloom of Silver Spring, Maryland. A regional native, Steve is of Irish descent and, as of 1994, had never been to Cuba. In my notes, I questioned whether or not he qualified as a member of the Afro-Cuban community. Setting my suspicions aside, I began a series of interviews and musical lessons on the congas - percussion instruments central to rumba.

On my third meeting with Steve, in the middle of a rumba lesson, I noticed in the corner of the room three hourglass-shaped drums set upon a collection of shelves. I asked Steve about the drums, but received a disinterested reply. He was content, for the moment, to talk only about rumba. On our next meeting I asked again about the three drums. Sensing my persistence, Steve waited until the end of our two-hour lesson and introduced me to the *batá*, talking about them and his own experiences for about five minutes.

I learned in 1994 that Steve had been playing Afro-Cuban music for two decades. When the Mariel Boat refugees arrived in Washington he quickly became associated with them and developed relationships with all the members of Cubanakán. Specifically, he began a course of study with *batá* master, Lorenzo Peñabel and initiated his involvement with this religious genre. In the following years, Steve performed with another Afro-Cuban ensemble known as Otonowá, which consisted primarily of former members of Cubanakán. Steve is currently the musical director of

Havana Select, a performance group consisting of Americans and Cubans, which divides its repertoire among the non-religious Afro-Cuban folk genres (*yambú, guaguancó, columbia* and *comparsa*) and the Afro-Cuban religious genres (*güiro, iyesá* and *batá*). Steve represents the modern evolution of the Afro-Cuban musical community. Since the 1980 emigration of thousands of Cubans to North America, Afro-Cuban culture, music and religion has become increasingly accessible to Americans of any race.

When I arrived at Steve's house for our fifth encounter, Steve was prepared to teach me rumba, but again, I inquired about the *batá*. This time, unlike the previous days, Steve set the conga aside and placed the small drum, the *okónkolo* - the child - in my lap. I was slow to realize that Steve's hesitation to teach me *batá* or even speak of them was actually my first, and perhaps most important, *batá* lesson. The secrets of the *batá* are not revealed easily, and many of these should never be revealed to a non-initiated audience. The drums and their rhythms are sacred, and are a vehicle for communication with the *orishas*. They deserve respect and, as I learned through time, demand personal sacrifice. Sacrifice appears in many forms: it may simply be understood as the hours of devotion and study required to progress in skill and knowledge; or the physical pain in the hands, shoulders and neck from hours of playing; or the chastising received from some players who view humiliation as both an important teaching tool and as a rite of passage. Regardless, persistence on my part and continuing sacrifice has been the foundation of all my *batá*-related education.

From 1994 to 1998, I studied Afro-Cuban styles, including the *batá,* with Steve Bloom, and eventually became a principle percussionist with his ensemble,

Havana Select. In 1998, my education and research accelerated when Francisco "Pancho Quinto" Mora, Pedro "Pedrito" Pablo Martinez Campo, and Rogelio "El Gato" Ernesto Gatell arrived in Washington, DC during their North American tour with the Canadian saxophonist, Jane Bunnett.[2] Afforded ample free time in an otherwise busy touring schedule, they quickly became close friends. For a week's period they resided in Steve's home while we lived and breathed *batá*.

During this time, Pedrito became my first Cuban *batá* teacher. He decided to remain in the United States, while Pancho Quinto and El Gato returned to their homes in Havana. Though Pedrito settled in New York City, we often travel to each other's homes and continue developing our student-teacher relationship. Pedrito has had a successful career in the United States: he performs nightly with rumba, son, salsa and Latin jazz groups, is in high demand on weekends for *toques de santo*, has recorded numerous CDs, appeared in two movies, and won the prestigious 2000 Thelonious Monk International Afro-Latin Jazz Hand Drum Competition. After Pedrito traveled to Havana the following January to carry a newly crafted set of *batá de fundamento* (Sp. consecrated *batá*) back to New York City for his *padrino* (Sp. godfather) Román Díaz,

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[2] Throughout this dissertation I refer to many persons by their first name or nickname. In Cuba, nicknames are commonly used, and many public figures are referred to by their first name or nickname. Some people may even casually know one another by nickname for years without knowing that person's proper name. For example, Francisco Mora is known only by his nickname, Pancho Quinto. This is the name with which he introduces himself and is known by all his friends. It also appears this way on his compact discs. Since his nickname has two names, I assumed that these were his first and last names and never thought to ask for his proper name until after I had known him several years.

I was extended an open invitation to accompany and play with Pedrito at *toques de santo*.[3]

In January 1999, during my initial visit to Cuba, El Gato opened his home to me for two weeks. During this visit, I not only met with Pancho Quinto on a nearly daily basis, but also worked with Alberto Villareal, the percussion director of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, who lives in Santo Suarez, only several doors away from El Gato. The following summer, Pancho returned to Washington, DC where we were able to continue our interviews and lessons.

Though studying with the intent to understand and perform within the sacred context since 1994, it was not until January 2000, on my second research trip to Cuba, that I confided to Pancho the desire to formally begin my initiation as a drummer within the Lucumí religion. While interviews, observations and analyses are illuminating, some portion of the knowledge that *bata* drummers possess about their craft can only be known experientially. As I had known Pancho already for several years, he welcomed my request. He asked Juan "El Negro" Raymat (who resides in Miami but was visiting Pancho's home on this particular afternoon) to help with the preparations for a short ceremony where they "washed my hands," thereby initiating me into many of the secrets of Aña and establishing lifelong relationships among myself, the master drummers and Aña. On this day, I was presented before a set of

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[3] The set of *bata de fundamento* were crafted in Havana by Angel Bolaños.

consecrated *batá*, Aña Oba Dé Yé and was told that I should consider these drums to be close, personal friends.[4]

The Lucumí word Aña refers both to the spirit or *orisha* that lives within *tambores de fundamento* (Sp. consecrated drums) and to the drums themselves. When drums are "born," the physical body of the drum is joined with the spirit to create a single entity, much like the Judeo-Christian conception of the joining of body and soul to create a complete human. Aña, like humans, exist only within a complex web of "kinship relationships" (Cornelius 1990: 135). Generally, each set of Aña is "born" from an existing set.[5] Within such a system, "lineages of drums" (Vélez 2000: 50) arise and serve, ultimately, as a way to connect people. When I was presented to Aña, I entered into relationships with my *padrinos*, Pancho and El Negro, all those who have come before me, and all those who have made similar commitments to other sets of consecrated *batá* that are related through this system of kinship. Further, I became connected to an entire community of *Santeros*, for individuals like Pancho do not own Aña, but are entrusted to play, nourish, and "guard them in service for the community" (Mason 1992: 21). This extended ritual family becomes an essential component of my identity as an individual, and especially as a drummer. Subsequent introductions and opportunities to perform in ritual settings invariably begin with recognition of my *padrinos*.

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[4] Aña Oba Dé Yé was crafted by El Negro.

[5] Mason discusses the origins and lineages of many sets of Aña (1992: 13-20). Though many sets of *batá de fundamento* are born from existing drums, it is possible to create a set from "thin air." The latter is likely the means used to create the first *batá* in Cuba, and is still occasionally used today (Font 2003, communication).

To date, I have made four visits to Cuba: January 1999 (2 weeks in Havana),

January 2000 (3 weeks in Havana, Matanzas and Santiago), January 2002 (2 weeks in

Havana), and January 2003 (2½ weeks in Havana and Trinidad). Aside from an

ongoing relationship with Pancho, I continue to widen my sphere of informants,

contacts and teachers, including Angel Bolaños (master drummer, Havana), Ezequiel

Torres (master drummer, Miami), Jesus "Cusito" Lorenzo (singer with Abbilona,

Havana), Ramon "Sandy" Garcia Perez (former member of Grupo Afrocuba de

Matanzas), Daniel Alfonso (member of Tambores de Esteban "Chacha" Vega

Vacallao, Matanzas), Jesus Alfonso (member of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas),

Lorenzo Peñabel (master drummer residing in Los Angeles), Idalberto Bandera

(general and artistic director of Ballet Folklórico Cutumba, Santiago de Cuba), Felix

Sanabria (*iyá* player with the *batá* ensemble of Orlando "Puntilla" Rios, New York)

and Michael Spiro (well-known North American *batá* drummer, California). I have

attended numerous *toques de santo* in Havana, Matanzas, Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad

de Cuba, Union City NJ, New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC, and have

performed ceremonies on both *fundamento* and *aberikula* (Sp. non-consecrated) in

Union City, Miami, Baltimore, Washington DC, and Havana.

I regularly perform with Havana Select, which has made several appearances

at the Kennedy Center and the Smithsonian Institution. In October 2001 the ensemble

joined with musicians from the Grupo Folklórico Cutumba and Reynaldo Gonzales

(former member of Grupo Afrocuba de Matanzas) for a week of touring on the East

Coast of the United States including performances, workshops and dance classes.

Aside from my involvement with the ensemble, I provide accompaniment for *orisha*

dance and song classes at the Latin American Folk Institute (LAFI) and George Mason University.

It is these experiences that inform my dissertation. They provide me with the background to make the occasional generalization, and a wide enough view to avoid generalizing when a practice is not universally or at least widely shared.

CHAPTER 1

THE LUCUMÍ RELIGION AND ITS MUSIC

The Lucumí Religion: Santería or Regla de Ocha

A product of the upheaval and displacement created by the Atlantic slave trade, the Lucumí religion of Cuba (commonly known as Regla de Ocha or Santería) is a syncretic mix of Yoruba *orisha* worship, Catholicism, and various West African religions.[6] The *orishas* are spirits with human-like personalities who are associated with, and are believed to control, natural phenomena. While some have existed since the beginning of the earth's existence, others were originally humans deified after their deaths. In addition to the *orisha,* the Yoruba-Lucumí believe in an omniscient Supreme Being, known as Olorun, Olofi or Olodumare, who is rarely worshipped directly, but is addressed through intermediaries, the *orisha.*

The Yoruba religion was significantly transformed when it traveled to the new world. In nineteenth century Africa, as well as in the modern-day, certain *orisha*

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[6] Neither an expert in Yoruba *orisha* worship nor Catholicism, I have focused my energies towards understanding the Lucumí religion from the viewpoint of a *batá* drummer. A reader who wants to obtain a wider view or develop cursory familiarity with the religion beyond what I address herein, would be well served to investigate comprehensive and introductory writings (Barnet 1997, 2001; Clark 1998; Murphy 1993). Alternatively, one could access one of many informative websites created by *santeros* who have access to the Internet: www.church-of-the-lukumi.org/, ilarioba.tripod.com/, www.seanet.com/~efunmoyiwa/, and www.yemoja.com/.

occupied a dominant position in some towns while being completely absent from

others. By contrast, the rites and practices were standardized in Cuba as the religion

simultaneously incorporated the practices of Catholicism, as well as the beliefs of

other African slaves. Africans, threatened by severe punishments and enticed by

rewards, were strongly encouraged to adopt Catholicism. The Spanish efforts were

aided by what the Lucumí recognized as undeniable similarities between the *orisha*

and the Catholic saints of their masters. For each *orisha*, the Lucumí identified a saint

who had been canonized for exhibiting similar qualities and began worshipping these

by incorporating the saints' images within their own African-style altars. The term

Santería (Sp. saint worship) aptly describes this phenomenon from the point of view of

the dominant class of white Spaniards, but is often considered pejorative by the

Lucumí who tend to use the terms, Lucumí religion, Yoruba religion, and Regla de

Ocha (Rule of the *Ocha*, a contraction of the word *orisha*).[7]

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[7] The view of syncretism presented here, to a large degree, ignores the inherent
complexity of this cultural phenomenon, which cannot be aptly treated in this musical
dissertation. One can get a sense of this by comparing *orisha* worship in Cuba and
Brazil, which have the two largest populations of Yoruba outside Africa. One must
admit, on one hand, the more open attitude of the Portuguese towards syncretization
and African belief systems, and on the other hand, the differing ratios of other African
and Indigenous influences in both Cuba and Brazil (Sturm 1977). While most scholars
and musicians recognize the musical and ritual differences among *orisha* worshipers
in these regions, Spiro and Lamson (1996) present a convincing alternative view in his
scholarly compact disc recording, which layers Cuban and Brazilian *orisha* music and
emphasizes the commonalities. Similarly, it is also valuable to study Haiti, a former
French colony that received a majority of its slaves from the Dahomey kingdom that
historically occupied a territory contiguous to the Yoruba, and shared many cultural
and religious traits (Barrett 1977). Descendants of the Dahomey kingdom, known as
Arará in Cuba, have both maintained their own traditions and mixed with the Yoruba
as part of the syncretization process.

Music's Role in Lucumí Ritual

The Lucumí believe that all humans have a patron saint, one of approximately twenty-two *orisha* who is said to "own your head." Though there are several stages in the initiation process (e.g. receiving warriors and *elekes*),[8] the most significant and final step is known as "making *ocha*," "making *santo*," or "*asiento*," at which time the patron *orisha* is ritually seated within one's head. When fully initiated into the priesthood, *santeros* become periodically possessed or "mounted" by their saint, often within the context of a music ceremony known alternately as a *toque de santo*, *bembé* or *tambor*. For these festive ceremonies, *santeros* transform their homes into places of worship and celebration. With elaborate decorations including fabrics, beads, fruits and many other ritual items, a special room, the *igbodú*, is transformed into an altar. Members of the household and close friends prepare a feast, including animal sacrifices to the *orisha*, which is consumed by all who attend. These are often public events and usually welcome both members of the religious house as well as respectful onlookers.

To fulfill the musical expectations, the host of a *toque de santo* hires a professional drumming ensemble, which provides the instrumental accompaniment by performing *batá*: three double-headed, hourglass-shaped drums of varying sizes. Additionally, the host engages the services of a fourth musician who, given the role of

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[8] In the *orisha* pantheon, the warriors include Elégua, Ogún, Ochosi and, for many, Osun. A *Babalawo* (Lu. High Priest) prepares and presents the fundamental symbols of these *orisha* to a godchild, whom is expected to care for them and, in return, is blessed with their protection. *Elekes* are beaded necklaces, which unlike the warriors, are presented by a woman, your godmother. Generally, you receive five *elekes*, each representing a different *orisha* (Murphy 1993: 70-83).

lead singer, is known as the *apón*. During the ceremony, music fulfills several roles.

First, it works in coordination with the other expressive elements (incense, food,

clothing, & decorations) to create a festive environment that brings a community

together for worship. Music is also used to identify *santeros* and it leads them towards

being "mounted" by the saint. It further provides these mounted *santeros*, by

performing songs and rhythms associated with the *orisha*, with the "means of

manifesting this identification and thus exteriorizing [their] trance" in the form of

dance (Rouget 1985: 325-26).

Contexts for Performance: Secular vs. Sacred

The music of the Lucumí flourishes in two distinct contexts, one sacred and

one secular. While the religious context is rooted in ancient Yoruba traditions, the

secular context is an offspring of the *afrocubanismo* movement of the 1920s and 30s

(Moore 1995). Fernando Ortiz organized the first public display of Lucumí music for

an "ethnographic conference" in 1936 (Ortiz 1937: 163). The musicians included:

Pablo Roche on *iyá*, Aguedo Morales on *itótele*, and Jesús Pérez on the *okónkolo*.[9]

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[9] At the time, Ortiz considered Roche to be among the most reputable living *batá* players in Cuba, and Roche was his primary informant on all matters relating to the *batá*. To this day, Roche's students are among the most well known, internationally traveled, commercially recorded and sought-after drummers in the tradition. For example, Jesús Pérez, his *okónkolo* player at the 1936 event, became one of seven founding members of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba in 1958 (Hagedorn 2001: 155). If Roche's reputation, within his own community, was insufficient to provide him with an enduring legacy, surely his associations with Ortiz have done this. One must raise a questioning eyebrow when considering aesthetics and the notion of what defines a good performer. We must wonder, what was Ortiz' role in elevating the status of Pablo Roche, his students and, ultimately, his entire lineage?

Though the *batá* made subsequent appearances in non-ritual settings, including a 1953 show in Las Vegas (Ortiz 1980: 121-25), the single most profound event for the development of the secular context was the 1959 Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro. As Cuba gradually transformed into a socialist nation in the wake of the revolution, Marxist ideologies began espousing the value of folklore and, as a result, endorsed and supported the art and culture of Afro-Cubans, in general. This view is apparent in the writings of the Cuban Marxist and early director of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, Rogelio Martínez Furé:

> Folklore, that is to say, the most authentic manifestations of traditional popular culture, as opposed to the culture of the dominant classes or "official" culture, is viewed from a different perspective within the context of a socialist revolution. In the first place, it is seen as the genuine creation of the masses, and as a refuge for some of the best traditions of a people in struggle against cultural penetration by foreign-inspired national oligarchies serving imperial interests (Furé 1991b: 252)

With the support of the Ministry of Culture, *batá* drummers, who at one time only played on *batá fundamento* (Sp. consecrated *batá*) in the privacy of homes, began to perform in public venues on *batá abericulá* (Sp. non-consecrated *batá*) for audiences comprising local believers and non-believers, as well as international aficionados. While the atheist government often sought to discourage religious activities, they simultaneously "vigorously [promoted] their music and dance on folkloric levels as vital and cherished parts of national culture" (Manuel 1991: 293).

The goals of each of these performance contexts are significantly different. Within the sacred religious context, musicians, with the support of an energetic audience that sings and dances in close proximity to the musicians, help guide Lucumí priests to become possessed by a saint. By contrast, in its secular context the

performers occupy a stage, while a seated audience attends expecting to be entertained and, perhaps, educated. Usually, the event provides the musicians and organizers with pay and profit.

Recent publications by Katherine Hagedorn (1995, 2001) focus on the relationship between these two contexts. Though the standards by which each is judged are significantly different, Hagedorn presents convincing research that emphasizes the degree to which the contexts inform one another, highlighting the similarities and minimizing some of the suspected contrasts. Any investigation into the aesthetics of this music has to address both contexts. In this dissertation I draw from religious ceremonies, secular concerts and commercially distributed recordings.

Sacred Context: The Structure of a Toque de Santo

A *toque de santo* consists of four temporal phases or sections that are defined and structured by musical performance. Each temporal phase is characterized by unique intents, modes of performance, varying levels of participant involvement, and shifting spatial relationships among the professional musicians, the participants and the altar that has been erected to the *orisha*.[10]

The first phase, known colloquially as the *oro seco* or formally as the *oro igbodú*, is the official beginning of the *toque de santo* and brings the ceremony into sacred time and space. The colloquial name refers to the mode of performance, indicating that the drums perform without vocal accompaniment; therefore it is *seco*

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[10] Some of my ideas in this section were developed from Robert Friedman's discussion in Chapter 5 of "Thematic Structure and Temporal Flow" (1982: 215-33). The remainder is pulled from my cumulative experiences.

(Sp. dry). The formal title refers to both the intent and the spatial relationships; the drummers arrange themselves so that they face the altar that is situated in the *igbodú* (Lu. sacred chamber) and perform a suite of *toques*, known as an *oro* (Lu. songs or drum rhythms in honor of each *orisha*). This includes one or several *toques* for each of the following twenty-two *orisha*: Eleguá, Ogún, Ochosi, Obaloke, Inle, Babalú Ayé, Osain, Osun, Obatalá, Dadá, Ogué, Agayú, Orula, Orishaoko, Ibedyi, Changó, Yewá, Oyá, Ochún, Yemayá, Oba, and Odudua, and it typically takes between thirty and sixty minutes to complete.[11] Whether the *igbodú* is in a separate room or, owing to space limitations, created in the corner of public space, my experiences suggest that anyone present may witness the performance if they maintain a respectful distance from the drums and recognize that the performance is a salutation directly to the *orisha*.

The second phase is known as the *oro cantado* (Sp. sung *oro*) or the *oro eyá aranla* (Lu. *oro* in the main room). It includes *toques* from the *oro igbodú* and honors the same *orishas*, but omits a small number of them. Though it typically takes between thirty and sixty minutes to complete, the *oro eyá aranla* can be expanded to any length. The drummers shift their chairs and face the participants who are now encouraged and expected to sing. While the *oro igbodú* provided an opportunity for

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[11] Some drummers insist that there are actually twenty-three *orisha* honored during the *oro igbodú*. In their view, the *toque* identified by most as Dadá is in actuality two *toques*: the first for Dadá and the second for Ogué. They further view the *toque* for Ogué to actually be a *toque* for Korikoto. For simplicity, I will only refer to the twenty-two *orishas* commonly recognized, though I am aware that this is debatable.

the drummers to salute the *orisha*, the *oro cantado* provides a similar opportunity for the participants.[12]

While the *oro igbodú* and *oro cantado* are relatively short and structured, the third phase, known as the *wemilere* or *iban balo* (Lu. patio) may last several hours. Because it shares many of the dynamics of a house party, this relatively free and open phase is sometimes referred to as a fiesta. Characterized by layered and shifting intent, the *wemilere* praises the *orisha,* entertains the participants, provides an opportunity for singing and drumming competitions, fosters musical and ritual education, and encourages spirit possession. Negotiating the constantly shifting expectations of this phase of the ceremony, the lead *batá* drummer draws from an extensive repertoire and skillfully selects *toques* to achieve a desired outcome. Judged not only by knowledge of repertoire and ability to capture the spirit of the individual *toques*, he is valued for his capacity to select *toques* that best fit the moment, engage the crowd, propel the event forward and maintain a high energy level. These are, presumably, attributes that are valued by both the *orisha* and their devotees.

The final phase of the *toque de santo* is the *cierre.* This section is similar to the opening in that it is performed *seco* (without singing accompaniment) and includes salutes to the *egun* (Lu. dead) and the *orisha* connected with death: Oyá, Babalú Ayé, Osain, Yewá, and Yemayá. During the final *toque*, a bucket of water is carried to the street and expelled of its contents, presumably including the latent spiritual energies from the evening's events. The *toque* dramatically ends when the bucket is placed

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[12] In English, the word salute is most commonly used in a military context. In Spanish, the word *saludo* simply connotes any formal greeting.

upside down directly in front the drummers. Several songs, accompanied by the *batá*, are then sung for Eleguá. As the *orisha* who guards the crossroads, and opens and closes all gates, Eleguá is honored at the beginning and end of all ceremonies. This ensures his blessings upon the event and guarantees that normal order is restored, allowing the participants to safely return to their homes at the evening's conclusion. This sequence of events ensures that the *orisha* end their possessions, allowing the ceremony to leave sacred time and space.

Meeting the Musicians: An Interview with Angel Bolaños

In late December 2002, I returned to Cuba for my fourth time with a goal of visiting Pancho Quinto, my friend and teacher of five years. Pancho, I was disheartened to see, was suffering from the effects of two recent strokes (August and November) and was having difficulty communicating. Now in the final phases of my current research and deep into the writing of my dissertation, I found myself with a myriad of questions that Pancho could not answer. After spending several afternoons with Pancho, eating quiet meals, viewing old videos of his performances and watching the world pass by while lazing around his front porch, I set out to meet other Havana drummers from Pancho's generation. While the most active drummers in Havana are members of the younger generation, visits with the older drummers, even brief ones, are always enriching experiences. Age is an important quality within all Santería traditions and is regarded as a sign of knowledge and wisdom. While energetic, young drummers are admired for their fast and exciting performances, their relative youth precludes them from the degree of recognition and respect reserved for the elders.

On January 2, 2002, I encountered Angel Bolaños, one of the most well-known

and respected *batá* drummers in Havana, on the sidewalk outside the Museum of the

Orisha, located in Centro Havana across the street from the Capitolio. He was

preparing to enter the building where members of the Yoruba Association were

making preparation for the yearly *toque de santo* in honor of the *orisha* Odudua.

Before the festivities began, we quietly arranged two musical lessons, followed by a

formal interview. In the following pages, I share portions of this interview,

interspersing my own thoughts to highlight those points that best illuminate the

concept of aesthetics, as well as other points that appear in this work. The interview

begins quite formally. Before I asked a single question, Bolaños offered a brief

summary of his professional life in folkloric music.[13]

> My name is Angel Pedro Bolaños Corrales. I am currently sixty years old. I
> turned sixty on August 2, 2002. I'm a folklore musician, as well as symphonic.
> I played symphonic percussion for six years. I am a professor of folkloric and
> popular music. I am certified by the national board of education of the arts. I
> have worked in Danza Contemporánea for thirty-nine years. I live in Marianao,
> 71st Street #13404, between 134 & 136 streets. You are welcome here.
>   I got started in percussion because I loved it. I started learning to play
> rumba when I was nine years old in a rough neighborhood, Los Sitios, #6
> Antigua. They wouldn't let me play because I was so young, but I went every
> Sunday. I made the effort, I was always there watching. Gradually as the
> drummers got tired, they'd let me play a little. And that's how I got my foot in
> the door. I started playing in the cabaret when I was twelve. They weren't

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[13] The interview with Angel Bolaños was conducted in Spanish. In this translation, I
attempt not only to accurately reflect the meanings behind his words, but also to
convey the flavor of his speech. Since I had the opportunity to play *batá* with Bolaños
before beginning the interview, he had a chance to gauge my knowledge and, while
speaking to me, took many small facts for granted. To aid the reader, I have liberally
inserted the word "*orisha*" before proper names that describe an *orisha* (i.e. "the
orisha Elegua") and inserted the word "*toque*" before proper names that describe a
toque (i.e. the *toque* "Yakota"). Further, as this conversation indeed contains many
proper names, including places that no longer exist, I apologize if they are misspelled
or misrepresented in anyway.

supposed to let me play because of my age. But I was tall and thin, and they confused me for someone older. That was the cabaret La Taverna de Pedro, next to Cabaret El Niche, which was where Chori played. That was during the Batista government, before Fidel.

From there, I started working with Argelier León after the Revolution triumphed. A funny thing – I didn't start out as a musician. I was a dancer in a program called "[unintelligible] y la Pongo" with Leonor Bustamante and Emilio Ofaril who were followers of Bantú. I danced in the show, but I spent my time watching the musicians who were sitting there playing and didn't have to leap and jump. I said, "I should be doing that. I have to sit there too." So, I switched to music. I was with that program for a while. At that time, the National Theater wasn't finished yet. We presented at the Cavarrubias, which also wasn't done, but at least there was a stage. After that, the Theater was fixed and the Avellaneda room. From there, I started working at the Copacabana that was where the teachers of the arts were trained.

From there Papo Angarica looked for me to do the 9th Festival of Youth and Students that was going to happen in Argelia. But it wasn't in Argelia, because there was a coup d'etat by Vendela. So, the Festival took place in Bulgaria and the Soviet Union instead. We rehearsed for six months and went on June 16, 1965. We were at the Festival for a little more than three months. When I returned, I went to work for Danza Contemporánea, which used to be called Danza Moderna under the direction of Ramiro Guerra. Later, it changed its name to Danza Nacional, and now Danza Contemporánea. To this day, I'm still there. I also founded the group Oru de Sergio Vitier, which I was with for thirteen years, playing with Cuchao, etc. I also was with Los Amigos, with the now deceased Baretto, Mercedita Valdéz, and Tata Guines the conga player.

Bolaños laughed when he told me that he started his professional career as a dancer. But in Afro-Cuban music, dance and drums are inextricably linked. Most drummers are indeed proficient dancers, and vice versa. I have seen for myself and been told multiple times that understanding the connection between the various modes of performance (drums, dance and song) is an essential step towards learning how to play *batá*. Further, like many *batá* drummers, Bolaños is at ease in both secular and sacred contexts. Many of the skills he learns in one are undoubtedly transferable to the other. In this way, secular and sacred contexts are constantly informing one another.

After learning about his professional, secular life, I asked Bolaños to talk about his

experiences as a *batá* drummer and *santero*:

> I became a *santero* thirty-eight years ago. My godmother, the woman that dedicated me, is called Bellita. She was the *orisha* Ochún. I was initiated in the street between Mision and Esperanza, July 28, 1964. In this same house, before I became a *santero*, I started learning about the ceremonies and the *batá* drums. The drums passed through the hands of Serio Angarica who has since died, and are now, I think, with one of his sons – they are with Papo Angarica's son, in the family. I played with them for twenty years. I learned the secrets of the *batá*, everything that is the essence of the *batá*.
>
> You are always developing and learning. Nobody has complete knowledge. Everyone knows something, and you learn a little bit from each person. I learned everything in Barrio Jesús María. My godfather taught me as well, Ori Ate Oba. I've also been Oba for thirty-seven years. I completed my year of becoming a santero during the 9th Festival of Youth and Students, two days before leaving Cuba, on a boat in the middle of the ocean.[14] Coincidentally, my mother was Yemayá, the *orisha* of the ocean. I was on tour and when I returned, my year of initiation was complete. I became Oba and still am today.
>
> I specialized in how to do fundamental, religious ceremonies. Many people know how to play, but not everyone knows how to direct a ceremony. To direct, you have to know everything, have complete knowledge about everything, everything, everything. You have to dominate each thing, learn it well, to do it well. I've been doing this for forty-two years. Unfortunately, I can't find the person now who can teach me more. I want to learn more. I know that there's more out there that I haven't learned. But I haven't found the person who carried this knowledge inside.

In this narrative, Bolaños mentions completing his "year of becoming a

santero." During this important year, an initiate is addressed only as "*Iyawó*," and is

considered to be the wife of the *orisha* in his/her head, regardless of the gender of

either the *orisha* or *santero*. An *iyawó* adheres to a restricted lifestyle and wears only

white clothing. Bolaños makes a connection between the day he finished his year and

the fact that his mother was a child of Yemayá, both of which are related to the ocean.

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[14] Yo cumplí mi año de santo en El Noveno Festival de la Juventud y Los Estudiantes a dos días de salir de Cuba en barco en medio del mar.

For the Lucumí, the *orisha* are used to explain life events, personalities and natural phenomena.

For all his cumulative knowledge, I was most impressed with Bolaños' humility. Though many *batá* drummers regard him as omniscient, he wishes he knew more, and wants to continue learning. Here we see that learning is an ever-present component of playing the *batá*, even for the masters.

Next, I asked Bolaños to help me understand the differences between the younger and older generations. We discussed his misgivings with the way some things have changed, focusing initially on the way young drummers learn nowadays. It took Bolaños several minutes to begin speaking frankly with me and his first words, which I omit, were very tentative. After ten minutes of patient listening, and a string of diversions, Bolaños finally spoke his true feelings:

> Let me tell you. My style of playing is very different from the youth today because my foundation, my education was so different. When I started playing, becoming a drummer meant making a sacrifice. You had to sacrifice yourself. Now, that's not the case. When I was learning, an apprentice got ten *centavos* for playing, while the other drummers got five or six *pesos*. What happened was, the apprentice wanted to earn the four *pesos* that the experienced drummers earned, so he dedicated himself to learning.
>
> These old players aren't like the young drummers today. I think the young drummers have some defects. Part of it is my own fault. I accept some of the blame. Before, if you played something wrong, you were scolded, "you can't play." You were expected to play things correctly, exactly like the older drummers were playing. You couldn't just make things up. But now, kids get away with it. But not me, I had to learn in a different way. I learned *toque* by *toque*. I dedicated myself to analyzing every *toque*, one by one, from "Latopa" to the last one. What does the *boca* do?[15] What does that *chachá* do? If I was playing something wrong, I tried to fix it. Because there are three drums, with

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[15] The word *boca* means "mouth" in Spanish and refers to the voice of the drum, both literally and figuratively. The larger head of each *batá* drum is known as the *boca* or, in Lucumí, as the *enú*. The concept of conversation and talking (i.e. voice) are at the end of this chapter, and later, in Chapter 2.

six heads, together forming just one rhythm. Since I was only earning ten cents, I had to get better. I had to learn well.

Now, no apprentice earns just ten cents. Times change. There are even apprentices with children themselves. What can they do with even five pesos? Nothing! So what happens? Today, everyone earns the same amount regardless of how you play. So, you don't have to worry about studying. I'm not someone who sits around criticizing how others play. But if you don't know how to play, it's uncomfortable. The problem is, the old drummers don't take the responsibility for correcting the young ones anymore. They don't say "stop, you're playing it wrong." They feel bad about criticizing, about saying something. But the young players don't know how to play. They can't do a real *tambor*. It's wrong; their position, their posture, their speed. They injure themselves by playing wrong and when they go to the bathroom, they pee blood because they're sitting incorrectly. They don't have technique, so their speed is bad. They play badly.

Clearly Bolaños is disappointed with the youth of today, as well as with himself, for not guiding them correctly. The concept of sacrifice is sorely missing from the current day practices. And apprenticeship, as he experienced it, is no longer insisted upon. Exploiting his openness and willingness to share such strong thoughts, I asked Bolaños to address specific areas where the younger drummers were not playing the way he would like:

Well, another problem I see is this. They play things that don't make sense. Their variations and fills are wrong. If you're going to play "Nyongo," you need to do fills that fit or that make sense with "Nyongo." You have to follow a basic pattern, a basic feel. But they think they know how to play. There are players and there are drummers.[16] They are different. Anyone can put his hands on the drum, and there, you're playing. But you have to learn the style, the technique. Only the players who learn well become drummers.

There are a lot of songs for the saints. You can't sing any song with any *toque*. Each one has a specific *toque*. The kids also don't understand at what moment they should play something. They need more rehearsal, more practice. A real drummer has to be able to play, to fill, and to know the ceremony. You have to know the *toques* inside and out.

About how they play, what can I say? I'm not criticizing. I'm just telling you, when there are people who have certain experience playing, the new players should observe. They should observe how they play, how they

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[16] *Hay tocadores de batá y tamboleros de batá.*

develop, and how they sit, because these young players play just a little and think they know. They need to seek out the experience of older players. They play crazy things that don't make sense – they just make things up. It's just like composing or choreographing – before you can create, you need to know and understanding the basic mechanisms. Creativity has to grow from inside each person.

In this portion of the interview we start to get a really strong sense of what Bolaños values. First, he distinguishes between players and drummers. Players may be good with rhythm and may even sound good to the untrained ear, but a drummer of the *batá* needs to learn technique and style. He must know the ceremony and learn what *toques* accompany the hundreds, possibly thousands, of songs that comprise the repertoire. Bolaños emphasizes the value of seeking the experience of elder drummers and spending more time watching than playing, a thread that appeared many times during our interview. Finally, Bolaños addresses the concept of creativity. I asked him to continue this thought and in the following excerpts, he talks in depth about creativity and individuality:

> Each drummer has his own sound. He has his own *chachá*, his own drum sound and his own style of playing. Chuchu has his own style of playing, Papo Angarica has another, Regino another, Fermin, Israel. . . The deceased Jesus Perez Puente, he had his own way of playing. *Hay murumaca como se le dice a los floreos.* He had a fill that was very nice, very pretty that he did like the deceased Andres. I can't do it. When I do it, it doesn't sound good, because my style is stronger. It doesn't work for me. Everyone wants to imitate, but what works well for one person, doesn't work for another. The feeling of every person is different. Nobody has the same feeling, the same form. You do something, it sounds good. You're you. I do it with a different touch. It doesn't work. One thing about art; first you have to believe it yourself before you can transmit it or communicate it to another. So, that's what happens. Without the feeling, it's no good.
> I'm sixty years old, but I have the same technique that I had at sixteen. When I play *batá*, I think I have good speed. I'm not into the competition of who plays better than whom. I'm against that. I don't like it at all. Once, I was

playing with Mario. He was playing *itótele*, and me, *iyá*.[17] The people wanted us to argue. I told Mario, "when they ask me who plays better, you or me, I'm going to say "Mario" and when they ask you, you say "Bolaños." And that's what we did. The competition ended, right there. After that, there was no more intrigue about who played better.[18] Nobody asked again. I think that in *batá* groups, you can't really say who plays better than whom.[19] Everyone has their specialty, their style. There are people who specialize in *okónkolo*, in *itótele*. Also, *iyá* can be your specialty. I know a drummer that specializes in *okónkolo* and *iyá*, but knows nothing about *itótele*. There are great drummers, but there is no such thing as the best.

Though he spoke earlier of closely watching the older, experienced players, here Bolaños advises against imitation and encourages drummers to find their own sound. He says that a drummer can even specialize in the *okónkolo*, the smallest drum often viewed as the simplest to learn, and not be considered more or less than any other player. Most significantly, Bolaños describes *batá* drumming as an art, and in this excerpt, reveals his view on aesthetics. He values when drummers display individuality, play with feeling and communicate with one another. These statements reflect the rather fragile balance between following strict rules and striving for creativity.

When Bolaños and I returned to our discussion regarding the differences in the older and younger generations, he seemed to relax his rhetoric, adopting a conciliatory tone that recognizes that change is natural and inevitable:

> The world evolves, the world changes. Two hundred years ago, we got around on horses, now there are automobiles. Things change, from one step to the next. In the times of our parents, the *toques* were slower. Now, the *toques*

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[17] Bolaños uses *segundo* (Sp. second), designating the *itótele*.

[18] *Y ya se acababa la intriga de quien toca mas.*

[19] *Yo creo que entre grupo batá no hay que toca mas o menos.*

are the same, but they're played a little faster. That's what we've come to. It's a small change, not big.

But when I asked him how he feels about the faster tempos, his tone quickly changed.

> These young people can't even play the "Yakota." It should be played slowly, but if you play it that way, people complain, "It's so slow, you're killing me." They play for the public, for the audience. They sometimes say that us old players play too slowly. I don't play at the same speed that they play, because it's not right. They're playing to please the public.
> I play how I play, with a lot of feeling. Today they rush things too much. One thing about percussion in general, it shouldn't be rushed. Each *toque* has its own time. It builds. There's no need to rush. It has it's own time; it's own pace. You need to keep it there. It starts at a certain level and builds, arriving at the final level. Today there's no pace. Instead, it starts where it's supposed to build to.

Batá toques, I've learned from other interviews, are intended to speak to the *orisha*. Obviously, Bolaños thinks that by playing fast, young players are misguiding their efforts. Rather than communicating in a proper way to the *orisha*, the young drummers are trying to appease the public who, in this case, are the *santeros* and practitioners.

In his final thoughts on the topic, Bolaños' frustration comes clear in his words, facial expressions and gestures. Becoming quite animated, he speaks out against excess and encourages moderation when inserting *floreos* (Sp. fills) into your playing. Specifically he talks about the *toque* "Nyongo," which I discuss in length in the final two chapters of this dissertation:

> Another problem, they start playing "Nyongo" and change to another *toque* that isn't "Nyongo." I always say, return to your base. The *okónkolo* guides, it doesn't fill, doesn't vary. Where is the base? That's not "Nyongo." If everyone is filling, that's not "Nyongo." There's no base. They don't even know that they aren't playing "Nyongo." Within your foundation, your base, you can fill, you can develop, but you must always return to the basic pattern. You can't fill, fill, fill, because you lose the essence of what "Nyongo" is.

They don't even realize. All those fills annoy the listener. It's too much; it's bothersome.

Everything in excess is bad. Choose your favorite food, shrimp enchilada. Suppose that tomorrow, I told you that you have to eat shrimp enchilada everyday for a month. After a month, I'm not going to want shrimp; I won't like shrimp. Everything in excess is bad.

Fill. Fill. Fill. They have no control. Maintain your base. Hold steady for a minute. It's like an electronic guitar using the pedal constantly. It's annoying. It torments the listener. They need to be scolded. They need to be taught. Go ahead and do your fill, but return to the basic pattern. And they think they know how to play. They think they play more than they do.

Whereas our interview began tentatively, by the end Bolaños felt comfortable venting his many frustrations about the young players. My goal here was not to get Bolaños to speak ill of other players. On the contrary, I simply was looking for a way to get him to express those things that he values most in *batá* playing. Foremost, I believe he feels it is important to spend more time listening and watching than playing. But I find it curious that in his personal life, he started to play rumba when he was nine and even managed to sneak into cabarets when he was twelve. Granted, he would probably make a distinction between those folklore endeavors and religious performances. But I suspect it is a natural behavior to try to circumvent a drawn-out apprenticeship.

Conclusions

The Lucumí religion is a blend of African and European practices, known to the general public as Santería due to the syncretizing of Yoruba *orishas* with Catholic saints. Though there are many ways to worship the *orisha*, both in public and private, the most dynamic displays are festivities known as *toques de santo*. Often associated with a *cumpleano de santo*, but offered for many other purposes as well, these highly

structured celebrations are organized by music. Though several types of ensembles can perform music at these ceremonies, the *batá de fundamento* (Sp. consecrated *batá*) are in the greatest demand, and receive the highest compensation throughout Havana and North America. The musicians of this tradition are professionals and, like Angel Bolaños, often lead successful careers playing both religious and secular styles. Many tour internationally and appear on commercial recordings, playing not only secular styles but the *batá* as well.

As I demonstrate in the above interview, *batá* drummers have sophisticated notions concerning the aesthetics of their craft. Specifically, Bolaños infers a delicate balance between adhering to certain expectations and expressing individuality. While I find his words revealing and the imagery clear, most *batá* drummers transmit core skills, rhythms and aesthetic values without saying a word. Though they can effectively communicate ideas through bodily expressions, physical contact and non-lexical speaking, some types of communication are embedded in the structure of the music. For this reason, I begin the next chapter by examining the structure and form of *batá* music and present my views regarding the notation and transcription of this oral tradition. In doing so, I discuss some of the inherent problems by examining the decisions made by other scholars.

CHAPTER 2

STRUCTURE AND FORM IN BATÁ MUSIC

The *batá* repertoire consists of *toques*. These are often multi-sectional compositions that unfold linearly, with one section leading predictably into the following and terminating only after each of the sections has been performed. Within any given section, the drummers as a collective are permitted a range of variations, usually referred to as "conversations." By making a predictable change in his pattern, the *iyá* (Lu. the lead drum) player indicates that at least one of the other two drums (the *itótele* and *okónkolo*) should alter his pattern during the subsequent pass through the section. Simple in theory, this structure is often difficult for the untrained ear to perceive and requires significant simplification when depicted in writing. For example, at the level of pitch and timbre, small alterations may communicate significant changes within the ensemble, indicating either a new section or a variation. At the level of rhythm, by comparison, gross alterations in the meter from 4/4 to 6/8 may communicate little in the way of a change. After first considering the descriptive notation I employ throughout this dissertation, I compare my choices concerning pitch, timbre and rhythm with those of other scholars and examine some of the difficulties in depicting the musical sounds in this way. This is followed by a detailed look at two important investigations into the structure and form of *batá* music, comparing their

divergent views on how structure should be perceived and depicted with both notation and terminology.

Pitch and Timbre

Traditionally, *batá* performance skills and repertoire are transmitted orally. Where they do exist, most notated sources are intended for a musically-educated western audience, resulting in systems that use the five-line staff and a "percussion clef" where the lines and spaces on each staff are assigned a particular drumhead and method of striking, rather than absolute pitches.[20] The three drums in the ensemble produce pitches relative to their size. Arranged from smallest to largest and from highest pitch to lowest pitch they are: *okónkolo*, *itótele*, and *iyá*.

The double-headed *batá* drums, depicted in the lower portion of Figure 1, contain a *chachá* (small head) and an *enú* (large head). While the small *chachá* produces a dry, crisp, high sound, the larger *enú* generates lower-pitched tones. Generally, the *enú* is capable of producing two distinct tones: an open tone when the hand quickly rebounds off the drum allowing the head to freely vibrate and a muffled

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[20] Altman (1998), and Amira and Cornelius (1992) both use the percussion clef. Though Hagedorn (2001) uses the bass clef, it is clear that she is not indicating absolute pitch, but rather applying the same principle as the previous authors. Ortiz (1950) represents the primary exception to this practice. Using the bass clef, as well, he assigns absolute pitches to the drumheads, reflecting tonal phenomena he observed during his research. Though it is valuable to study the absolute and relative pitches of the drums, I believe that the wide variety of tunings that exist in common practice dictate that absolute pitch notation be omitted from most transcriptions.

tone when the drummer presses his hand into the drumhead.[21] Muffled tones are cut short, clipped, and dry, generating a pitch that is slightly higher than the open tone.[22] The graphic system of notation depicted in the upper portion of Figure 1 places higher-pitched sounds above the lower-pitched sounds allowing the reader to see the resultant melodies between each of the drums.
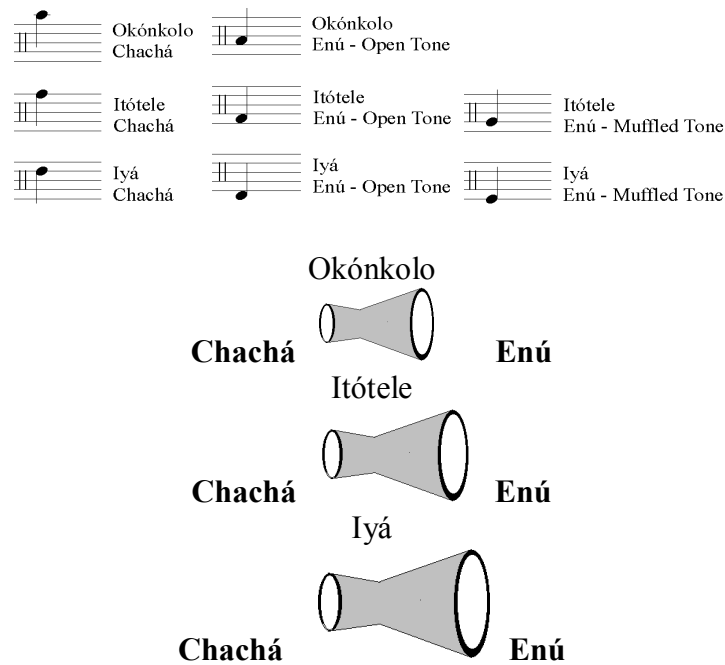
Figure 1: Notation key

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[21] In Havana, the *okónkolo enú* produces only the open tone. In Matanzas, drummers employ a greater variety of techniques including a muffled tone on the *enú* similar to the *itótele* and *iyá* as well as an open tone on the *chachá* produced by striking the drumhead with one finger and allowing it to rebound off the drum. This dissertation is primarily concerned with the performance practice as it is known and commonly applied in Havana. Though the United States has received immigrants from both cities, the Havana style predominates and has influenced my own playing as well as the majority of my informants.

[22] Ortiz's (1950) notation, which uses absolute pitches, suggests that the muffled tones sound one semi-tone higher than the open tones.

In addition to the pitches I've indicated, most drummers include additional, almost inaudible, light touches on the drumheads. These serve to mark time and help execute complex, syncopated phrases. Though they are sometimes sufficiently audible to contribute to the texture of the sound, they do not interfere with the structure of the *toques*. Further, while the notation allows for the production of two distinct tones on the *enú*, capable drummers can manipulate their hands to produce a wider range of timbres and tones on each of the heads, resulting in a greater range of sounds than is expressed with the above system of notation. Likewise, these do not affect the structure of the music.[23]

Rhythm

Among the earliest transcribers of *batá* rhythms is Cuban musicologist and ethnographer, Fernando Ortiz (1950). His early transcriptions were an important resource for New York *batá* drummers in the 1950's, 60's and 70's until the 1980 Mariel Boat Lift flooded New York and Miami with *batá* masters including: Orlando "Puntilla" Rios, Juan "El Negro" Raymat, and many others. North American drummers familiar with both Ortiz' work and the current Havana-style of playing often criticize his approach to transcription. Ortiz notates everything in a 4/4 meter, even though many of the rhythms are performed with a 6/8 "feel." In Ortiz' defense, many *batá toques* freely shift between meters, exploring both the extremes as well as the rhythmic "in-betweens" that often result in that elusive quality of "swing."

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[23] The aesthetic component of both phenomena would make an interesting study, but are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The examples provided in Figure 2 illustrate three ways to execute the typical *itótele* patterns in the *toque chachalekefon*. From an etic viewpoint each figure clearly describes a unique and distinguishable rhythmic pattern. From the emic view of a *batá* drummer, these rhythms are perceived as slight shifts in the "feel." Depending upon the particular performance context and the momentary disposition of the performers, the *itótele* player may freely shift among these patterns as well as others.

Figure 2: Three ways to "feel" the *itótele* rhythm in "Chachalekefon"

The example illustrated in Figure 3 further addressing the complexities associated with absolute and accurate rhythmic notation. While mm.1 matches the 6/8 pattern labeled "B" in Figure 2, the third measure is equivalent to the 2/4 pattern labeled "A." The second measure, by contrast, depicts a feel that exists somewhere between 2/4 and 6/8. Simple to execute, the double-dotted-sixteenth notes and the sixty-fourth note rests clearly illustrate the limitations of the western music rhythmic notation system.

Figure 3: The complexities associated with absolute and accurate rhythmic notation

Form and Structure

Transcription and notation issues are not limited to pitch, rhythm, and timbre, but extend to the perception and understanding of form and structure. While each *batá toque* is comprised of several structural levels, these are not uniformly identified and labeled by researchers. The following observations and conclusions are my own understanding and interpretation of two publications that directly address the issue of structure and form: *The Music of Santería* by John Amira and Steven Cornelius (1992), and *Making an Abstract World Concrete: Knowledge, Competence and Structural Dimensions of Performance among Batá Drummers in Santería* by Robert Friedman (1982). Rather than attempting to reconcile the divergent views of these authors, this section concludes by considering how their contrasting views complement one another, demonstrating the multiple layers of meaning that are encoded within the structure of a *batá toque*.

Amira and Cornelius identify four fundamental structural levels: roads (which they identify as sections in the transcriptions), calls, conversations and variations (1992: 24). Friedman recognizes only three: the section's basic conversations, calls and answers, and *juégalo* (Sp. playing with it) (1982: 137). While Amira and Cornelius provide a prescriptive notation directed towards an audience of western musicians who wish to learn to play the tradition, Friedman describes the structure of *batá* performance based on the emic perspective of his informants. Figure 4 compares Amira and Cornelius with Friedman, illustrating the relationship between the two ways of understanding the structure of *batá toques*.

Amira & Cornelius   **Friedman**

2. Roads ──────────────→ 1. The Basic Conversations
3. Calls ──────────────→ 2. Calls and Answers
4. Conversations ──────→ 3. Juégalo ('playing with it')
5. Variations
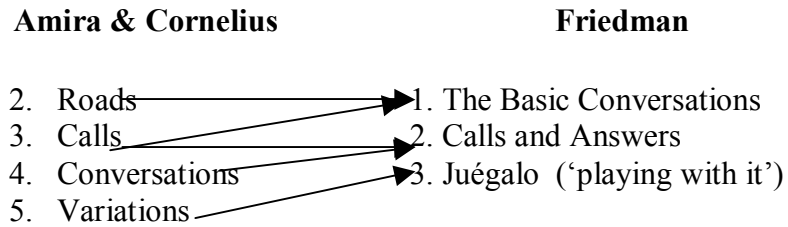
Figure 4: Comparison of terms used by Amira and Cornelius, and Friedman

According to Amira and Cornelius, the primary structural level of a *batá toque* is a road, which is "a complete and distinct musical phrase" (1992: 24). Individual *toques* may be comprised of several roads; each "believed to be sonic representation of a different avatar of the orisha" (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 22). The following passage, which describes the multiple roads of *Obatalá*, illustrates the great variety of traits an individual *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) can display in its various manifestations.

> Obatala has many "roads": different aspects or manifestations, avatars in the Hindu sense, in which the characteristics and attributes of the orisha vary tremendously. These range from a belligerent and bellicose warrior, Ajaguna, to a feeble, absent-minded old man, Oshalufon, who relies on a cane or staff for walking. Obalufon introduced the vocal chords, and thereby taught humans the art of speaking. Baba Asho shares with Obalufon the art of weaving and clothing humankind. Baba fururu and Alamorere are the sculptors of the human body. Yeku yeku represents the aging process and, along with Orolu, wisdom of acquired age.

> Although his masculine aspects dominate, certain "roads" are considered female manifestations of the deity (e.g., Oshanla, Eru Aye, Obanla) (Ramos 1996: 65).

Obatalá is at once young and old, male and female, artist and warrior. Just as it is with his multifarious personality, the *toque* for Obatalá sonically embodies a wide range of expressive musical phrases. Structurally, the *toque* is divided into seven roads. These roads can be grouped into three distinct structural units identifiable by their meter. The first structural component is characterized by a polyrhythm that places a 3/4 figure in the *okónkolo* against a 4/4 pattern in the *itótele* and 6/8 in the *iyá*. The second structural unit releases this tension by shifting all three drums to a relaxed 6/8 "feel." Finally, the third unit dramatically changes the nature of the *toque* when it suddenly marches in a bright 4/4.[24] Each structural component described represents one or more of the roads, avatars, or manifestations of *Obatalá* as outlined in the above excerpt by Ramos.

Robert Friedman, likewise, recognizes that a *toque* can consists of several sections.[25] He terms the primary level of each section, "the section's basic conversation" - equivalent to Amira and Cornelius' concept of "sections" or "roads."

> Each toque consists of one or more sections. Each section has a unique configuration of melo-rhythmic patterns considered to be basic to the toque. This notion of uniqueness is not attributable specifically to any one drum pattern but rather in the resultant patterns that emerge from the total combination of rhythms of all three drums. Each section of a toque has a primary resultant pattern referred to by the drummers as "the conversation of the toque." I will refer to "conversations" of this type as the section's basic conversation (Friedman 1982: 136-37).

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[24] See notation of this *toque* in (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 74-78). Section 1-4 comprises the first unit; Section 5 the second unit; and Sections 6-7 the third unit.

[25] Though Friedman (1982) refers to "roads" on p. 58, he never applies the concept in his later discussion of the sectional structure of the *toques*.

When Friedman uses the term "conversation," he is referring to the way two or more drums cooperate simultaneously, using hocket to construct musico-linguistic phrases. In this manner, drummers converse with the *orisha*, *egun* (Lu. ancestors) and *santeros* participating in the *toque de santo*. For Amira and Cornelius "conversation" holds a different meaning. It describes a call and answer interaction between two or more drums, mimics the structure of conversation in language. Friedman refers to this musical phenomenon as "calls and answers." Amira and Cornelius also apply the word "call." For them, there are three kinds of calls: those that initiate *toques*, those that signal new roads, and those that begin conversations. When compared to Friedman, the first two types of calls are subsumed under the heading of "the basic conversation," while the third type closely identifies with Friedman's "calls and answers."

In the following passage, Amira and Cornelius indicate their awareness of the multiple applications of the word and concept, conversation: "They [the *batá*] speak on two levels: first metaphorically, by imitating in sound the spiritual nature of each of the *orishas*, and second, in a concrete fashion by reciting musical phrases which are actual representations on the drums of Yoruba speech inflections" (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 22). But of these two levels, the authors appear to favor the former concerning metaphors. I believe this decision is rooted in their stated intent to provide a prescriptive notation for North American and European musicians and permits them to highlight metaphor, imagery and impressionism, which are more familiar concepts for westerners than the relatively foreign notion that drums can speak a language.

Amira and Cornelius continue to direct their orientation towards North American performers as they discuss the final structural level, "variations," which coincides with Friedman's Spanish word, "*juégalo* " meaning "playing with it." A quick glance at Amira and Cornelius' transcriptions reveals that many sections have variations. They provide instructions for drummers, indicating how they should apply variations in performance:

> The variations in Section 1 provide rhythmic contrast. Musicians might choose to play either one or both of them in performance. (It is also possible that some ensembles might choose to play either of the variations as their main pattern.) If played as variations, they are to be played a few times only and then the iyá should return to the basic pattern (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 38).

Though this is a pedagogically sound method of transferring this information to a western musician, its mechanical approach falls short of depicting the essence of this structural level.

Again, basing his terminology on interviews and an emic perspective, Friedman uses the word, *juégalo* . In doing so he identifies an important aspect of the performance aesthetic. While he acknowledges that standardized variations are important, he goes beyond Amira and Cornelius, placing emphasis on individualized embellishments. Friedman defines *juégalo* , as the "ability to take a rhythm and, while maintaining its basic structural outline, [reinterpreting] that structure to produce a new pattern" (Friedman 1982: 142). He continues:

> Enriching or playing with the beat is not a random style of embellishing rhythm. It is considered by the drummers as a highly developed aspect of the art of drumming. Its mastery is one of the criteria used to distinguish between a drummer who plays "mechanically" and one who plays with "feeling." It is the ability to "put oneself into the music" properly (Friedman 1982: 142-43).

By identifying this structural level as "variations" and providing a discreet number of standard versions, Amira and Cornelius offer an invaluable service to *batá* drummers who can read music and are in the early stages of their education, by providing materials they can learn by rote and subsequently apply mechanically. By contrast, Friedman's focus on individuality more accurately reflects the values and aesthetic criteria of drummers in this tradition.

Conclusions

Perceiving and depicting form and structure in *batá* music are highly interpretive endeavors. It begins with discerning when a change in pitch, timbre or rhythm indicates a significant shift in the music and continues with debate surrounding musical and symbolic significance of the various structural components. In this section I have examined the biases and conclusions of two scholarly works that deal with the musical structure and form of *batá toques*.

The Cuban *batá*, which are descendant from a Yoruba "talking drum" tradition, retain many of the linguistic elements of the African system, including the importance of a musical conversation. The entire structure of *toques* is rooted in the notion that the drums are conversing among themselves and with the *orisha, egun* and *santeros.* Words that refer to language (i.e. calls, answers, response, conversation) dominate the discussion of musical structure. When there is questionable linguistic value in a *toque*, the concept of "roads" and the ability for a *toque* to "sonically embody" the attributes of the *orisha* is emphasized. *Batá* drummers understand their role as communicator with the *orisha* whether they are drumming a semantic rhythm

or an impressionistic rhythm. In both instances, they are sending praises to the *orisha*, often calling them to the *toque de santo*. Conversation is at the root of musical structure, meaning, and aesthetics. Finally, *batá* drummers do not simply play variations. Rather, they "play" with the basic pattern and are expected to "put oneself into the music." The structure of a *batá toque* requires constant, meaningful conversation. The following chapter builds on many of these ideas. Examining the repertoire as a whole, it focuses on the imitative features within the *batá* repertoire including, but not limited to, the ability of the *batá* to imitate attributes of language, nature and human personalities.

CHAPTER 3

IMITATIVE FEATURES OF THE BATÁ REPERTOIRE

Though they exist within the fairly rigid four-phase framework outlined in

Chapter One, the moment-to-moment details of *toques de santo* (Sp. drumming

ceremonies) are dynamic and unpredictable. Rather than approach ceremonies with a

mental script, *iyá* (Lu. mother, indicating the lead drum) drummers continually

reevaluate performances. They select *toques* that best match each moment, paying

careful consideration to ritual intent, singing, audience participation, and many other

factors including their own aesthetic biases. The drummers' options often seem

limitless, as they are armed with an extensive repertoire, consisting of hundreds of

toques. This chapter addresses the decision-making process, and thereby aesthetics, by

examining how drummers perceive their repertoire and locate the sources of meaning

in the *toques*.

One commonly accepted division of this vast repertoire splits *batá toques* into

two major categories; the first is comprised of all *toques* traditionally associated with

the *oro igbodú* (Lu. first phase of a *toque de santo*), while the second encompasses all

the remaining *toques*. Though this division is deeply rooted in tradition, modern

scholars who have documented *batá toques* during the last fifty years tend to overstate

its significance (Ortiz 1950, Ortiz 1980, Amira and Cornelius 1992, Summers 2002,

Davalos and Coburg 2002). Their fascination with the *oro igbodú*, driven by the recognition of both its ritual significance and its suitability for analysis, has resulted in a heavy focus on the *toques* of the *oro igbodú*, and a masking of some of the more subtle and relevant features within the repertoire as a whole.

In response, I present a complementary view of the repertoire that grows from my own observations and experiences. Rather than existing solely in the rigid polar dichotomy described above, each *toque* falls within a continuum that ranges from dedicated *toques*, identified with particular *orishas* (Lu. deities in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon), to generic *toques*, which accompany the songs of most, if not all, of the *orisha*. After presenting a traditional view of the repertoire, I continue by exploring the imitative quality of the *batá*, focusing specifically on linguistic, metaphoric and associative elements, and explain why the meanings of *toques* are fluid and sensitive to context.

A Traditional View: The Oro Igbodú and Toques Especiales

When Cuban musicologist Fernando Ortiz began his work with Afro-Cuban cults in the middle of the twentieth century, he made extensive transcriptions. Of his many books, *La Africanía de la Música Folklórica de Cuba* (1950) contains his most complete collection of *batá* rhythms. Ortiz begins his discussion of transcriptions by naming six *toques* that are used exclusively for the *orisha* Changó: "Kan-kán," "Ebí kpa mi," "Meta-meta," "Tui-tui," "Báyuba," and "Didilaro" (1950: 264).[26] Curiously,

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[26] Ortiz actually includes a seventh *toque*, "Taniboya." I exclude this *toque* from the list because I believe that this is a *toque* for the *orisha* Yemayá. Since Ortiz never

in this discussion he only presents transcriptions of the five *toques* not traditionally

associated with the *oro igbodú* (1950: 256-67). The remaining one, "Didilaro," is

reserved for a later discussion on the entire *oro igbodú* (1950: 297, 404-06). Ortiz, like

many other scholars and drummers, was apparently influenced by the musical appeal

and ritual significance of the *oro igbodú*. The organization of his transcriptions

suggests that he recognized a rigid division between *toques* traditionally performed

during the *oro igbodú* and all other *toques*.

All academic endeavors into the study of the Lucumí traditions have

referenced and ultimately been influenced by Ortiz' early works. His implied division

of the repertoire into two large units has been mirrored and further cemented by

modern scholars. When major portions of Ortiz' writings on the *batá* were translated

into English (1980), large excerpts from *La Africanía de la Música Folklórica de

Cuba* (1950) were included.[27] Interestingly, the translators chose to include only the

writings and transcriptions dedicated to the *oro igbodú,* omitting references to the

other *toques.* The primacy of the *oro igbodú* is reaffirmed in the writings of Amira and

Cornelius (1992) and Summers (2002), by what they included and what they omitted.

These two books together provide English-speaking audiences with three versions of

the *oro igbodú,* again avoiding the rest of the repertoire. The former presents the New

York tradition, while the latter focuses on both the Matanzas and Havana styles.

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transcribes his "version" of "Taniboya," I have no way to confirm or contest his use of
the label.

[27] The translators indicate that they are presenting the material from pages 378-413.
By my observation they appear to translate pages 372-405 and provide transcriptions
from 373-419. Obviously we are working from different editions of *La Africanía de la
Música Folklórica de Cuba* (Ortiz 1950).

Davalos and Coburg (2002) makes the clearest distinction between the two repertoires with his two-volume work focused on transcriptions of the entire repertoire. While the first volume offers transcriptions of the *oro igbodú*, the second claims to contain all the *toques especiales* (Sp. special toques), a term that implies all *toques* outside the *oro igbodú*.[28]

The Oro Igbodú

Performed over the course of thirty to sixty minutes, the *oro igbodú* consists of a stream of seemingly endless *toques* for twenty-two or twenty-three *orisha*, where each *toque* honors an individual *orisha*. For example, the first four *toques* are associated with the *orisha* Eleguá. In the order they are performed, they are known as "Latopa," "Agongo ago," "Bobo araye" and "Abukenke." While each *toque* may be identified individually, it is quite common to refer to them collectively by the name of the first *toque*, i.e. "Latopa," or by the name of the *orisha*, i.e. Eleguá. Unless there is

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[28] I do not know when this term made its first appearance. *Toque especial* is a Spanish term, not Lucumí, and is likely of modern origin. Though I have not made an exhaustive search, I am unable to find this term in Ortiz' writing. The use of this term is not standardized and clearly means different things for different people. In 2001-02, I witnessed an online debate amongst drummers who are members of the batadrums.com discussion group regarding a classification system for the entire repertoire. After much negotiation, four members of the group, Thomas Altmann, Mark Corrales, Orlando Fiol and Chris "El Flaco" Walker compiled the "Bata Repertory List / La Habana Style." In this list they identify five categories: *oro igbodú*, *toques especiales*, generic *toques*, *rumbitas* (Sp. little rumbas) and other *toques*. Though the list is a little difficult to understand, I was able to count twenty-five *toques* listed under *oro igbodú*, fifty *toques* listed under *toques especiales* and seven *toques* listed under generic *toques*, *rumbitas* and other *toques* combined. Even though this group attempted to develop a classification system that includes five categories, the vast majority of the *toques* can be grouped as *oro igbodú* and *toques especiales*.

an overriding reason to identify a *toque* by a specific name, I refer to *toques* of the *oro igbodú* by the name of the appropriate *orisha*.

Throughout my training in this musical tradition, the *oro igbodú* has played a central role. When I was new to the music, my lessons invariably began by addressing the *oro igbodú*. Entire weeks were devoted to these rhythms. In more recent years, as I encounter new teachers, lessons still tend to begin with the *oro igbodú*. But, when it appears to them that I have command of these rhythms, we move to *toques especiales*.

Toques Especiales

Toques especiales comprise all the remaining *toques*, including those for specific *orisha,* generic *toques* that accompany the songs of many *orisha*, *toques* dedicated to the *egun* (Lu. ancestors) and *toques* that are performed for the initiation of new *santeros* (Sp. worshipers of the *orisha*). The naming of *toques especiales* is not as standardized as in the *oro igbodú*. Many do not have a universally recognized name, and are identified by various descriptive titles. During our January 2003 interview, Angel Bolaños shared a particularly funny example of this, regarding the *toque* that accompanies the Changó song "Eni alado:"

> Its name, if you can believe it, that someone gave it is "The merry widow" ["*La viuda alegre*"]. It is an old name that was given to identify it. It just occurred to someone and the name stuck. What does a merry widow have to do with this toque for Changó? Nothing! The toque does not have a Yoruba name – "La viuda alegre" is a Spanish name. What does it have to do with the *toque*? Nothing! And even less with Changó. It's just to identify it.

Such naming practices leads to confusion, especially in print, where it is sometimes difficult to understand exactly which *toque* an author is referencing. In

these instances, I attempt to be as clear as possible and occasionally indicate several names for the *toque*.

Dividing the Repertoire between Oro Igbodú and Toques Especiales

Pedagogically, dividing the *toques* into two categories is functional. By learning the *oro igbodú*, a novice drummer acquires both the skills to continue his education and a functional knowledge of *toques* that is useful in all phases of the ceremony. Once a drummer has faithfully committed himself to the *oro igbodú*, the *toques especiales*, by comparison, provide little surprise or technical challenge.[29] However the division is not completely logical. The *toques* of the *oro igbodú* appear throughout all phases of the ceremony. This is especially true for a few select *toques*, which become generic during the *oro eyá aranla* and *wemilere*, where they accompany the songs of many *orisha*. These include the *oro igbodú toques*, Obaloke, Dadá, Ogué, the last section of Oba, and the last two sections of Osain.

Similarly, to suggest, as I have, that the initial phase of the ceremony, the *oro igbodú*, contains a discreet number of *toques* that are universally accepted and applied in every *toque de santo*, would be a gross misrepresentation. In truth, the ritual is much more dynamic and fluid than this. There are many *toques especiales* regularly performed in the *oro igbodú*, including the following common substitutions and

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[29] Chapter Four examines the pedagogy and the role of learning the *oro igbodú*.

additions to the more traditionally recognized form of the *oro igbodú*. Such changes

are guided by the aesthetic biases of the *iyá* drummer and driven by ritual necessity.[30]

1) All *toques de santo* honor an individual *orisha*. In standard practice, the *toque* for the honored *orisha* is generally displaced from its normal position in the order and moved to the end of the *oro* where it is performed as the penultimate *toque*. There are several exceptions to this practice, including *toques de santo* for Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi, who are invariably honored at the beginning of an *oro*. Therefore, a *toque de santo* in their honor includes two instances of their *toques*: first, in their normal position near the beginning and, second, in the penultimate position. In the case of Eleguá, this usually means that "Latopa" (the *oro igbodú toque* identified earlier) is performed at the beginning of the ceremony and a *toque especial* for Eleguá, "La lu banché," is heard near the end.

2) At the end of the *oro igbodú* (the penultimate position), the celebrated *orisha* may be honored with additional *toques especiales*.

3) The *toque especial*, "Tuí-tuí," sometimes replaces the *oro igbodú toque* for the *orisha* Oyá, known alternatively as "Oyá recto," "Oyá por derecto," or "Bayuba kanté."

4) The *oro igbodú toque* for the *orisha* Changó, "Didilaro," is sometimes extended with the *toque especial*, "Meta-meta."

5) The *oro igbodú toque* for the *orisha* Yemayá, "Alaro," is sometimes extended with the *toques especiales*, "Omolode" and "Ala chikini."

Imitative Features Create A Fluid Continuum

In light of these observations about the *oro igbodú*, I present an alternative

method of understanding the repertoire, which focuses on the relationship between

toques and the *orisha*. All *toques* exist within a fluid continuum that ranges from a

clear relationship with an individual *orisha*, i.e. dedicated, to no relationships at all,

i.e. generic. This view grows from an examination of the highly imitative nature of the

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[30] In Chapter Five, I describe an event where such a decision was likely based on the skill level and experience of one of the drummers.

batá, including its ability to reproduce elements of language, mimic nature, and to appropriate the rhythms of other musical systems. The intimate relationship between *toque* and *orisha* that exists at one extreme of the continuum can generally be attributed to an embedded linguistic attribute, either as musical speech or song. Further along the continuum exist *toques* that are associated with a limited number of *orisha*, generally by musical metaphors created through associations between musical sound and patakín (Lu. origin myths). Continuing towards the generic repertoire are a class of *toques* for many songs and *orisha,* often identified by their origin including: "Iyesá," "Arará," and "Igbin" (referring to regions in Africa). Finally, there are the generic *toques* "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon." These *toques* accompany hundreds of songs for every *orisha*, and are the most commonly performed *toques*. By examining the steps along the continuum, I reveal the inherent diversity of the repertoire.

Linguistic Attributes

The Cuban *batá* is a "talking drum," capable of imitating the human voice in direct speech, musical speech and song. Semantic *toques* (i.e. *toques* that have linguistic meaning) identify a specific *orisha* by referencing historical or physical attributes of that deity. Some drummers contend that most, if not all, *toques* contain these literary associations; but recognize that the meaning of many, especially those in the category of direct speech and musical speech, have been forgotten. Others believe that the ratio is significantly lower and suggest that the relationship between the *orisha* and many *toques* is via musical metaphor. Unfortunately, among the Lucumí, the linguistic content of many *toques* is to a large degree ambiguous and debatable. It is

uncertain exactly what portion of the entire repertoire actually contains semantic rhythms, and it is further unknown, in some instances, what the text means. Nonetheless, linguistic attributes, as well as the belief that there are linguistic attributes, play a considerable role in the *batá* repertoire.

Yoruba Language and the Yoruba Batá

Though the Cuban *batá* tradition evolved in isolation from its Yoruba ancestor, the African tradition may still hold the key to understanding some of the forgotten and distorted traits of the drumming phenomenon in the diaspora. Yoruba, as a tonal language, readily lends itself to partial reproduction on various musical instruments, including trumpets, flutes, *batá*, dundun, and to a lesser degree, the *ipese, agere, igbin*, and *gbedu* drums. Akin Euba (1990) meticulously analyzes the nature of talking drums, focusing specifically on the popular Yoruba *dundun* drum, but often speaking in general terms that are applicable to the Yoruba *batá* ensemble, as well.

> In *iyaalu* [mother drum] drumming there are three fairly distinct forms in which literary material is employed. First, the instrument may be used solo as an organ of direct speech without musical attributes, except so far as the Yoruba language may be considered as having latent music attributes. Secondly, the instrument may be used to talk in 'musical' as opposed to 'speech' rhythm in the context of, and integrated with, other musical instruments whose function is purely musical. Thirdly, the iyaalu may be used to imitate a voice singing literary text (Euba 1990: 192-193).

According to Euba, the Yoruba *dundun* and Yoruba *batá* speak in a similar, yet distinct manner. Though each ensemble consists of multiple instruments, the lead instrument of both ensembles, known as the *iyàálu* (mother drum), fulfills the linguistic capacity, while the supporting instruments provide musical accompaniment.

As a variable pitch drum that is controlled by applying tension to strings attached directly to the drumhead, the *dundun* is able to reproduce all the pitches, including microtones, contained within a range of approximately one octave. In a remarkably accurate manner, the drum is able to mimic the tonal inflections of Yoruba speech, including the three distinct pitch levels (high, mid, and low), and the glissandos between these pitches. Likewise, it can imitate the melodic contour of a song as well as any other "pitched" instrument.

By contrast, the Yoruba *batá* is a double-headed, fixed-pitched drum. In order to reproduce the three pitch levels of the Yoruba language, the *iyàálu* drummer relies on muting techniques that simultaneously change the timbre and incrementally raise the pitch of the lower drumhead. Though unable to perform glissandos, Oyelami (1991) points out that the Yoruba *batá* is advantaged by its ability to distinguish between soft vowels (i.e. i and u) and hard vowels (i.e. a, e, ẹ, o, ọ) by exploiting the characteristics of two distinct drumming surfaces, versus the single struck head of the dundun. The soft vowels are achieved by striking the *enú* (Lu. the larger head of the *batá* drum) of the *iyàálu* while striking both drumheads implies the hard vowels.

Lucumí Language and the Cuban Batá

Considering that Lucumí is rarely spoken outside of ritual, and few understand more than just a few words and phrases, it is not surprising that spoken Lucumí has lost much of the tonal inflection that makes its predecessor, Yoruba, intelligible on musical instruments. While the Yoruba tonal system consists of three tones – high-tone, mid-tone, and low-tone (Abraham 1958: x) – the tonal nature of Lucumí has

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been inconsistently preserved. For example, the Lucumí dictionary, *Anagó*, lacks diacritical marks to indicate tone (Cabrera 1986).

Of the three forms of linguistic material employed by the *batá*, there is a clear progression from the "more-literary" use of the instrument to the "more musical" as Euba addresses "direct speech form," "musical speech form," and finally "song form" (Euba 1990: 193). Euba's balanced analysis suggests that the three forms are equally developed, if not equally applied in Yorubaland. In Cuba, by contrast, there is a clear preference for song form, and the direct speech form is nearly extinct. Where the tonal nature of the spoken language system has been forgotten, song melodies remain true to their original form and are easily imitated by the drums.

Direct Speech Form

In Cuba, the direct speech form exists primarily as short, simple rhythmic phrases on the *batá* that imitate speech. The most recognizable is *di-de* (Lu. get up, proceed). The *iyá* player uses this phrase after a *santero* prostrates before the drums, indicating he/she should rise, or when a practitioner honors the drummers by placing money before them, as a way of recognizing the contribution. It is also used to indicate the end of a section or a *toque*. *Di-de* is accomplished by playing an open tone followed by a muffled tone, both on the *enú*. It is played distinctly "out of time" so that it is not confused with an improvisation or musical variation. In this way, it is direct speech, and not musical speech. In the course of my investigation, I have found only a few examples of direct speech. I suspect that, since Lucumí is rarely spoken outside the ritual context, the tradition of direct speech has largely disappeared. Of

course, there are many ritual contexts that I have not been privileged to attend. This could be a fruitful area for further investigation.

Musical Speech Form

In contrast to direct speech, there are ample examples of the musical speech form in academic literature, recordings and ceremonies. Ortiz identifies several examples of drummed conversations. While he acknowledges the existence of semantic rhythms in the *seco toques* (Sp. dry *toques*, referring to *toques* performed in the absence of songs) for Babalú Ayé, Obatalá, Ibedyi, and Oyá, he uniquely identifies a drummed conversation in the *toque* for Babalú Ayé that is spoken and not sung (Ortiz 1950). According to Ortiz, the *toque* "Iyá nko tá" intones the following phrases:

> Iyá nko tá. Iyá nko tá. Iyá nko tá.
> Kokpa ni yé. Kokpa ni yé.
> Iyá nko tá. Iyá nko tá, etc (Ortiz 1950: 387-8).

On the recording entitled *Fundamento* (1995), by the well-known and respected Cuban *batá* drummer Papo Angarica, the choral group intones the above chant for Babalú Ayé, "Iyá nko tá," as well as a second one for Inle, "Ilya ba ta chobi." Both are perfect examples of musical speech. Interestingly, the chant for Inle is not one of the drum conversations identified earlier by Ortiz. On this recording, the chants are intoned simultaneously with the drum *toque*, facilitating a comparison between the vocalizations and the drumming imitations. Since Angarica's choral

ensemble uses only two pitches, the low pitch is indicated with (L) and the high pitch

is indicated with (H) (Figure 5).[31]

A. Iyá nko tá

I(L)   yá(L)   nko(L)   tá(H)
I(L)   yá(L)   nko(L)   tá(H)
I(L)   yá(L)   nko(L)   tá(H)
Ko(L)   kpa(H)   ni(H)   yé(H)
Ko(L)   kpa(H)   ni(H)   yé(H)

B. Ilya bata chobi

I(H)   lya(L)   ba(H)   ta(L)   cho(L)   bi (H)
I(H)   lya(L)   ba(H)   ta(L)   cho(L)   bi (H)
A(L)   ga(L)   da(L)
I(H)   lya(L)   ba(H)   ta(L)   cho(L)   bi (H)
I(H)   lya(L)   ba(H)   ta(L)   cho(L)   bi (H)

*(L)-indicates a low tone. (H)-indicates a high-tone.

Figure 5: "Iyá nko tá" (Track #5) and "Ilya bata chobi" (Track #4) performed as musical speech by Papo Angarica's ensemble on Fundamento (1995).

These patterns of high and low (i.e. the musical speech) are imitated by the

batá in several ways. Figure 6, isolates the *iyá* and demonstrates one version of "Iyá

nko tá" commonly heard in ceremonies. Note the rhythmic correspondence between

the spoken word and the drummed figures. In this example, the low tones are

perceived any time the *enú* is struck, either alone or with a *chachá* (Lu. the smaller

head of the *batá* drum). The high tones are recognizable by the solo *chachá* hits.

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[31] The absence of a middle tone, or a third tone, in either chants suggests the three-tone Yoruba system has been conflated into a two-tone Lucumí system. Though this is an intriguing hypothesis, it is beyond the scope of this investigation.

Figure 6: "Iya nko tá" – Comparison between *iyá* and voices

Even though Euba asserts that the *iyàálu* is the only drum that "talks" in the in the Yoruba *batá* ensemble, in the Cuban *batá* tradition the *itótele* (Lu. middle drum of the *batá* ensemble) helps the *iyá* talk. Figure 7 demonstrates how the *itótele enú* matches all the high tones of the voice, and illustrates how the *itótele*'s presence permits the *iyá* to vary its figure slightly in measures 7-8. Here the *iyá* is completely silent on the high tones of the syllables, "pa ni ye." In this way, we sense how the ensemble can remain true to the literary phrases, yet still find room for personal interpretation.

Figure 7: "Iya nko tá" – Comparison between *itótele*, *iyá* and voices.
Includes a variation for the *iyá* in measures 7-8

Song Form

Some *batá toques* maintain a close relationship with specific songs. These *toques* mimic the general melodic and rhythmic material of the songs they accompany. A typical example is provided with the song and *toque* for Changó, known as "Fomalokete." Figure 8 provides a transcription of the *toque* as taught to me by Pancho Quinto in 2002 with the words for the song inserted in their correct rhythmic location. To make the relationship between the song and the *toque* more apparent, Figure 9 eliminates four of the drumheads, providing the essential melody generated between the *enú* heads of the *iyá* and *itótele* on a single staff. Accompanying this are the words and melody of the song (Altmann 1998: 142). This reduction makes one further adjustment by eliminating the improvised *iyá* part that accompanies the *apón* (indicated by "A" in the lyrics) in measures 6 and 7. Focusing only on measures 1-6,

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which contain the chorus part (indicated by "C" in the lyrics), it is evident that the melody of the drums and the melody of the singer bear strong resemblance.

Figure 8: "Fomalokete" – *Toque* and words

Melody created between the enu of the itótele and iyá.

Melody of the song

Figure 9: "Fomalokete" – Song (words and melody) and *batá toque* (reduced to the *enú* drumheads of the *itótele* and *iyá*)

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Summary

The Cuban *batá* descend from an African tradition where drums mimic speech. In this way, both African and Cuban *batá* drummers are storytellers who use drums as their voice. These linguistic actions refer to historical events, real and perceived. They speak of time when the *orisha* walked upon the earth. To a large degree, the Lucumí have forgotten how to speak their language. Its usage is generally restricted, in both speech and semantic *toques*, to short exclamations and greetings (e.g. direct speech like *di-de*), chanting (e.g. musical speech like "Iya nko tá" and "Ilya bata chobi") and singing (e.g. song form like "Fomalokete"). As a result, the ability to convey meaning through semantic *toques* is limited. As we see in the following sections, Cuba *batá* players have adapted to the limits of their language. Remaining true to their heritage as storytellers, they rely upon musical metaphors to communicate with and tell stories about the *orisha*.

Musical Metaphors

The *orisha* are endowed with both natural and human qualities, where each is individually assigned to govern over specific forces of nature and embody human personality archetypes. These traits are recorded in the collective memories of the Lucumí as mythological stories, or *patakín*, that are often learned experientially and expressed non-verbally through various aspects of religious life.

The *patakín* are manifest in ritual behavior,[32] and in the quasi-theatrical interaction between two possessed *santeros* who reenact portions of the *patakín*. They

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[32] The *patakín* are manifest in ritual behavior, as in the practice of touching water to the back of your neck when the *orisha* Babalú Ayé is invoked. When he walked the

are interpreted in artistic realms including altar and garment creation, dance and music. In this vein, garment and altar artist Ysamur Flores-Peña describes his craft as storytelling, "To design a garment is to dream, to be a storyteller whose medium is fabric." He further contends that he is excited when presented "unique opportunities to interpret the Orishas' stories" (Flores-Peña 1994: 17, 20).

Similarly, when *batá* drummers play, there is an immediate association with these *patakín*. Sometimes, as indicated in the previous section, this is achieved through linguistic reference. But often, it is realized in the more flexible form of a musical metaphor, where drum *toques* imitate the qualities of an *orisha*, thereby invoking that individual *orisha*, or, more commonly, connecting two or more *orishas*. The *toque* for Ochún, the *orisha* of sweet waters, e.g. rivers, and a model of female sensuality, accomplishes both. The unique qualities of Ochún are depicted in sound, as demonstrated during a personal communication with David Font, *omo* Aña and professional *batá* drummer in Miami and Washington, DC.

> Ochún is a musical impression of river flowing. A river goes around anything, it bubbles here and there. I find that very easy to understand. When you hear the rhythm, it has that feel to it. To me it's impressionism in music. Where you take a vibration, not necessary a specific tonal vibration, but an energy, and try to manifest it in music (Font 2002: communication).

When I hear David play this *toque*, it is clear that he strives to convey the impression of "bubbling" and "flowing." As he improvises over the fairly simple *toque*, he is restricted only by the desire to tell the story of a river, bound by his own imagination, interpretation, and his relationship to the other drummers. This stands in stark contrast

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earth, evil men taunted Babalú Ayé by throwing water on his open small pox wounds. When he is invoked, the Lucumí place water on the back of their necks to keep small pox and all epidemics at a safe distance.

to my characterization of *toques* that are defined by linguistic associations; though there is always room for variation, the essential melody of a semantic *toque* does not stray far. The division between semantic *toques* and impressionistic *toques* is not absolutely clear. Depending on one's points of view, *toques* might fall into both categories, requiring that the drummer consider context as he balances the two attributes against each other.

Ochún is not the only water *orisha*; she shares company with Yemayá, who rules the oceans and embodies motherhood. In the summer of 2002, I witnessed a riverside ritual in honor of both Ochún and Yemayá, where two altars were erected on the banks of the river. During the performance, the practitioners conveyed to me that they felt a strong presence of both *orisha*, owing to their proximity to the water source.

Just as some portion of both *orisha* is believed to exist in all bodies of water, there are similarities in their *toques,* the most obvious being the way many *iyá* drummers employ the hundred and one brass bells that encircle the rims of the *enú* and *chachá*. Brass is associated with Ochún, and the bells strung near the rim of the *batá* drum are admired for the sweet, feminine sound they make in contrast to the explosive, forceful strokes on the skin drumheads. Though they constantly shake throughout all performances, many *iyá* drummers have a peculiar way of using them during *toques* for Yemayá and Ochún. While momentarily suspending their own drumming pattern, and allowing the *itótele* and *okónkolo* (Lu. smallest drum in the *batá* ensemble) to continue, the lead drummer grabs his *iyá* at both ends and shakes the drum, making a beautiful cascading sound. This action may last only a few moments or be dramatically drawn out. This is an effective way to call both *orisha*.

Considering the many similarities between the two *orisha*, i.e. water, femininity and bells, Ochún's *toque* can potentially invoke Yemayá, and the converse.

Metaphors become Iconicity

Toques are not linked only to linguistic features and mythology; they simultaneously infer movement and dance. As the Havana *apón* and *batá* drummer Rubén Bulnes shared with me during an interview in January 2003, one does not truly know how to play *batá* unless he knows the songs, the dances and the stories. The three are inseparable. During our interview, he clearly expressed this point when he rose from his chair, and began to sing, dance and tell me the following bit of advice:

> Changó won a war with a cluster of bananas soaked in coconut oil. So, Changó comes out dancing with bananas on his head . . . What am I trying to explain to you with this story? The relationship between the dance, the song, and the drumming! There is a way to drum and a way to dance. The dancer has to know the song to be able to dance it. There has to be a congruency, a union, as much with the dance as with the drumming. All of this has to come together.

The metaphors between music, dance and myth are further strengthened when one considers the influence of the *orisha*, and thereby music and dance, on the natural world. Several accounts, and even my own personal experiences, illustrate this. In January 2002, I attended a *toque de santo* in the Santo Suarez *barrio* (Sp. neighborhood) of Havana. After the *oro igbodú* and *oro eyá aranla* were completed, three *iyawós* (Lu. wife, indicating a new initiate) were presented before the drums as a component of their initiations to the following *orishas*: Yemayá, Changó, and Oyá. Though the evening had been overcast, rain had not yet begun to fall on the *barrio*, not until the *iyawó* of Yemayá (*orisha* of the ocean) was presented before the drums.

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When the *iyawó* began to dance, accompanied by *batá toques* and community singing, sheets of rain fell from the sky. Soon after the presentation of the *iyawó*, the weather outside subsided and reduced to a trickle. When the *iyawó* of Changó (*orisha* of fire and thunder) walked into the room, and the singing, drumming and dancing resumed, several brilliant flashes of lightning darted across the sky, causing everyone in the room to let out a brief cheer. Finally, when the *iyawó* of Oyá, (the *orisha* who guards cemeteries and controls the winds) was presented before the drums, the storm winds blew into a fury, rattled the windows, sent a blast of wind into the room, and again led the practitioners to express their delight. Though these occurrences may have been the result of chance, in the eyes of the practitioners, they were testament to the *orishas'* control over nature and their own abilities to work in congruence with their *orishas'* wishes, and to influence and affect their own conditions. When I later shared this story with David Font (2003), he admitted that, in his experience, these types of "coincidences" tend to happen more often than not.

> When you're presenting *iyawós* - if you're playing for Yemayá, Changó or Oyá, *orishas* that are directly related to certain forces of nature - there's a really strong tendency for things to happen. It will rain. A bolt of lightning will drop. A strong wind will come through. All kinds of stuff like that. To be honest, it almost never fails.

Among other things, what defines a musical performance in this tradition as particularly beautiful, powerful, compelling, evocative, or aesthetically valued is the perceived naturalness of the metaphors, i.e. iconicity, between music, dance, myth and nature (Becker and Becker 1981; Feld 1988; Keil 1979). A highly valued *batá* drummer is, in part, one who knows the *patakín*, knows how to express them

creatively in sound, and knows how to watch the dancers and singers, and respond to their creative interpretations of the *patakín*.

Iconicity of Yemayá and Changó: Hearing Gender in Rhythms

With regard to gender, the *orishas* Yemayá and Changó complement one another. Yemayá is a nurturing mother, while Changó embodies masculinity as a virile warrior. Their relationship is chronicled in the *patakín*, which is expressed metaphorically in the rhythms of the *batá*, as well as in all the realms discussed above.

Yemayá inspires peace and tranquility. The opening strains of her *toque* are calming and invite dancers to sway. She lives in the ocean, the cradle of life, and wears a blue dress, with white or silver trim. When Yemayá dances, she sways and spins, and it looks as if the ocean is foaming. But the ocean is not always gentle. Wind can drive the waves and raise the tides. Her music can invoke the sound of crashing waves and the swirling of a whirlpool. Her dress jerks violently up and down, and her spinning can be dizzying.

By contrast, Changó is aggressive and masculine; he epitomizes manhood. Wearing red and white, he is the lord of fire and lightning. His *toque* is strong and angular. When Changó dances, he grabs lightning bolts from the sky and casts them down on his foes. The drums echo his antics with thunderous explosions. Though the *oro igbodú*, as a whole, is designed to equally recognize all the *orisha*, perhaps with a particular emphasis on the honored *orisha* of the *toque de santo*, many drummers feel Changó deserves extra recognition. His *toque* is masculine, aggressive, and an opportunity for the drummers to display their prowess and virtuosity. Therefore, many

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ensembles pause before playing his *toque* and salute him by lifting out of their seats for a brief second. A result of this theatrical gesture is a fairly informal beginning to the *toque*. Whereas an *iyá*'s call typically dictates the tempo and meter of most *toques*, in this instance, there is a pause, perhaps several seconds, between the *iyá* call and the *itótele* entrance, permitting the *itótele* to establish the tempo after the drummers rise and settle back into their seats. After the *itótele* enters, the *okónkolo* comes in, followed casually by the *iyá*.

During a lesson on January 3, 2003, Angel Bolaños revealed his understanding of how the gendered qualities of Yemayá and Changó are embodied in the rhythms of the *itótele*.[33] When Bolaños played the call for the *oro igbodú toque* for Changó, I entered with the *itótele*, in the manner I was taught and have been playing for eight years. For several moments, I played by myself. Not unusual, I suspected the *okónkolo* would enter whenever it suited him. With a gesture that I missed during the lesson, but later identified on the videotape, Bolaños motioned the *okónkolo* to wait. My teacher just sat and listened, shaking his head and quietly murmuring, "Yemayá!" After, several more moments, Bolaños played a gesture on the *iyá* that made little sense in the context of this *toque*. The *okónkolo* mimicked him. Slowly, I realized we were playing the *toque* for Yemayá. Why had he done this? I was confused.

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[33] This experience stands alone in my mind, because it is one of the few instances where a Cuban master drummer isolated the middle drum, and discussed meaning in its rhythm. Many times, I have been drawn to the *iyá* and found substantial meaning, but an understanding of the *itótele* and *okónkolo* usually depends on both their relationship to each other and to the *iyá*. As Friedman aptly points out, "It cannot be overstressed that the individual treats his part not as an isolable entity, but rather in relation to the other component parts used to reproduce a specific <u>toque</u>" (Friedman 1982: 124).

Figure 10 demonstrates what transpired during these moments. The first portion of the figure, labeled "A," represents my expectations. After the *iyá* call, I entered with the part notated on the lower staff and expected the *okónkolo* to play his part as represented on the top staff. Since no other drums entered, however, my part was non-metric and sounded like the rhythm represented by "B." Or, possibly for Bolaños, like the rhythm represented in "C." Though the *okónkolo* was prepared to enter the correct way, my teacher asked him to enter as indicated in "D." Bolaños was trying to teach me that when the *itótele* is played in the manner that I did, which I insist is very widely done, it can interpreted as either Yemayá or Changó, depending on the *okónkolo*'s relationship to the *itótele*. Bolaños showed me both how and why he felt this way of playing was incorrect.

A. *Okónkolo* and *itótele* patterns for Changó

B. *Itótele* pattern notated without meter

C. Identical *itótele* pattern again notated without meter

D. *Okónkolo* and i*tótele* patterns for Yemayá
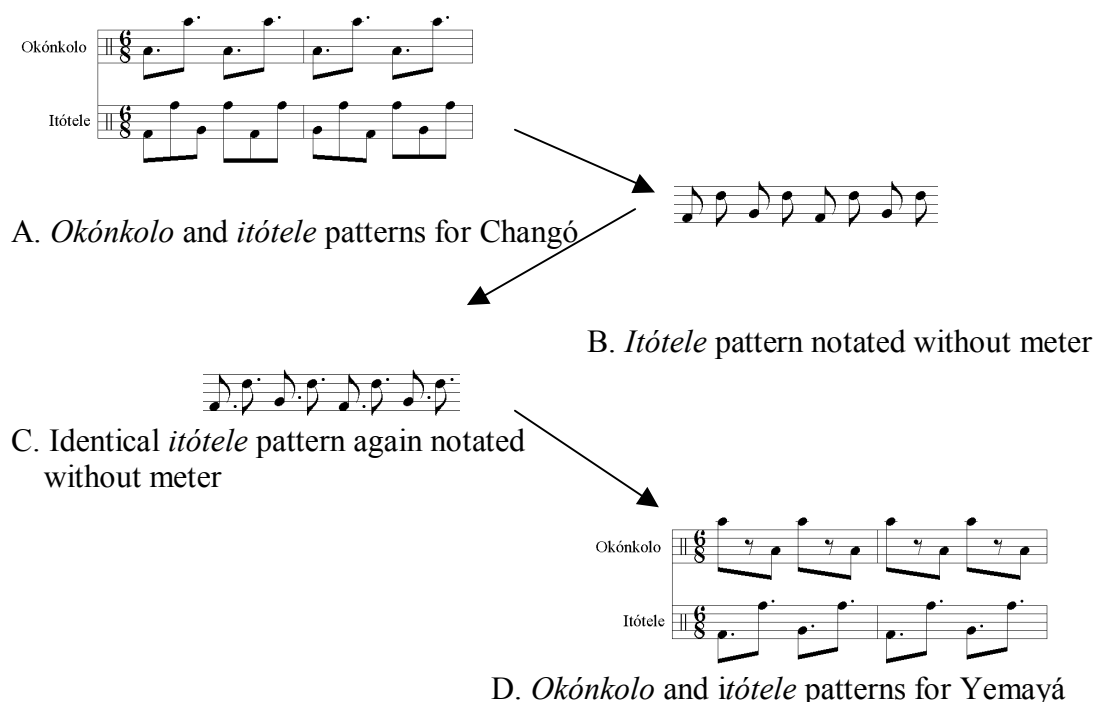
Figure 10: Description of what transpired during a moment of my drumming lesson with Bolaños on January 3, 2003
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #1)

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Bolaños feels that Changó and Yemayá are very different *orishas*, and that this should be reflected in the *itótele*. He modified my part, as illustrated in Figure 11a. Very similar to the one I began with, it feels stiffer, angular. It doesn't flow smoothly like Yemayá's version. In Figure 11b, the *okónkolo* is reinserted and the relationship between the two clearly implies a 4/4-meter.
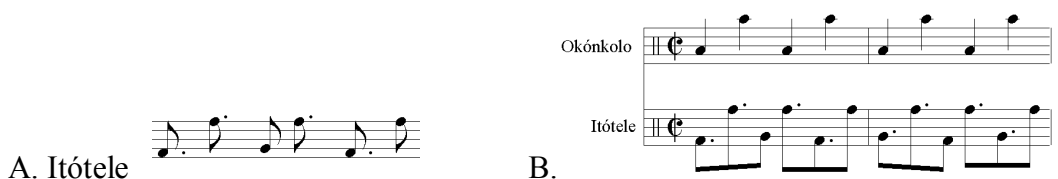
Figure 11: *Toque* for Changó according to Bolaños (*okónkolo* and *itótele*)

For Bolaños, Yemayá is played in a flowing 6/8-meter, while Changó is angular, with sharp edges in 4/4-meter. No other teacher had ever emphasized to me the similarities between the *itótele* parts of these two *toques*. Nor did they ever insist that I make the distinction that Bolaños insists upon. Over the next few days in January 2003, I attended several *toques de santo* and carefully observed this *toque*. On most occasions I witnessed the *itótele* playing exactly as I do, in 6/8-meter. On two occasions, however, I noticed students of Bolaños play the 4/4-meter version that Bolaños taught me on January 3. The relationship of each individual in this religion with the stories of the *orisha* is a very personal matter. As with altar and costume design (Flores-Peña 1990, 1994), drumming is an interpretive experience often without a clear distinction between right and wrong.

As different as Changó and Yemayá are, Bolaños was also concerned with sharing his thoughts on their commonalities. For example, when Yemayá and Changó

are fed a blood sacrifice, they eat the same foods at the same time. This, he showed me, is represented in their *toques*. While my earlier depiction of Yemayá begins by describing her as calm and tranquil, I also write about her stormy nature. Like Changó, she can be fierce. Representing this commonality in sound, both *orisha* share the passage indicated in Figure 12. In this illustration we again see how a single *toque*, or portion thereof, can be associated with and call more than one *orisha*.

A. Excerpt from Changó (*toque* "Meta-meta")

B. Excerpt from Yemayá (*toque* "Taniboya")

Figure 12: Similar passages in *toques* for Changó and Yemayá

"Tuí-tuí:" A Toque for Changó or Oyá, or Both?

The *toque* known as "Tuí-tuí" may be associated with either Changó or Oyá. According to the Havana master, Angel Bolaños, drummers in Matanzas play "Tuí-tuí" for Oyá, while those in Havana use it to honor Changó. Many Havana drummers contradict Bolaños, however, by regularly inserting "Tuí-tuí" as an alternative for Oyá in the *oro igbodú*. And yet others comfortably assert that the *toque* is "owned" by both *orisha*.

During our interview, I challenged Bolaños regarding why so many Havana drummers play "Tuí-tuí" for Oyá. Specifically, I mentioned to him that I often hear the song "Ayiloda Oyá okuo" accompanied by "Tuí-tuí." He assured me that this practice was incorrect and that this song should be accompanied with the *toque*, "Oyá bi ku:"

> Since "Tuí-tuí" has more swing than "Oyá bi ku," the young players like to play it; they use it more. So, many people are forgetting how it was originally played and are playing "Tuí-tuí" instead. "Tuí-tuí" is a *toque* that you can develop; it has a lot of changes. The changes are not related to the songs for Oyá. So when you change to different sections of the *toque*, you have to stop the song. This isn't good, not being related.

Lazaro Pedroso, another Havana master who also dislikes this practice, credits his friend, Lazaro Ros, with the innovation:

> And I'll say, my compadre Lazaro (Ros) for the last twenty years, he made an invento with Tui-Tui for Oya with a specific song from El Mago, 'Ayiloda Oya okuo'. I never accepted it . . . Where do I accept it? In a folkloric work! Now, when I'm singing at a tambor where I'm contracted to sing, I don't accept any kind of "invento" (Pedroso 2001, communication)

Though Pedroso finds the "invento" musically compelling, just as Bolaños admits that "Tuí-tuí" had more "swing" than "Oyá bi ku," both feel that drummers should adhere/return to a more conservative style during a *toque de santo*.

Many other drummers share a different view of "Tuí-tuí." Unlike Bolaños and Pedroso, these drummers believe that Changó and Oyá share "Tuí-tuí," an assertion that can be justified by a well-known *patakín* that describes Changó sending "Oyá to the kingdom of Bariba to find a magical preparation that, placed under his tongue, would allow him to spit thunderstones." Of course, Oyá desired this same ability and hid a bit of the magic for herself (Gleason 1992; Marks 2001: 20). To thank Oyá for bringing the magical preparation, Changó presented her with "Tuí-tuí." Originally a

toque for Changó, it can now be used to honor both *orisha*. Further, since both Oyá and Changó have the power to spit thunderbolts, their *toque* imitates thunder (Font 2002: communication), in much the same way that Ochún sounds like a river and Yemayá describes many aspects of the ocean.

Summary

On a superficial inspection, the *toques* discussed in this section (Ochún, Yemayá, Changó, and "Tuí-tuí") are uniquely identifiable to a single *orisha*. But the ability of music to become a natural metaphor (i.e. iconic) for the stories and attributes of the *orisha*, allows the *toques* to embody multiple, and often times debatable meanings. The connections among the *orisha* that are apparent on a mythological and physical level are equally manifest in the sounds of the *batá* drums.

Toques for Many Songs and Orisha

Further along the fluid continuum of dedicated to generic *toques*, one encounters *toques* that accompany many songs. These may be associated with as few as three *orisha* or extended across the entire pantheon. Many describe these *toques* as generic,[34] a term I use reluctantly because it obscures many of the embedded associations. To display the range of *toques* that exist within this portion of the continuum, I focus on three very different examples. The first, "Imbaloke," comes from the *oro igbodú* where it honors the *orisha* Obaloke. The second is an un-named *toque especial* that is closely identified with the *oro eyá aranla* and the *orisha* Ochosi.

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[34] Bolaños uses the term "conventional."

The third, "Arará," shares company with a class of *toques* that imitate the drums of other Afro-Cuban ensembles, and accompanies many songs of the most popular *orishas*. Each of these *toques* displays a wide range of generic characteristics while retaining some latent associations.

"Imbaloke"

The meaning of "Imbaloke" changes with context. During the *oro igbodú*, it unequivocally praises the male *orisha* Obaloke, king of the mountains. When it appears in the *oro eyá aranla* or the *wemilere* (i.e. the third phase of the ceremony also referred to as a fiesta), it becomes a generic *toque* and is used to accompany the songs of several *orishas*, especially those of the river goddess Ochún. Pancho Quinto also uses "Imbaloke" to accompany a song for Ogún, known as "Ogúnde arere." [35] In contrast, Ernesto Guerra, a Cuban residing in Miami, displays his disapproval of this practice, suggesting that the virile warrior Ogún should not be accompanied by a *toque* that is so closely associated with female *orishas* (Bloom 2003: communication). In his view, from the *oro igbodú* to the *wemilere*, the *toque* "Imbaloke" shifts from male to female. In Pancho Quinto's view, it simply becomes generic. Disagreements over such distinctions are commonplace among drummers, and are the discourse of aesthetics.

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[35] Pancho Quinto accompanies "Ogúnde arere" with four different *toques*: Ogún, "Nyongo", "Eggüado" ("Rumba Obatalá," "Wardo") and "Imbaloke." By contrast Altmann (1998: 38) only lists two *toques*: The *toque* for Ogún and "Wardo."

As indicated earlier, many *toques* have no Lucumí name. To accommodate this, drummers use various descriptive titles that simultaneously identify the *toque* and reveal layers of meaning associated with divergent views. One such *toque* is known alternatively as "Rumba Ochosi" or "Los guerreros." Thomas Altmann introduced the term "Rumba Ochosi" in his 1998 work, *Cantos Lucumí*. Having never heard the term, I communicated with the author in July 2002, and asked him to share his thought process and sources:

> I had asked John Santos one day whether he knew any "official" name for this *toque*, and he said it was called "Toque Ochosi," which I would tend to associate with "Agueré" [the *oro igbodú toque* that praises Ochosi]. So I baptized it "Rumba Ochosi" and everybody knew which *toque* I meant.

By contrast, David Font knows this *toque* as "Los guerreros," recognition of the fact that it accompanies the songs of only three *orisha* - Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochosi - known collectively as "the warriors." When I shared this term with Angel Bolaños he took exception and told me:

> The warriors consist of four (Eleguá, Osun, Ogún, and Ochosi) and this *toque* doesn't have anything to do with the warriors. For example, "Latopa" is a *toque* for Eleguá. Before, it wasn't called "Latopa," but just a *toque* for the warriors. "Los guerreros [The warriors]" refers to the saints [*orisha*], not to the *toques*.

These varying views are, in part, the result of having nameless *toques*. But they also indicate the facility with which *batá toques* can acquire and cast off meaning. Giving something a title is as much a description of the item as it is a reflection of the person who does the naming. Altmann makes this explicit when he says, "the fact that this *toque* is so essential for the songs that are sung in the *eyá aranla* to [Ochosi],

justifies the assumption of a corresponding case of 'property.'" [36] Altmann identifies this *toque* first with Ochosi and second with other *orisha* whose songs it may accompany. For Font, it's a *toque* for three *orisha*, the warriors. And for Bolaños, it is a generic, nameless *toque* that accompanies some songs, but not others, and has no inherent meaning.

Imitating the Arará, Iyesá and Eggüado Rhythms

When African slaves were brought to Cuba, colonial authorities encouraged the establishment of *cabildos* (Sp. chapters), which were organized by ethnicity and contributed to the retention of African cultural practices. By the mid-nineteenth century, the largest single ethnic group in Cuba was the Lucumí. With a long tradition of dominance and hegemony in Africa, the Lucumí not only successfully recreated many of their own traditions, but also continue to co-opt the songs, rhythms and practices of many other closely related ethnic groups within their own rituals.[37] This is particularly evident with respect to the Arará, the Iyesá, and slightly less so with the

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[36] I suspect Altmann does not sing the song for Ogún, "Ogún arere kwa lode," during the *oro eyá aranla*, as my teacher Pedrito does. If he did, the sense of "property" that he associates with Ochosi may not be so strong.

[37] Miguel Ramos provides an extensive treatment of Lucumí, also known as Oyo, hegemonic practices in both Africa and Cuba in *The Empire Beats On: Oyo, Batá Drums and Hegemony in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (2000). Additionally Kevin Delgado cites Lázaro Pedroso as describing the *batá* as the "imperialists of music," referring to the *batá*'s ability to "replicate and absorb any Afro-Cuban drum ensemble" (2001: 415-6).

Eggüado.[38] The ability to incorporate the rhythms of other types of ensembles is strongly aided by the *batá*'s imitative abilities.

Arará is a Cuban designation for the descendants of the Ewe-Fon who lived in the old kingdom of Dahomey, which occupied current-day Benin. The Arará have a common history with the Lucumí. As bordering empires, the two people share many religious beliefs and recognize many of the same *orisha* (known as *vodun* among the Arará). Although the Arará successfully maintain their religious autonomy in isolated areas of Cuba, specifically in Matanzas province, many have assimilated with the Lucumí, and syncretized their beliefs and practices within the Lucumí religion. To accommodate the Arará songs, *batá* drummers use two *toques* that imitate the Arará drums: "Arará" and the *toque* for Yewá. The first is applied only to Arará songs, while the second also serves to praise the *orisha* Yewá during the *oro igbodú*.

The biggest musical contribution the Arará bring to Santería is a vast supply of songs for the *orisha* Babalú Ayé (also known as Asoyí). This contribution is made clear in the title of Lazaro Ros' recording *Asoyí: Cantos Arará* (1994), which includes songs to Asoyí, Afrekete (also known as Yemayá), Jerbioso (also known as Changó) and others. The title of Ros' recording suggests that Asoyí is nearly synonymous with the Arará, minimally suggesting latent associations between "Arará*,*" the *toque* for Yewá, and the *orisha* Babalú Ayé.

The Iyesá, another ethnic group in Cuba, also maintain their unique traditions in Matanzas province while simultaneously assimilating with the Lucumí. The group

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[38] Katherine Hagedorn cites Carlos Aldama's view of this cooptation with respect to the *iyesá* and arará (2001: 124).

is most strongly identified with Ogún and Ochún, whose names are used to identify the two primary *toques* played with the *iyesá* drums.[39] These two generic *toques* provide the accompaniment for all Iyesá songs and are used for many *orisha*. Unlike the *batá,* the *iyesá* drum repertoire is extremely limited.

Of all the *orisha* worshiped by the Iyesá, Ochún is, by far, blessed with the most songs. When the Iyesá tradition syncretized with the Lucumí, the *batá* drummers appropriated only Ochún's *toque* (now known simply as "Iyesá"), which accompanies the songs of Ochún, as well as those of other *orisha* that use her 4/4-meter. In this way, the generic *toque* "Iyesá," which accompanies the songs of many *orisha*, maintains strong associations with Ochún. This association is further strengthened by the fact that when Ochún possesses an initiate, she typically dances to the *toque* "Iyesá."

While the origins and associations of *toques* "Arará" and "Iyesá" are widely accepted, the *toque* that some drummers associate with the ethnic group Eggüado is subject to some debate. This *toque* appears in the *oro igbodú* as the final section of the *toque* for Osain, but is used in other parts of the ceremony as a generic *toque*. It is known alternately as "Eggüado" and "Rumba Obatalá."[40] Miguel Ramos explains that "in Cuba, [the Eggüado] were often associated with Obatalá and other related *orishas*"

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[39] Most of the thoughts in this paragraph are derived from Delgado (2002). His dissertation is an extensive study of a Matanzas Iyesá cabildo and to date is the most comprehensive source of information on this subject. Particularly germane to the current study is a section (pp. 413-428) devoted to the influence of Iyesá music on the Lucumí *batá* tradition.

[40] Altmann (1998) uses "Wardo." The English pronunciation of "Wardo" is very similar to the Lucumí pronunciation of Eggüado.

(2000: 266). In response to drummers who believe this *toque* has a relationship with

Obatalá, Angel Bolaños told me:

> That *toque* doesn't have a name. It's conventional. A lot of people say it's for
> Obatalá. But it's conventional. … You can sing a whole lot of songs with this
> *toque*. People want to label it "Obatalá," but that's just to identify it. It doesn't
> mean that it's just for Obatalá. This *toque* is used most of all for Oyá, also for
> Yemayá, for many saints [*orisha*]. But some want to say that it's specifically
> for Obatalá.

Summary

Though the *toques* in this category are generally perceived as generic, they

each possess the capability to be laden with meanings and associations that change in

various contexts. This is evident in *toques* such as "Imbaloke" and "Eggüado," which

appear in the *oro igbodú* and are closely associated with the *orishas* Obaloke and

Osain, respectively. In the *wemilere* both *toques* become generic, the former being

connected with female *orishas* while the later is identified by the *orisha* Obatalá.

These associations are the source of debate and individual interpretation, and are not

universally recognized. In the case of "Rumba Ochosi," and other unnamed *toques*, it

appears that countless names can derive from the unique perspective and approach of

each drummer. Finally, the *toques* that *batá* drummers borrow from related ethnic

groups each come with an associated *orisha*. Just as every *batá* performance is in

some small way a salute to Changó - realized when the drummers rise from their

chairs immediately before playing his *toque* in the *oro igbodú* – the *toque* "Arará"

invokes Babalú Ayé and the *toque* "Iyesá" honors Ochún.

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Generic Toques – "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon"

At the end of the continuum lie two *toques,* "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon," that fall into a category of their own and are, for most drummers, relatively free of specific associations. Together, these two *toques* can accompany nearly any song in the repertoire, including songs that are otherwise identified with a *toque especial*. This leads to frequent use, which enables drummers to become very familiar with the *toques* and, in turn, encourages them to freely improvise over the rhythms.[41]

The origin of these *toques* is uncertain, though I suspect that they have similar histories to the *toques* "Iyesá," "Arará," and "Eggüado." The *Diccionario de la Lengua Conga Residual* (Fabelo 1998: 73) translates *nyongo* as *campo* (Sp. countryside), suggesting that "Nyongo" was invented to accommodate Congolese migration from countryside plantations to the urban centers of Havana and Matanzas. It is a theory that complements David Font's rural imagery when he shares his view, during an interview, that the dance for "Nyongo" imitates "walking over tilled earth," an image he believes is reflected in the sounds of the *toque*. One might even go so far as to claim that "Nyongo" has associations with the *orisha* Ogún, who with his iron implements is identified as the patron of rural life. But this association, if it is accurate, appears to play little, if any, role in modern performance practice.

Chris "El Flaco" Walker, a *batá* drummer in the San Francisco Bay area, during a communication in June 2003, expressed similar thoughts about "Nyongo," with regards to both its origin, and the fact that this origin has been all but forgotten and of little importance in performance today:

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[41] The nature of these improvisations is analyzed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Nyongo is one of the most adaptable toques, and has therefore been used to include content from Bembé or Makawa repertoires, which are much more vast than those of batá. I derive this view primarily from my 14 years of study with Regino Jimenez, though it recurs throughout my experience as a tambolero [drummer], particularly wherever my attention is drawn to songs whose origin is Makawa or Bembé. Felipe Alfonso and Amelia Pedroso also routinely called attention to this. Nowadays, few living players are sophisticated enough to draw the distinction between Batá and Bembé repertoires, so it is usually an invisible distinction. Others may have the knowledge, but remain silent on the topic. I believe this is because their prestige is enhanced by the perception that they have an extensive repertoire, when in truth they are borrowing from other genres. In my acquaintance, only the elders such as Felipe Alfonso, Carlos Aldama, and Regino Jimenez have been best able to identify songs from Makawa or Bembé.

The origin of "Chachalekefon" is similarly shrouded in uncertainty. Some think it has similar roots to "Nyongo" and derives from *bembé*, while others note the convincing similarities in the *iyá* and *itótele* parts of *toque* for Agayú. Often I have heard drummers suggest that "Chachalekefon" is associated with Changó. When I mentioned this to Pancho Quinto in January 2002 he swiftly and emphatically corrected me and said "*Chakalekefon no es un salud*!" ["Chakalekefon" is not a salute!]. For the time, I'll give my teacher the last word on the subject.

Conclusions

The wide variety of *toques* that exist in this vast repertoire can be partially attributed to the syncretic nature of the Lucumí religion. As *batá* drummers recreated their tradition in Cuba, beginning in the early nineteenth century, they faced the seemingly impossible task of joining many disparate, but related ethnic groups, within a single practice. Just as the Iyesá, Arará, and Eggüado brought their songs to Lucumí venues, so did a myriad of other ethnic and regional groups. As the *batá* in Africa

were only associated with ceremonies for the *orisha* Changó and the Egungun (Lu.

ancestors), the *batá* in Cuba had to imitate and invent rhythms to accompany the other

songs that they encountered. From my limited experience with Yoruba *batá*, (i.e.

recordings and books), I suspect that a vast majority of the rhythms employed in

Africa rely upon linguistic associations. However, *batá* drumming in Cuba is defined

by the syncretic processes that resulted in the adoption of musical metaphors and

encouraged the development of generic *toques*, which are borrowed from other

musical genres.[42]

In this overview, I examine two views of the *batá* repertoire. The first divides

all *toques* into two categories, those that typically appear in the *oro igbodú* and all the

remaining *toques*. This dichotomy reflects, for the tradition-bearers, both the ritual

significance of the *oro igbodú* and the pedagogical justification behind learning these

toques first. For researcher/academics, it reflects both the accessibility of the *oro

igbodú* and the musical appeal of a thirty to sixty minute drumming experience that

continually unfolds and possesses minimal repetition. Its weakness lies in its

implication that the *oro igbodú* is a static event, which unfolds, more or less, in the

same manner throughout Cuba and its diaspora. The extensive transcriptions of Ortiz,

Amira and Cornelius, Summers, and Davalos and Coburg strengthen this impression.

In truth, the *oro igbodú* is an ever-changing dynamic event. *Toques* are regularly

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[42] While researching and writing this dissertation I corresponded with Amanda
Vincent, a doctoral student in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the
University of London, who researching both Cuban and Nigerian styles of *batá*. I
anxiously await the publication of her doctoral dissertation *Romance and
Reclamation: The Nigerian Bata and its Evolution in Cuba and Beyond* (Proposed
Title), which I expect will shed light on the distinctions and similarities between the
two traditions.

added and subtracted depending upon context, ensemble capabilities and the wishes of the *iyá* player.

The inability of the *oro igbodú*/*toque especial* dichotomy to represent the fluidity of this repertoire leads me to consider a second approach that views the repertoire as a continuum. At one end, *toques* are generally dedicated to an individual *orisha*. Whether or not the drummers or practitioners understand the words, speech is viewed as a concrete way of designating an association between *orisha* and *toque*. Slightly more flexible are the imitative capabilities of the *batá* that bridge the gap between myth and the natural world. By reflecting *patakín,* musical metaphors are used to invoke the personalities, relationships and domains of the *orisha*. Insofar as the *patakín* are subject to individual interpretation, so are the *toques*.

Further along the continuum exist *toques* that are generally described as generic. To varying degrees, these *toques* accompany the songs of many *orisha*. Most have a latent association with one or more *orisha*, but this is highly debated, and far from universally recognized. The final category consists of two *toques*, "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon," which are recognized not simply for their absence of associations but for the sheer number of songs they accompany and their extensive usage.

The initial observation that led me to question the dichotomy established in the first view of the repertoire, was that in addition to the common exceptions highlighted in the body of this chapter, I was regularly hearing *toques* during the *oro igbodú* for which neither the literature nor my lessons could account. The *oro igbodú* serves to praise the entire pantheon by performing specific *toques* that are associated with and honor twenty-two *orisha*. Generally, each *orisha* is given equal recognition, except the

honored one who is moved towards the end of the order and often showered with additional *toques.* Any *toque* that the *iyá* player associates with an individual *orisha* can be performed during the *oro igbodú.* As seen in my examination, this means that every *toque* can potentially be used, depending again on the viewpoint of the drummers.

The most conservative of drummers, among whom I include Angel Bolaños, restrict themselves to the *toques* that are traditionally associated with the *oro igbodú.* Many slightly less conservative drummers will easily select *toques* from among the first two steps in the continuum, especially if they are among the *toques* that shower the honored *orisha* near the end of the order. For progressive drummers, it appears there are no bounds. Finally, when I surveyed an Internet discussion group, www.batadrums.com, which receives contributions from hundreds of *batá* drummers of all skill levels, I observed a lack of consensus regarding each of these possibilities.

My decision to present the repertoire as an ever-changing fluid continuum evolved from a desire to decode the decision-making process and to understand why a particular *toque* or sequence of *toques* is the most appropriate at any given moment, whether in the *oro igbodú, oro eyá aranla, wemilere* or *cierre.* This view provides the tools for finding imbedded meanings within *toques* that are open to individual interpretation and debate. This debate, whether in the verbal form or, more likely, encoded in the gestures of the drummers, dancers, singers and *orisha*, amounts to an aesthetic discourse.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING BATÁ EXPERIENTIALLY

While in many music traditions the act of performing and the act of teaching

are distinct events, in *batá* drumming they, are identical. The mechanisms that permit

batá drummers to play alongside one another for upwards of 5 hours, and provide a

successful drumming for the *orishas* (Lu. deities in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) and

the community, without rehearsal, are the same mechanisms that allow *iyá* (Lu. lead

drum) players to transmit knowledge to inexperienced players on the *itótele* (Lu.

second drum) and the *okónkolo* (Lu. smallest and simplest drum). Though it is

common in the present-day to engage in lessons and conduct rehearsals, traditional

batá education typically occurs during ceremonial performances. Therefore, the

tradition demands pedagogical tools that allow developing players to learn *in situ.*

Toques de santo (Sp. drumming ceremonies for the *orisha*) are unpredictable, dynamic

events. There are many instances when members of the ensemble may be in a position

where they are expected to perform uncommon or difficult toques that are beyond

their abilities. For example, this sometimes happens after an *orisha* "mounts" one of

his/her children; without regard to the abilities of the ensemble, the *orisha* can

request/demand unfamiliar and arcane *toques* (Sp. drumming pieces). This also occurs

when *apónes* (Lu. vocal soloists) engage in song duels; their actions stretch the

ensembles' abilities when they sing increasingly esoteric songs that are accompanied by uncommon *toques* (Friedman 1982). Finally, inexperienced players may be asked to provide physical relief for tired drummers; they often sit in the *okónkolo* and *itótele* chair before having completely mastered the repertoire. In each of these instances, inexperienced players need guidance from the *iyá* to play correctly.

In this chapter, I address several aspects of the Cuban *batá* pedagogy, focusing primarily on the role of non-lexical verbal communication, the spatial relationships among the performers and, the micro- and macrostructures of the musical system. I begin by exploring the relationship between learning and mythology, expanding upon the findings of the previous chapter that link mythology, music, dance, and nature. This approach further reveals the perceived naturalness (i.e. iconicity) in the metaphors between various realms, and argues a strong connection between pedagogy and aesthetics (Becker and Becker 1981). First, it examines the relationship between the *okónkolo* and the *iyá*, naturally drawing on associations between the *okónkolo* and mythology of the *orisha* Eleguá. It then examines the macrostructure of the musical system, comparing the order in which *toques* are invariably played during the *oro igbodú* (Lu. initial phase of a *toque de santo*) to the mythological stories of the warriors - Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi. Many of the skills developed on the *okónkolo* are vital to learning the *itótele*. After these are examined, the role of spatial relationships and the microstructure of the musical system are discussed simultaneously, to illustrate the communication between the *iyá* and the *itótele*.

The Okónkolo: Eleguá's Drum

The smallest of the three drums, the *okónkolo* is identified with the *orisha* Eleguá who, like a child, is small and mischievous (Ramos 2000: 130). Usually assigned the simplest rhythms in the ensemble, the most common ostinato played by the *okónkolo* is a motive that *batá* players describe as "ki-la" (or "ki-ha"). The syllables "ki" and "la," respectively, relate to the two sounds the *okónkolo* makes: a resonant open-tone on the *enú* and a dry, higher-pitched tone on the *chachá* (Figure 13).[43] In this motive (Figure 14), the *chachá* is struck on the first and fourth eighth notes, while the *enú* anticipates these hits on the third and sixth, resulting in a "swing" that emphasizes the strong beats of the measure. In the *oro igbodú*, twelve of the twenty-two *toques* contain this pattern. Of the remaining ten *toques*, three additional ones are characterized by sharp accented sounds ("la") on the downbeat.[44] Many other rhythmic possibilities exist for the *okónkolo* with some being quite complicated. Nonetheless, simple *okónkolo* patterns typically provide the interlocking and polyphonic parts of the ensemble with a firm foundation.
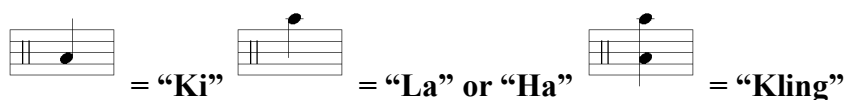
Figure 13: Non-lexical vocables imitating sounds on the *okónkolo*

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[43] New York *babalawo* (Lu. high priest, devotee to the *orisha* Orunmila) John Mason believes that the name *okónkolo* "suggests the 'standard' konkolò rhythm pattern which is learned by memorizing the nonsense syllables Kón-Kó-Ló." (Mason 1992: 10).

[44] For excellent notation of the *oro igbodú* refer to Amira and Cornelius (1992). The twelve *toques* which contain the "ki-la" figure described above include: Eleguá, Babalú Ayé, Osun, Obatalá, Dadá, Ogué, Orishaoko, Ibeyi, Yewá, Oyá, Yemayá and Oba. The three characterized by downbeat accents include: Ogún, Obaloke and Inle.

La - - Ki-La - - Ki - La - - Ki -La - - Ki

Figure 14: Most common *okónkolo* pattern

The fundamental item that distinguishes *okónkolo* education from either the *itótele* or *iyá* is the use of these syllables (vocables), including "ki" and "la" as described above, as well as the syllable "kling" that represents the sound of both heads being struck simultaneously.[45] This tool allows the *iyá* player to sing *okónkolo* parts (Figure 15), and transmit important musical information without interrupting the performance. In situations where this pedagogical tool is unsuccessful, and the *okónkolo* still fails to play his pattern correctly, the *iyá* player has a second option of momentarily abandoning his part, and mimicking the *okónkolo* until the novice acquires it. Though this is less appealing than singing, it is a common procedure and does little to disrupt the overall flow of the performance.

La - - Ki-La - - - - - La-Ki - - Kling

La - - Ki-La - - Ki - La - - Ki -La - - Ki

Kling - - - La-Ki - - - -Kling - - - -La-Ki - - - - -La - - Ki-La-Ki - - - -La - - -Ki -La - - - - -

Figure 15: Typical *okónkolo* patterns matched with non-lexical vocables
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #2)

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[45] Choice of syllables used to signify the various sounds on the *okónkolo* are not standardized. Felipe García Villamil uses "kim" and "pá" to represent what I have designated as "ki" and "la," respectively (Vélez 2000: 41). Pedro "Jesús El Asmático" Orta uses "krin" instead of "kling" (Crespo 1997: 99). Orta also uses the syllables "kron" and "ko." Though I find Crespo's description of these syllables is unclear, I am inclined to interpret them as "kling" and "ki," respectively.

Though the *orisha* Eleguá is usually associated with the *okónkolo*, observations

and statements concerning the relationship between Eleguá and music are rarely

expressed in literature or among *batá* players. However, statements regarding the

orisha's general personality, abilities, and place among the pantheon of *orishas*

abound. Some, including John Mason's description of Eleguá, are quite revealing

about music:

> "Eshu [Eleguá] is the meeting point, the crossroads that put things together, and pull together things that are apart in opposition and do not agree. He causes things and men to work together in harmony or to suffer the consequence. He causes bees and men to swarm creating highly structured and complex social organizations. He is the cement that holds society together (Mason 1992: 63).

Eleguá has a role in guiding men to "[work] together in harmony," both in social

environments and in musical contexts. His drum is the "cement that holds" the

ensemble together, and provides the foundation for a highly syncopated, polyrhythmic

genre of music; realized by simple ostinato rhythms and a tendency to emphasize the

downbeats. The image of Eleguá pulling "together things that are apart in opposition"

evokes the polyrhythmic nature of this music. John Miller Chernoff identifies

polyrhythm as an essential component in the African musical aesthetic and proposes a

parallel analogy between social organization and musical organization, claiming that,

"the many ways one can change a rhythm by cutting it with different rhythms is

parallel to the many ways one can interpret a situation or a conversation" (Chernoff

1979: 158).

Beginning with the Warriors: Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi

Mastery of the *batá* depends upon the acquisition and execution of several skills. Foremost, a *batá* drummer must become proficient with the rhythms of each of the three drums and understand their relationship and alignment with one another. Particularly, he must know all the "calls" of the *iyá* and be able to react by executing entrances and changes in the *toques* with ease and grace. Second, each drum demands unique technical abilities to correctly produce the proper sound. The drummer must be able to execute an *enú* open tone, *enú* muffled tone and *chachá* slap, which are different for each drum. Finally, with the exceptions of the *oro igbodú* and the *cierre* (Sp. the final phase of a *toque de santo*), the *batá* accompany song and dance. One or more specific *toques* may accompany each of the hundreds of songs in the Lucumí musical tradition. These songs are chosen by the *apón*, and the drummers are expected to follow in suit. Though it is often said that the dancers follow the *apón* and drummers, there are times (for example, when an *orisha* has "mounted" one of his/her devotees) when the drummers, instead, react to the dancers steps. Drummers, therefore, must have detailed knowledge of both these performance modes (i.e. song and dance). Because of the vast array of skills required to play *batá*, most novices begin their apprenticeship by playing the *oro igbodú* (Vélez 2000: 42). Without the concerns of song or dance, the student can focus on learning the rhythms and techniques for each of the drums.

The *oro igbodú* consists of *toques* that salute twenty-two *orisha*. Though ensembles vary the order of salutes depending upon personal style and ritual occasion, there is complete agreement with respect to the first three *toques* performed in every

toque de santo: Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi. These three *orisha* are invoked for their

ability to open and clear paths. In this vein, they are praised at the beginning of the *oro*

igbodú and the *oro eyá aranla* (Lu. second phase of the *toque de santo*) in recognition

of their ability to open the proceedings, facilitate communication with the *orisha,*

enable the *orisha* to descend from the heavens and possess their *omo orisha* (Lu.

children of the *orisha*), and ensure general blessings upon the event.

Designated as "the warriors," Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochosi fight on the behalf of

believers and protect them from harm.[46] A rite known as "receiving the warriors" is

considered to be the "first step in opening [a believer's] path of growth in *santo*, in

saintliness, in the way of the orisha." It is the first step on the long path to "making

santo" (Murphy 1993: 70). The *orisha* are conceived as human-like, with

personalities, preferences, aversions, attributes and weaknesses. They desire particular

kinds of food and are similarly prohibited from partaking of others. They enjoy

dancing, drinking and other worldly pleasures. These qualities provide believers with

the means to access, understand and relate to the divine beings. In addition, each deity

is associated and has domain over one or more aspects of the physical world (e.g.

ocean, rivers, mountains, storms, agriculture), as well as elements of human nature

(e.g. beauty, love, greed, aggression, illness, birth, death). Though distinct from one

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[46] While some sources refer to only three warriors (Murphy 1993: 70), others include a
fourth, Osun. All sources, verbal and written, are in agreement that you "receive"
Osun at the same time you receive Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi. But it is unclear, from
the literature whether Osun is a warrior, or even an *orisha*. Ramos, for example,
describes Osun as a "staff related to the *Olorisha*'s head and stability, sometimes
believed to be an *orisha*" (2000: 273). Musically, the *toque* for Osun is separated from
the other three. Therefore, Osun is omitted from this analysis.

another, the warriors' personalities and attributes contain overlapping elements that

demonstrate the importance of working together as a team:

> Eleguá is the one who opens and shuts all doors and designates the crossroad.
> He is always praised first and "fed' first. Without his approval, nothing is
> accomplished either on earth or among the *orisha*. If insulted or ignored he
> will use trickery to halt your progress.

> Ogún is the god of iron and war. Because of the facility with which he
> manages the machete, Ogún is able to cut through the densest of forests,
> thereby considered a path "maker" or "opener."

> Ochosi is the god of the hunt. He is endowed with the ability to hunt any
> animal (or foe), regardless of distance. Yet he depends upon his brother Ogún
> to clear the path through the bushes in order to reach his prey. [47]

In the realm of pedagogy, the warriors perform a dual role: first, opening the paths for

receiving knowledge of *batá* performance and, second, equipping the novice with the

arsenal of performance skills needed to successfully complete their studies. These

statements are supported by musical analysis.

Just as Eleguá guards the threshold of the home, the crossroad between

personal and public space, he also guards knowledge of the *batá*. His *toque* is tricky

and confuses even skilled musicians, causing many novices to doubt their commitment

and turn back from the challenge. The musical difficulties lie in the opening

statements of the *iyá* and the subsequent entrance of the *okónkolo*. Once the players

enter correctly, the parts become increasingly manageable; but it is this initial

entrance, the threshold, which offers the greatest difficulties for many players.

To illustrate the tricky nature of Eleguá's *toque*, this analysis begins by illuminating

the relative directness and simplicity of the entrances for Ochosi and Ogún and

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[47] Though all of this information about the *orishas* is common knowledge among *batá*
drummers my choice of wording was influenced by Ramos (1996: 62).

contrasting these findings with the entrance for Eleguá. The call for Ochosi consists of a one-measure pattern, illustrated in Figure 16. In the second measure, the *okónkolo enú* rhythmically imitates the *iyá enú* while the *chachá* provides a steady backbeat on beats 2 and 4. The part is further simplified when the *iyá* repeats its opening statement providing a homophonic texture between the *iyá* and *okónkolo*. If the *okónkolo* is initially unsure of his relationship to the call, it is acceptable to wait until the second or third measure and enter once the *iyá* and *itótele* have firmly established the meter and tempo.

Figure 16: *Iyá* call and entrance (*iyá* and *okónkolo* only) for *toque* Ochosi
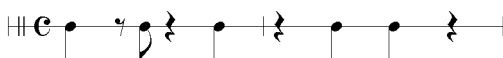(AUDIO EXAMPLE #3)

The call for Ogún, illustrated in Figure 17, consists of four hits on the *chachá* of the *iyá*. Coupled with the *itótele*'s response in the second measure, these hits outline clave, a rhythm and concept that underpin most Afro-Cuban music.[48] Note the similarities between mm. 1-2 in Figure 17 and the "son clave" in Figure 18. Quoting the essence of this rhythmic cliché, the *iyá*'s gesture is immediately familiar to Cuban ears and firmly establishes the meter. The *okónkolo* responds by imitating the *iyá* on the *enú* while it marks beats 1 and 3 on the small *chachá* head. If an *okónkolo* player enters incorrectly during a lesson or an informal performance setting, the *iyá* might perform the call again and help the *okónkolo* player by saying, "Listen to the *iyá*, it

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[48] The nature of clave is discussed extensively in Chapter Seven.

gives you the *okónkolo*." The function of a call is two-fold. First, it identifies the *toque* that is about to be played; each *toque* in the *oro igbodú* is identified by a unique call.[49] Second, it establishes the meter and tempo.

**Figure 17: *Iyá* call and entrance for *toque* Ogún**
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #4)

Figure 18: Son clave
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #5)

By comparison, the call for the Eleguá is less clear (Figure 19). Figure 20 includes two likely ways to interpret the un-metered Figure 19. The first (A) presumes that the initial and repeated *chachá* hits mark the beat. Confirmed by the previous analyses of Ochosi and Ogún, simple calls begin on the downbeat of a measure. The second figure (B) phases the pattern. The *chachá* hits are perceived as pickup notes to the bass tones of the *enú*, which create a duple feel. This resembles a second category of calls, like the ones illustrated in Figure 21, where calls begins on a pick-up note, and again emphasize the strong beats in the measure.

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[49] There is one exception to this statement. The *toques* for Osun and Orisha Oko begin identically. It is only when the *iyá* signals the second section that the *toque* is uniquely identified. Further, the first section of the *toque* for Oba is nearly identical to Osun and Orisha Oko. Together, the opening portion of these three *toques* is known as "Kan-kan."

Figure 19: *Iyá* **call for** *toque* **Eleguá (un-metered)**
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #6)

A

B
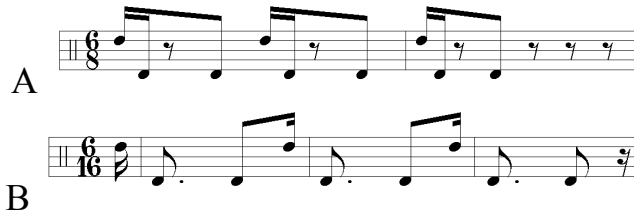
Figure 20: *Iyá* **calls for** *toque* **Eleguá (incorrect interpretations)**

Call for Osun *toque*   Call for Osain *toque*
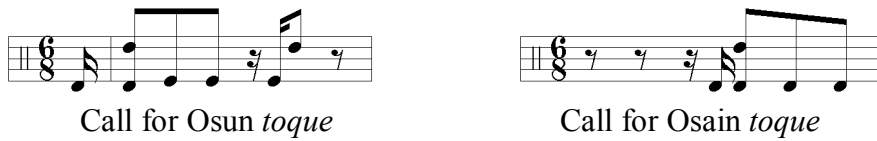
Figure 21: *Iyá* **calls, Osun and Osain** *toques*

Both interpretations of the Eleguá call are common, but incorrect. They result in misplaced entrances by the *okónkolo*. Figures 22a-b, which corresponds to Figures 20a-b, respectively, illustrates this common mistake. In both instances the *okónkolo* inserts the "ki – la" gesture a quarter note early. Compare Figure 22a-b (mm. 3 and 4) with Figure 24 (mm. 3 and 4) to confirm the phased relationship among the three drums.

(AUDIO EXAMPLE #7)

(AUDIO EXAMPLE #8)

Figure 22: *Iyá* **calls and entrances for Eleguá** *toque* **when interpreted incorrectly by the** *okónkolo* **player**

Figure 23 prescribes the correct way to hear the *iyá*'s call, while Figure 24 completes the picture with both the *iyá* call and the correct *okónkolo* entrance. This unconventional call begins on a weak beat and represents the only example of its kind in the *oro igbodú*. The first two hits of the *iyá* land on neither a strong beat, nor are they pickup notes that lead directly into a beat. Rather, they appear to float in middle of the measure.

Figure 23: *Iyá* **call for** *toque* **Eleguá (correctly interpreted)**

Figure 24: *Iyá* call and entrance for Eleguá *toque* when played correctly
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #9)

When the *okónkolo* player successfully learns to play the *toque* for Eleguá, he has crossed a threshold, but the path is not completely clear. He still has to negotiate the rest of the warriors. Though Ogún and Ochosi have easier entrances than Eleguá, their unique difficulties lie elsewhere. The two most obvious distinctions between the *toques* for Ogún and Ochosi are:

1. While the Ogún *toque* molds the *okónkolo* player's sound and challenges his stamina by requiring a single rhythm for the entire *toque*, the Ochosi *toque* works on the *okónkolo* player's ear and ability to perceive subtle shifts in the *iyá* while they navigate seven sectional changes.[50]

2. While the Ogún *toque* is characterized by strong downbeats (beats 1 and 3) with the *okónkolo chachá*, the Ochosi *toque* provides a contrasting feel that places the *chachá* on the backbeat (beats 2 and 4).

Eleguá's relaxed 6/8 "feel," contrasts with the very aggressive 4/4 of Ogún. As the *okónkolo* struggles to stay "on top of the beat," the Ogún *toque* tests and molds the player's technique in sound production. Initially, it is difficult for many *okónkolo* players to achieve the appropriate slap sound on the *chachá*. The nature of the Ogún

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[50] In an attempt to essentialize the nature of each of these *toques*, I present simplified descriptions. In doing so, I leave out some of the many important qualities of each *toque*. One glaring omission is the fact that the *toque* for Eleguá, like the *toque* for Ochosi contains two changes for the *okónkolo*. These, like the ones for Ochosi, are often difficult for a beginner to hear and provide a valuable lesson for the *okónkolo* player about listening to the ensemble for upcoming changes.

toque is such that a sharp, crisp, dry, steady slap is required on the *chachá*. Amira and

Cornelius make the following observation:

> Some New York Santeros relate the rhythmic power of Ogún's duple meter
> angular salute to the sound of the oricha shaping iron at his forge or an army
> marching. These analogies are particularly appropriate for the patterns in
> Section 1 where the staccato slap strokes dominate the overall sound. In almost
> every other salute the slaps between the *okónkolo* and *itótele* are distributed in
> order to fill sonic space and create rhythmic flow … (Amira and Cornelius
> 1992: 38).

In this *toque*, the marching *chachá* not only provides a steady downbeat for the

ensemble, but also is important because of its connection with the nature and

personality of Ogún.

Ochosi, the hunter, depends heavily upon his brother Ogún to clear his path.

Likewise, Ogún relies upon Ochosi for food. The brothers live together in the homes

of all Santeros. They occupy an iron caldron, which contains both the iron implements

of Ogún, and Ochosi's bow and arrow. Their interdependence provides an important

lesson for believers about the necessity to work together to achieve goals. In this

respect, the *toque* for Ochosi complements Ogún and, by focusing upon distinct

performative aspects, equips the *okónkolo* player with a full range of technical and

musical capabilities.

Though drummers must constantly use their ears to maintain cohesion with an

ensemble, the many sectional changes in the Ochosi *toque* (Figure 25) require the

okónkolo to develop a heightened level of awareness and an advanced ability to

discern subtle changes in the *iyá*. [51] Several sections and transitions provide unique challenges for the *okónkolo*. Between sections 4 and 5, while the other two drums alter their parts, the *okónkolo* holds the same rhythm. In this instance he mentally registers the passage of a new section, but cannot physically make any change. The transition from section 5 to section 6 requires a shift from 4/4 to 6/8. Within the new section the *okónkolo* plays a different type of "ki-la" than was experienced in the Eleguá *toque*. Rather than a "ki-la" that leans into the beat, "ki" is on the beat while the "la" is after the beat. In the last section of the transcription, many ensembles gradually increase the tempo providing yet another challenge as the players try to keep the groove from breaking apart.

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[51] Though the transcription indicates only seven sections (i.e. six transitions after the drummers have entered), the drummers perceive seven transitions if the "return to Section 1" is heard as a unique section.

Figure 25: Complete transcription of the *toque* for Ochosi
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #10)

The complete transcription of the Ochosi *toque*, provided in Figure 25, is a

skeletal depiction of an actual performance. A *toque* performed in this manner would

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have little aesthetic appeal. While the *okónkolo* and *itótele* transcriptions are fairly accurate, the *iyá* player is expected to embellish each of the sections with individual style. This tends to obscure the transitions, as the call for each new section is layered over a dynamically changing *iyá*, rather than the static part that is notated. *Batá* drummers have a competitive nature, an attribute associated with the owner of the *batá*, Changó, a virile and combative *orisha*. Rather than make the transitions clear and easy to follow, the *iyá* player may try to "trip up" the *okónkolo* and *itótele* by playing alternate transitional passages that catch members of the ensemble "off guard," or by playing sectional variants that sound similar to transitions, thereby tricking them into moving to the next section. The *iyá* drummer playfully engages the members of his ensemble to increase their sensitivity to the *iyá*, learn subtleties of his vocabulary, and create a more tightly linked ensemble. Here we see that "play" is a crucial element of the performance aesthetic. It is often more important to "play" and develop "communitas" (Herndon 1990; Turner 1967,1969), and musical and social bonds within the ensemble, than to play conservatively without flaws.

The divergent variety of challenges provided by the Ogún and Ochosi *toques* provide a foundation of skills that prepare the novice drummer for future musical challenges. After learning Ogún and Ochosi, the novice *okónkolo* player is ready to tackle any of the rhythms in the *oro igbodú*. By completing the *toques* for the three warriors the player is not only permitted to continue (i.e. in a spiritual sense by providing the requisite salutes for the warrior orishas), but is provided with the tools for success.

Learning the Itótele

The *itótele* performs dual roles in the *batá* ensemble. On one hand, figuratively and literally, it is a timekeeper, much like the *okónkolo*. Generally, the *chachá* performs a repetitive pattern (Figure 26a) that interlocks with the typical "ki-la" *okónkolo* rhythm (Figure 26b), originally presented in Figure 14, creating a resultant ostinato (Figure 26c). However, the interplay among the *enú* heads of the *itótele* and the *iyá* create melodies or conversations. An excerpt from the *toque* for Babalú Ayé (Figure 27a) illustrates a resultant melody. To highlight the melody, the *enú* heads are reduced to a single staff, while the *chachá* heads are omitted (Figure 27b).

Figure 26: The *okónkolo* and *itótele* as timekeepers

(AUDIO EXAMPLE #11)

(AUDIO EXAMPLE #12)

Figure 27: Excerpt from the *toque* for Babalú Ayé

The dual nature of the *itótele* becomes increasingly apparent by comparing the standard *chachá* for the *itótele* with excerpts from three *toques*: Obaloke, Yemayá and Babalú Ayé. When discussing music in 6/8 meter, the following conventions will be adopted. One measure of 6/8 will be understood to contain 6 beats consisting of eighth notes. Beats 1 and 4 are generally felt as the strong beats. Beats 3 and 6 are anticipations or pick-ups to the strong beats, and commonly recognized in jazz music as the notes that produce the "swing" effect. Beats 2 and 5 are the "middle" beats. In each of these *toques*, illustrated in Figure 28, the *chachá* pattern consistently states beats 2 and 5 (i.e. the middle beats), while the *enú* is allowed a range of options. The difficulty in these excerpts lie in the *itótele* player's ability to relax and demonstrate complete coordination between the left and right hands. This is similar to the skill of jazz drummer who, with one hand, plays a "ride" pattern on the cymbal and, with the other, embellishes on the snare drum. But, while the jazz drummer's ride pattern outlines the strong beats and swings much in the way the *okónkolo* does, the *itótele* plays off the beats, filling in the middle beat that both the jazz drummer and the *okónkolo* generally avoid.

A: Standard *chachá* pattern for the *itótele*

B: *Itótele* pattern for first section of *toque* for Obaloke

C: *Itótele* pattern for first section of *toque* for Yemayá

D: *Itótele* pattern for second section of *toque* for Babalú Ayé

Figure 28: *Toques* where the *itótele chachá* consistently states beats 2 and 5 while the *enú* is expected to work independently

Transferring Skills from the Okónkolo to the Itótele

The first skills transmitted to an *itótele* player are developed while learning the *okónkolo*. Mastering the *oro igbodú* ensures the development of specific skills that translate to the *itótele* and eventually to the *iyá*. When a drummer begins to play the *itótele*, he is expected to have already developed a degree of coordination between his left and right hands and an ability to execute this difficult ride pattern on beats 2 and 5. Three *toques* in the *oro igbodú* provide the *okónkolo* with *itótele*-like parts: Ochosi, Osain and Changó. This analysis deals with the former two, excluding Changó to avoid repetitive statements that would present Changó in a similar vein as Ochosi.

It is fitting that this portion of the analysis begins with Ochosi, one of the warriors noted earlier in the chapter for his ability to open paths. In this *toque*, there are numerous changes for the *okónkolo* (Figure 25), including a shift to 6/8. While "ki-la" typically places the *enú* as an anticipation to the strong beat, the last two sections

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of Ochosi phase this pattern and places the *enú* on the strong beats, and the *chachá* on the middle beats. It is the first opportunity for the *okónkolo* to play "like an *itótele*," and it is typically executed easily. This is primarily because the *enú* steadily plays on the beat, leaving no downbeat untouched. And because the entire 4/4 portion of the *toque* places the *chachá* on the backbeat, allowing for a smooth transition from a "backbeat feel" in 4/4 to "middle-beat feel" in 6/8. Though this minimizes the difficulties of executing the pattern, it nonetheless prepares the novice drummer to play the *itótele*.

By contrast, the *toque* for Osain (Figure 29) provides a tremendous challenge for the *okónkolo* player. Twice as fast as Ochosi, the *okónkolo* part in Osain sounds and feels like a fast *itótele* part. Figure 30 provides a rhythmic augmentation of the *okónkolo* part presented in Figure 29. In a manner similar to the three *toques* illustrated in Figure 28b-d, the *okónkolo* in Figure 30 plays the middle-beat ride pattern on the *chachá* while *enú* is struck on alternate beats. In this *toque* we can observe that the *okónkolo* is playing "like an *itótele*."

Much of the challenge (and musical interest) of this *toque* lies in the interlocking nature of the *chachá* heads of the three drums, reduced to a single staff in Figure 31. Notice the lack of downbeats in the second and third measure, and the degree of precision required to successfully perform this polyrhythm. Novice drummers typically make the mistake of phasing the rhythm, misplacing the *chachá*, and emphasizing the downbeat. When a drummer plays this part correctly, easily and relaxed, it is generally regarded as a sign that he has achieved a skill essential to playing the *itótele*.

Figure 29: Excerpt of the *toque* for Osain

Figure 30: *Okónkolo* part from Figure 29, augmented

Figure 31: Reduction of the *chachá* drumheads in Figure 29 to a single staff

(AUDIO EXAMPLE #13)
(First half of track performs Figure 29)
(Second half of track performs Figure 31)

Spatial Relationships

Situated within close proximity to one another, *batá* drummers arrange themselves in a manner that profoundly affects the way they perceive the music and interact with one another. The *iyá* player sits in the middle of the ensemble with the drum positioned laterally in his lap. The larger *enú* head is played by his right hand while his left plays the smaller *chachá*. The *okónkolo* is situated to the right side of the *iyá*, while the *itótele* is located on the opposite side. All the players arrange the drums in their laps in a manner similar to the *iyá*.[52]

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[52] These observations presume that all the drummers are right-handed, or that they play as a right-handed person would. Though I have played with left-handed

The importance of this arrangement becomes apparent when one considers some of the more complex and challenging pieces in the repertoire. Yemayá, the *orisha* associated with the ocean, possesses a *toque* that is often noted for its wide range of expression. It grows from a slow, swaying rhythm into a dynamic *toque*, which draws parallels with the violent and shifting nature of the ocean that can be kicked up into a frenzy when coupled with driving winds. The *iyá* part is characterized with highly syncopated and explosive gestures that are capable of derailing the *okónkolo* and *itótele* if they do not closely listen to one another. The *itótele* part for this *toque* was originally presented in Figure 28c, which identified this as a typical *toque* where the *chachá* plays the middle beats. Likewise, the *okónkolo* plays the standard "ki-la" pattern illustrated in Figure 14.

In 6/8 meter, strong accents occur on beats 1 and 4, while the weak beats include 2, 3, 5 and 6. Recall from Figure 14 and Figure 28c that the *okónkolo chachá* and the *itótele enú* are struck on beats 1 and 4, while the *okónkolo enú* is struck on beats 3 and 6, and the *itótele chachá* is struck on beats 2 and 5. Comparing these observations with Figure 32, which diagrams the spatial relationship between the three drums, we observe that both the *okónkolo* and the *itótele* play strong beats on the drumheads that face toward each other (arrows labeled "A") and, as a result, towards the *iyá* (arrows labeled "B" and "C"). This provides the ensemble with strong sense of the downbeat while directing the offbeat strokes (beats 2, 3, 5, and 6) away from themselves and towards the audience, indicated by the arrows labeled "D." This

drummers, none of my primary teachers are left-handed. Though many of the conclusions developed here apply to left-handed ensemble members, others simply do not. An inquiry in this vein would be a separate undertaking.

phenomenon helps all three drummers hear the strong beats of the *okónkolo* and *itótele*

and helps them maintain their metric sense of time amidst a highly syncopated *toque*.

It allows the *okónkolo* and *itótele* to lock their parts together and provides a solid

foundation over which the *iyá* player can execute complex variations and

improvisations.
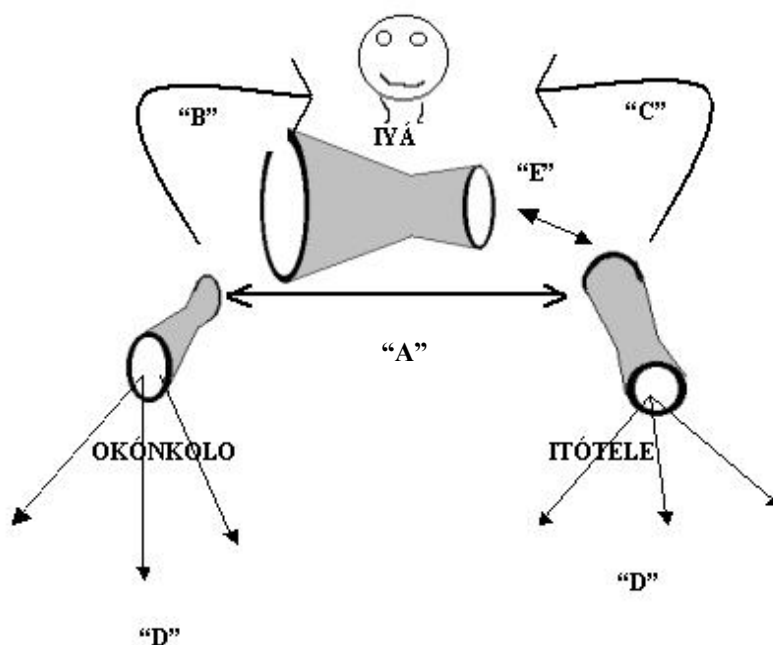
Figure 32: Spatial relationship of the three *batá*

Using this Spatial Relationship to Teach the *Itótele*

The double-headed arrow labeled "E" in Figure 32 represent a special

pedagogical relationship between the *iyá chachá* and the *itótele enú*. In many *toques*

these two drumheads sound simultaneously, especially in the earlier stages of learning.

This micro structural aspect of the music provides a means for the *iyá* to communicate

rhythms to the *itótele* player. Consider, for example, learning the *toque* known as

"Kowo-kowo." The relationship between the melody of the song and the melody

created between the *enú* heads of the *iyá* and the *itótele*, are closely related. Figure 33 includes eight measures of "Kowo-kowo" transcribed from a lesson with Pancho Quinto. The *okónkolo*, which is not included in the transcription, performs a typical "ki-la." To isolate the melody of this *toque*, the two parts are reduced to a single staff with the *chachás* omitted (Figure 34). Note that while mm. 1-5 contain melody, mm. 6-8 are essentially empty. These measures correspond with the chorus and the *apón*, respectively. It is typical within this type of repertoire for the *itótele enú* to be silent during the *apón*'s solos.

Figure 33: *Toque* that accompanies the song "Kowo-kowo" (*okónkolo* omitted)
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #14)

Figure 34: Reduction of the *enú* heads from Figure 33 to a single staff
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #15)

In measures 1-5, an additional observation can be made of the relationship between the *iyá chachá* and the *itótele enú*. They are struck on exactly the same beats. To illustrate this, Figure 35 omits the other drumheads (i.e. the *itótele chachá* and the

iyá enú). Learning this *toque* is a simple matter for an *itótele* player. While the *okónkolo* provides a "ki-la," the *itótele* plays beats 2 and 5 on the *chachá* and tries to match the strokes of the *iyá chachá* with his own *enú*. After several repetitions, the *itótele* should have little difficulty remembering the pattern; especially since the drum melody mimics the song.

Figure 35: *Toque* that accompanies the song "Kowo-kowo" (*itótele chachá, iyá enú*, and okónkolo omitted)

Though this technique provides an easy and efficient mechanism for teaching the various *toques* to the *itótele*, it is musically limiting for the *iyá*. While drummers use the *iyá chachá* as a teaching tool when necessary, aesthetically, they prefer to have more freedom for expression.

Figure 36 illustrates the *itótele* and *iyá* parts of a *toque* for Eleguá. Again, the *okónkolo* is omitted because it simply plays the typical "ki-la" gesture. Note that the *itótele enú* and the *iyá chachá* are sounded simultaneously, as in the example of "Kowo-kowo." To generate additional rhythmic interest, the *iyá* player can attempt several standard variations to this part. In the first variation (Figure 37), the *iyá* delays

the *chachá* by a sixteenth note. In the second variation (Figure 38) the *iyá* anticipates the *chachá* by an eighth note. The final variation (Figure 39) includes both the anticipated and delayed *chachá* hits. Though further options might include the complete omission of the *iyá chachá* or free embellishments that are not constrained by anticipation or delaying processes, most common variations are developed from the relationship between the *iyá chachá* and the *itótele enú*.

Figure 36: Excerpt of *toque* for Eleguá played with *iyá chachá* matching the *itótele enú*
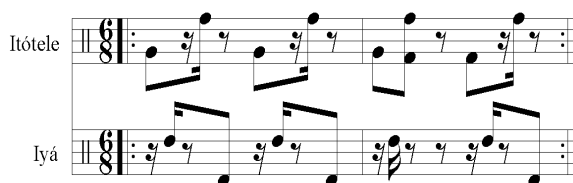
Figure 37: Excerpt of *toque* for Eleguá played with delayed *iyá chachá*

Figure 38: Excerpt of *toque* for Eleguá played with anticipated *iyá chachá*

Figure 39: Excerpt of *toque* for Eleguá played with anticipated and delayed *iyá chachá*
(AUDIO EXAMPLE #16 contains 4 measures each of Figures 36-39)

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Conclusions

The Cuban *batá* pedagogical system pervades every level of this musical style, and is central to understanding performance aesthetics. On the macro structural level, the order in which *toques* are invariably performed is determined by theological beliefs, while serving the practical needs of students in the tradition. The warriors – Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi – are noted for their role in opening and clearing paths. Their power is invoked whenever the *orisha* are worshipped, thereby facilitating communication and the transfer of spiritual energy. In a musical sense, they initially serve as a barrier to learning. Eleguá, as the trickster and keeper of the crossroads, keeps the undedicated from passing by having a very difficult *toque* entrance. But once the door is open, the *toques* of the three *orisha* prepare and equip novice players to tackle the *oro igbodú*, and eventually the entire repertoire. In this aspect of the musical structure, we witness the intersection of mythological stories (natural and human qualities), musical sounds, and pedagogical technique. Each realm is capable of being understood as a metaphor or iconic for the other two (Becker and Becker 1981). To learn the *toques* out of the specified order is to deny the legitimacy of the myths, and the efficacy of the musical sounds.

On the micro structural level, several communicative mechanisms enable the *iyá* to communicate both its intentions and expectations to the other two drums. The *iyá* communicates with the *okónkolo* by enunciating non-lexical vocables. This permits the *iyá* to teach an *okónkolo* player without interrupting his own playing. Here we see a pedagogical tool that liberates the *iyá* from playing too conservatively. It allows him to choose esoteric *toques* and attempt complex variations, regardless of

whether he is playing with a beginner or experienced *okónkolo* player. If his musical

choices result in the *okónkolo* making a mistake or getting lost in the music, he can

easily bring him back in line with a few spoken syllables.

Learning the *itótele* usually involves two phases. The first occurs while an

inexperienced drummer plays the *okónkolo*. While the *okónkolo* and *itótele* have

distinct functions within the ensemble, and generally utilize different skills, there is

some overlap. Several *toques*, specifically Ochosi, Osain and Changó, provide the

okónkolo player with opportunities to play like an *itótele*. This way, when the learning

drummer finally has an opportunity to sit with the *itótele*, his muscles are already

familiar with the basic *itótele* pattern, where the *chachá* plays on the middle-beats of

6/8.

The second phase of learning the *itótele* relies on the communication

convention that exists between *itótele* and *iyá*. While the *itótele chachá* typically

performs an ostinato pattern, the *itótele* player can generally rest assured that his *enú*

will closely resemble the *iyá chachá*. This is especially the case when an *itótele* player

is first learning, or anytime he appears unsure of himself. When the *itótele* is

confident, the *iyá* is free to vary its *chachá*. But, even in these instances, the *iyá*

chachá usually preserves some relationship to the *itótele enú*. This micro-structural

observation has some very apparent aesthetic consequences. During many *toques*, the

okónkolo and *itótele chachá* perform a fixed, timekeeping pattern while the *itótele enú*

and *iyá enú* are engaged in a fixed melody. The remaining drumhead, (i.e. the *iyá*

chachá) has the ability to determine the character of the *toque*. If the *iyá* player wants

to keeps things simple and grounded, he matches the *itótele enú*. If he wants to put

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some energy into the *toque*, he can alter and syncopate his part. He makes these judgments based on both the ability of the *itótele* player, and his perception of the needs/desires of the *apón* and the participants.

CHAPTER 5

OMO AÑA: THE FRATERNITY OF BATÁ DRUMMERS

The *omo* Aña are "children of Aña," a brotherhood of drummers sworn to the *batá*. Or, more precisely, are sworn to the *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) that inhabits consecrated *batá, iyesá* and *bembé* drums, and is believed to dwell in the wood of the African Àyàn or Àyòn (pronounced Aña) tree, also known as African Satinwood (Abraham 1958: 86). By ritual, and by virtue of deep mutual respect, each *omo* Aña shares a strong bond with their *padrinos* (Sp. godfathers) and brothers in Aña (Delgado 1999: 98), and extend respect to all drummers who have been sworn. This chapter examines the musical and social behavior of the musician-members of the brotherhood, and several of its potential initiates, that were present at five *toques de santo* (Sp. drumming ceremonies for the *orisha*) in Havana during January 2002. Though the manifest goal of these performances is to worship the *orisha*, they are multifaceted events that permit and encourage several layers of activity to coexist, including the transmission of musical knowledge in its various forms. While it is not necessary for drumming ensembles to grow, the musical tradition would lose efficacy and eventually cease to exist if young drummers were not engaged in meaningful ways. This chapter focuses primarily on the teacher-student relationship by examining those activities within *toques de santo* that nurture and

develop individual musical ability, and emphasizes the relationship between these learning/teaching experiences and aesthetics. Secondarily, it addresses peer-to-peer transmission, by examining ways that ensembles develop their sense of cohesion, identity and ability to achieve a state of communitas.

Learning and teaching are integral components of the *toque de santo*, both for musicians and for the community of practitioners at large. These activities occupy a large temporal element of the ritual and are central to the performance. This is where members of the Santería community first experience many of their songs and dances, and where *santeros* (Sp. fully initiated priests) can learn of, about, and from the *orisha*. It is here that the meanings and uses of songs, dances, and rhythms are "experientially apprehended through the body; they are not simply understood but are also enacted" (Mason 1994: 24-25).

On January 2, 2003 I witnessed a *toque de santo* at the Museum of the Orisha sponsored by the Yoruba Association in honor of the *orisha* Odudua. The drummers from the ceremony invited me, during the next two weeks, to observe and participate in their ritual performances in private homes throughout Havana, making nightly entries into my research journal, of which excerpts are included below. These observations are not necessarily presented chronologically, but are grouped according to observed activity, and include, in some instances, multiple observations from the same evening.

My analysis of these field note observations is divided into two sections. The first begins by examining how novice drummers learn the *batá* within the context of a ceremony. It builds upon the micro- and macro-structural concepts developed in the

previous chapter, and introduces additional ways that the drummers communicate. The largest contrast between the current and the previous chapter is the enlarged concept of the ensemble, which at any particular *toque de santo* may include upwards of ten musicians. At the end of this first section, I demonstrate how the needs/desires/expectations of the musicians, i.e. the fraternity of drummers, occasionally runs afoul with the needs/desires/expectations of the practitioners. To help understand this conflict between the various participants in the ceremony, I introduce the enigmatic Yoruba-Lucumí concept *aché,* which Ramos defines as the "animating force that moves both earth and cosmos" (1996: 59). In a *toque de santo,* aesthetic value lies not in the incidence of trance possession, but, more broadly, in the manipulation of *aché.*

The second section of the analysis also considers the divergent needs/desires/expectations of the many participants, i.e. drummers, *apón,* practitioners. But unlike the previous section, which focuses on conflict, this section examines the way multiple thematic acts can peacefully coexist. For example, when the musicians are engaged in teaching a novice drummer, or when experienced drummers playfully engage in drumming competitions to expand both their individual abilities and their ensembles' sense of communitas, practitioners are often unaffected and unaware of its existence. Though I reserve my analysis until after presenting all ten observations from my research notes, the reader is encouraged to draw conclusions as he/she wishes.

Observations

Observation One
Date: January 4, 2003
Barrio (Sp. neighborhood): Lawton, Havana
Address: Vista Alegre between San Lazaro and San Anastasio

Tonight the music is good, the room crackling with energy as the *apón* (Lu. solo singer) and drummers entice an old *santera* (Sp. fully initiated priestess) to temporarily release control of her body and allow Yemayá to "mount" or possess her. A smile grows on my face as I sense a growing pride in my field site. Sure, I have nothing to do with the success of the ritual, yet I want to boast. The energy in the room is as high as I have ever known and I have invited my two close American friends to experience their first *toque de santo*.

One of my friends leans into my ear and yells, trying to be heard above the din of the persistent drumming and singing, "Why are the drummers making so many mistakes?"

"What?" I yell back.

"The drummers seem to be making a lot of mistakes. It looks like that one needs a lot of help from the others." Caught off guard, I jump to the drummers' defense and chastise my friend for her lack of perception. Clearly this was a superior performance and she had no idea what she was looking at!

Observation Two
Date: January 3, 2003
Barrio: Santa Catalina
Address: Avenida Norte between Casino and Deportivo

While members of the house-temple engage in friendly conversation and share plates full of sweets that had moments before decorated the altar, the musicians abruptly take their leave. Lacking the convenience of a car, we each take turns carrying the drums over our shoulders and make our way through the dark, unlit streets of the Havana suburbs. Our progress is slow as we keep our eyes glued to the roadbed, careful to step around gaping potholes and large cracks in the cement. When the drums are safely home, several of us find a late-night convenience store and purchase beer to wash down a Cuban specialty, ham and cheese sandwiches. After our little party begins to die and most bid their farewells, only two of us remain. My new friend leans over to me and honors me with an invitation to be sworn to the drums. He explains that three of the musicians who accompanied us this evening were to be sworn on January 16 and that I was invited to join them. Things are beginning to make sense to me. I now understand why the drummers seem to be making so many mistakes. They are young, inexperienced and have not yet been sworn to the drums.

Observation Three
Date: January 6, 2003
Barrio: La Havana Vieja
Address: Sol between Cuba and San Ignacio

Initially, I sense that we must have arrived early this evening. There are only a few people gathered. Yet, the drumming has already begun in the *igbodú* (Lu. sacred room). Quickly we move down the hall, making our way through the kitchen and the

living room, finally entering the sacred room where the drummers are playing before the altar. Usually three musicians perform in the *igbodú*, one for each of the drums. But tonight, to my surprise, there is a fourth. An elderly gentleman is standing behind the *okónkolo* player and tapping on his shoulders, making no sound, but very much shaping the performance.

Observation Four
Date: January 8, 2003
Barrio: Vedado
Address: Corner of 9th and 10th

A young man walks into the living room where a *toque de santo* is in full force. He steps through the crowd, oblivious of their presence, concerned only with the drums and the musicians. With his arms crossed in front of his chest he bends to greet Aña by placing his forehead on the *iyá*. After repeating this gesture with the *okónkolo* and the *itótele*, he passes again in front of the *iyá* and lightly places his fingers on the forehead of the lead drummer, an intimate greeting. This newcomer is a friend and a member of the fraternity of men who have sworn to the drums and devoted their lives to praising the *orisha* in song and sound. He moves aside and takes his place with the other musicians who patiently wait for their turn to play the drums.

Observation Five
Date: January 8, 2003
Barrio: Vedado
Address: Corner of 9th and 10th

In the middle of the room, Eleguá shows signs of his presence. A *santero* (Sp. a male practitioner of Santería) wearing a black and red bracelet begins to shake and shudder. As if satisfying a deep itch, he scratches and tears at his scalp. One moment

he dances directly before the drums, the next he charges toward the exit, but is stopped by an impenetrable wall of practitioners eager to see, hear and feel Eleguá's presence. From somewhere in the back of the room, the *santero* is showered with hard candy and sweets. From the other direction, he is sprayed with rum. Again he dances, tries to escape, scratches his scalp, rubs his face. He is reluctant. The drums are persistent.

The practitioners have stopped dancing and are now forming a semi-circle around the *santero*, the child of Eleguá. At the open end of the circle the musicians focus all their energy on the reluctant mount. The *apón* (Lu. soloist) sings into his ear and shakes a rattle. The semi-circle begins to close. Trying to get a better view, several women sneak around the circle and stand in front of the *itótele* and the *okónkolo*. Two musicians quickly force themselves between the women and the drums, corralling the women to safety. The excitement in the room continues to rise; the circle continues to close in. More women stand in front of the drummers to get a better view. More musicians position themselves between the women and the drums. Finally, the *iyá* player has had enough. Eleguá is moments from mounting his child and yet the *iyá* stops the music!

Observation Six
Date: January 3, 2003
Barrio: Santa Catalina
Address: Avenida Norte between Casino and Deportivo

I sit with the *okónkolo* on my lap, a little nervous and very excited. What if they play something I don't know? Will they get mad at me? Will they laugh at me? Will they rob me of the opportunity to continue playing? Will I disappoint my teacher? Or worse, the *orisha*?

The *apón* begins to sing. In my ear I hear a faint "ki, la, ki, la, ki, la, ki, la".

One of the musicians is feeding me my part. Without making a sound, I begin to move

my hands in rhythm. I look up and he smiles at me. The *iyá* plays the call and I enter

gracefully.

Observation Seven
Date: January 6, 2003
Barrio: La Havana Vieja
Address: Sol between Cuba and San Ignacio

The *apón* looks in my direction, asking if I am ready to play the *itótele.* Of

course I am. Normally a bit nervous, I feel exceptionally relaxed this evening. The

current *iyá* player surrenders his drum and one of my new Cuban friends takes it from

him. He is a "ringer." He participated in my formal lesson with the *apón* earlier this

morning, and knew precisely what we were going to play. We share glances and the

apón can see that I'm ready. As rehearsed earlier, we perform several *toques*/songs for

Ochún: "Enio bobo," "Bamile Ochún" and "Chaku maleke." These are followed by a

tratado (Sp. sequence of songs/*toque*s that typically get played together) for Obatalá,

beginning with the song "Odudu aremu." Forty-five minutes after beginning, we are

done and I return the *itótele* to another drummer. The *apón* nods his approval of my

performance and promises tomorrow we will tackle more difficult *toques.*

Observation Eight
Date: January 5, 2003
Barrio: Cerro
Address: Palatino between Armonio and Esperanza

The drummers exchange glances, smiles, and gestures of friendship. During

frequent pauses, they pass around the rum and water and use the opportunity to joke,

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laugh and socialize with one another, or perhaps greet a friend who arrived at the ceremony while they were playing. A musician who had been resting against the near wall approaches the *okónkolo* and the two drummers swap positions. The former *okónkolo* player walks over to the *itótele* player and now swaps with him. During a five-hour ceremony there is time for everybody to play. And considering the physical strain of striking the drums with bare hands, frequent rests are welcomed.

Several hours into the *toque de santo*, the *batá* lay gently across the laps of relaxed drummers. The *apón*, sitting in a chair, lazily rests his head in his hands as he stares at the floor. After a particularly long pause, scarcely moving from this position, he begins to sing. Several people answer his calls. Most, however, quietly talk among themselves, half engaged with the music, half lost in the social gathering. Many practitioners have stepped outside to grab some fresh air or a smoke.

Slowly, the ritual regains its earlier momentum. The *apón* stands up; the practitioners return to the room and begin to sing with some force. Several *santeros* move to the open space in front of the drums and dance the steps for the *orisha* Changó. The pace of the music picks up and the drummers shift to the *toque chachalekefon*. The apparently inexperienced *okónkolo* player is in a little over his head. Nearby, a musician taps the syncopated rhythm on his own legs hoping the *okónkolo* will follow the visual cue. Another drummer moves into position behind the *okónkolo* player and taps on his shoulders.

As the tempo increases, the *iyá* and *itótele* engage each other with complex conversations that obscure the beat, robbing the *okónkolo* of a point of reference. Across the room, another musician senses the *toque* is falling apart and loudly claps

the clave rhythm. Normally this would be enough, but tonight they need more. The drummer standing behind the *okónkolo* claps the beats close to the ear of the *okónkolo* player. Together, the clave rhythm and the downbeats seem to remedy the situation.

The dancers, responding to the songs and the powerful rhythms, slowly increase the intensity of their movements. Gentle gestures transform into exaggerated movements. One of the *santeros* rushes towards the drums; then moves away. He relaxes a bit; then explodes into the air. He captures everyone's attention and all gazes are fixed as Changó "mounts" this child.

The music has reached a fevered pitch and the *okónkolo* can barely hang on. Another drummer steps in to help. Sitting on top of the *okónkolo*, he firmly plants all his weight on the *okónkolo* players lap. Reaching behind, he plays the *okónkolo*.

Observation Nine
Date: January 4, 2003
Barrio: Lawton, Havana
Address: Vista Alegre between San Lázaro and San Anastasio

A long pause in the music; the room begins to empty as the practitioners fan out in several directions. Some take to the kitchen to find a drink or a snack, while others move toward the balcony to escape the oppressive heat. I sit with the *itótele* in my lap, with the *apón* next to me, preparing to play *iyá*. No one in the room can sing the solo parts, so I relax and begin to reach for my glass of rum.

Suddenly the *iyá* sounds a call. Instinctively, my hands respond and I am striking the *itótele*. It takes a few moments before my consciousness realizes I am playing "Tuí-tuí." Lost in our little corner of the room, no one pays us much attention.

My teacher, the *apón*, wants to test my memory from our lesson earlier this afternoon. As we begin a series of drumming conversations, I feel his stare. Carefully, he watches and listens. To help me through a difficult section, he counts aloud three repetitions to help me figure out when to move on. He is quiet, yet loud enough for anyone standing close to hear.

Successfully navigating this tough spot in the *toque*, I feel us relax. We actually sound pretty good! The others drummers begin to drift back into the room, accompanied by the *dueño*, the owner of the *batá*. He stands and thoughtfully stares at us while we play, occasionally nodding approvingly. As we negotiate the last conversation of the *toque* he begins to smile, then laugh. He walks up to me and places his fingers to my forehead, pats me on the shoulder and walks away.

Observation Ten
Date: January 5, 2003
Barrio: Cerro
Address: Palatino between Armonio and Esperanza

I begin to feel a little disappointed I haven't played the *itótele* all evening. The ceremony is nearly finished and the drummers are rearranging themselves to play the closing, the *cierre*. Unexpectedly, the *dueño* invites me play. Shocked, I tentatively walk up to the drum. I begin to doubt myself and wonder if this is really the *cierre*. Then I look up and notice one of the *santeras* carrying a bucket of water from the kitchen, a clear sign that we are about to close the ritual. I begin to think that maybe the *dueño* hasn't seen the bucket yet and will soon reverse his offer.

Neither the *dueño,* nor the *apón* have heard me play the *cierre*. Ritually, this is an important part of the ceremony. I have been warned that bad things will happen if it

is played wrong or improperly observed and I am, admittedly, slightly nervous. Once it begins, we can't stop. My mind is flooded with images of my teacher jumping on my lap and playing the *itótele* behind his back. This is fine during the middle of the ritual when all eyes are focused on an impending possession. But here in the *cierre*, the drums play without songs and everyone respectfully listens. During previous nights I've heard these drummers play the *cierre*. Developed into a high art form, they pride themselves in subtle shifts between sections and *toque*s. So subtle are the changes, I doubt my ability to catch them.

To my relief, the *dueño* calls the first *toque* of the *cierre*, slowly and deliberately. Setting the tone for the entire *cierre*, I can sense that he won't try to lose me in subtleties. Rather, he plays as simple and transparent as possible. Meanwhile, the *apón* faces me, standing no more than two feet away. With his voice, he prepares me for each change, singing the upcoming part.

Analysis I: Learning the *batá*, a fraternity of drummers, and *aché*

In Observation One, the behaviors that my American friend interpreted as repeated mistakes were something so commonplace, that I didn't even notice them. First, there was a bit of competition between the *iyá* and the *itótele*. The *iyá* would throw a call at the *itótele* and listen to his response. As if to judge one another's abilities, they would share questioning looks. It was playful interaction, a sort of game or competition, and an integral component of the genre. Neither of them made any real mistakes. They were just sharing aesthetic critique on an advanced level. Secondly, my friend noticed drummers yelling rhythms at the *okónkolo* player, touching his

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shoulders, and playing the drum for him by either facing him, or sitting on the top of the *okónkolo* and playing the drum behind their back. The *okónkolo* player was making small mistakes, but the behavior surrounding these mistakes is such a common occurrence I did not interpret them as a weaknesses. Rather, while my friend questioned the drummer's abilities and, by extension, the value of the performance, I took offense to her implications. In truth, what I regarded as her lack of perception was my inability to remove myself from the experience and view this from an outsider's perspective.

In a *toque de santo*, there are many layers of activity, each informing the other but also operating with some independence. During this two-week period, prompted by my friend's comments, I became increasingly attuned to the musicians' interactions with one another. I observed, not simply the musical conversations between the three drums, but focused on the role of the other five to eight ever-present professional *batá* drummers. What I discovered was a nurturing environment, where the skills of younger and inexperienced musicians are fostered by the actions of their elders.

When my new Cuban friend, in Observation Two, broached the subject of joining the other three drummers on January 16 for the swearing ceremony, I initially greeted it with suspicion. As a foreigner, I was willing to pay for formal lessons. Perhaps they were hoping to part me from more money under the guise of a religious experience. My fears were soon assuaged as I realized how dedicated they were to teaching, learning, and growing as a community. Additionally, his comments enlightened me to the fact that these performances were attended by at least three inexperienced drummers. It didn't take long to identify who these were during

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subsequent performances, as they indeed made a lot of mistakes and relied heavily on the other drummers to negotiate their parts.

Observation Three refers to the *oro igbodú*. Normally, in this phase of the ceremony, the drummers are situated in the *igbodú*. Directly facing the altar, they perform a series of *toques*, each of which salute or honor one of twenty-two *orishas*. One might interpret these as prayers. The only audience for the performance are the *orisha* themselves. Others are welcome to watch and listen, but they stand behind. During the *oro igbodú,* there is none of the socializing that is present in the *wemilere*: no drinking, talking or joking. Drummers often emulate older styles of playing and reserve their cutting edge creativity for the public parts of the ceremony. This is not to say that the *oro igbodú* lacks creativity. Every drummer has his own style, his own sound, and every ensemble has a unique way of connecting one *toque* to the next. There are many joys in listening to *oro igbodú* and many ways to assign aesthetic value to each individual performance.[53]

Knowing the implications of this phase of the ceremony, I was surprised to find an elder drummer tapping on the shoulders of the *okónkolo* player. It challenged my basic notion that these prayers are an intimate experience between three drummers, the *batá,* and the *orisha*. There was a fourth person participating. The other drummers keenly felt his presence, each making eye contact with him. At times he spoke aloud to the *okónkolo* player and often uttered the syllables, "ki" and "la." A result of the

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[53] In Chapter Three, I address the *oro igbodú* and the many decisions facing the ensemble during this phase of the ceremony.

okónkolo player's inexperience, there were many audibly evident mistakes littered throughout the performance.

Only fifteen years old, the *iyá* player sounded like a drummer many years older, but certainly not like a master. Though very good, this young player was not the most experienced musician present. The others stepped down and provided him with an opportunity to develop his proficiency. He made several interesting musical decisions that I suspect reflected his confidence, or lack thereof, in the *okónkolo* player's ability. The first occurred during the *toque* for Yemayá. This *toque* begins at a slow, comfortable tempo with a simple pattern for the *okónkolo*. The speed gradually increases until it is three or more times the original tempo. This can take several minutes and provides ample opportunities for the *iyá* to insert variations and converse with the *itótele*. Then there is typically a transition into a section or *toque* known as "Taniboya." It requires the *okónkolo* to modify his pattern. At this tempo, it can be difficult to execute. Rather than launch into the new section, the *iyá* shortened the *toque* and cut it before the impending change.

The second interesting musical decision occurred when the *iyá* player decided to substitute "Tuí-tuí" for "Oyá directo." While the latter *toque* has many confusing changes for the *okónkolo*, "Tuí-tuí" consists of one simple pattern. Neither of these musical decisions is uncommon and, indeed, they didn't immediately strike me as significant. But, they are indicative of the types of musical decisions that ensembles make during ritual performances that significantly alter the listening experience.

What can one conclude about performance aesthetics in this example? It was not a particularly dynamic or exciting *oro igbodú*. Besides the two drummers who

were to be sworn on the 16th, few people gathered behind the ensemble to listen to it. Though more experienced drummers reclaimed the *batá* after the *oro igbodú* was completed, I sensed that something was lacking when the *santeros* and other practitioners appeared hesitant to dance and few participated in the choral responses during the *oro cantado* and *wemilere*. In one instance, the *apón* put his hand on the *iyá*, indicating it should stop, and waited for silence in the room. In a stern voice, as if scolding young children, he told all attending that, "If you don't sing, the drumming ceremony will not work!" And in many ways, I feel the ceremony did not work. There were no possessions by the *orisha* and the musicians were packing up by seven-thirty, more than an hour earlier than I expected and two hours earlier than the very successful *toque de santo* depicted in Observation One.

What was the cause of this apparent lack of connection and participation? Were the practitioners unimpressed with the *oro igbodú*? Not likely. As I mention in Observation Three, few members of the house-temple had even arrived during the *oro igbodú*, and fewer tried to listen to it. Further, I feel that the level of aptitude among the drummers performing the *wemilere* was acceptable and probably did not contribute to the low energy level. Perhaps the problem lies within the membership of the house-temple. As the religion is not uniformly practiced, it is possible that the members did not know many songs and did not feel comfortable dancing. Finally, I offer the option that the problems were spiritual in nature. If the *orisha* were unhappy with the *oro igbodú*, they might react by not possessing their children.

As these thoughts drifted through my mind on the walk home that evening, I began to question my basic premise that the evening represented some type of a

failure. After all, for the fifteen-year old *iyá* player, the elder and his student on the *okónkolo*, the performance achieved its desired result. Perhaps those in charge of the music were willing to sacrifice a flawless performance in exchange for an opportunity for younger players to learn. The performance of the *oro igbodú* provided a venue where a younger drummer could find his own way on the *iyá* and where a very inexperienced drummer could learn the basics on the *okónkolo*. This type of tradeoff is prevalent at many performances, and is a theme that runs throughout each of the "Observations."

Observation Four illustrates how insular members of this drumming fraternity can be. Each night, this ensemble performs in a different part of town: Vibora, Santa Catalina, Santo Suarez, Cerro, Vedado, and Havana Vieja. Most evenings, it was evident that the musicians were not personally acquainted with the practitioners. As a result, they kept to themselves and didn't interact socially. In such a climate, it is understandable that the drummers are concerned as much about their own ensembles' musical development as they are with the needs of the community.

Observation Five discusses a potentially awkward situation where the needs and concerns of the drumming fraternity appear to come into conflict with those of the practitioners. It offers an opportunity to discuss the many complexities of this fraternity. First, it suggests the variety of duties assigned to the gathered musicians. In addition to clapping, singing and helping the younger drummers, they "protect" the drums by configuring themselves around the ensemble. In Figure 40 we see the musicians positioned around the *okónkolo*, *iyá* and *itótele*. Sitting behind each *batá* is a drummer, indicated by an "X" inside an "O." To the left of center, between the

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okónkolo and the *iyá* is a short stool where another drummer can sit and rest his legs. By the window on the right, near the *itótele*, two more drummers appear sharing a chair; when drummers play nearly every evening, they search for ways to rest their feet. The "O" immediately in front of the drums represents the *apón*, while the swirling, crisscrossing lines represent the dynamic dancing and possessions that take place in the center of the room. The curved lines that follow the side and back walls represent practitioners who have situated themselves in, more or less, stationary positions. Finally, the remaining "Xs" indicate standing musicians. While some try to sneak into the back corners of the room, several need to stand beside the drums. The two standing drummers on the left and the two sitting ones on the right, provide a buffer between the practitioners and the drums. It is these musicians who forced themselves between the practitioners and the drums.
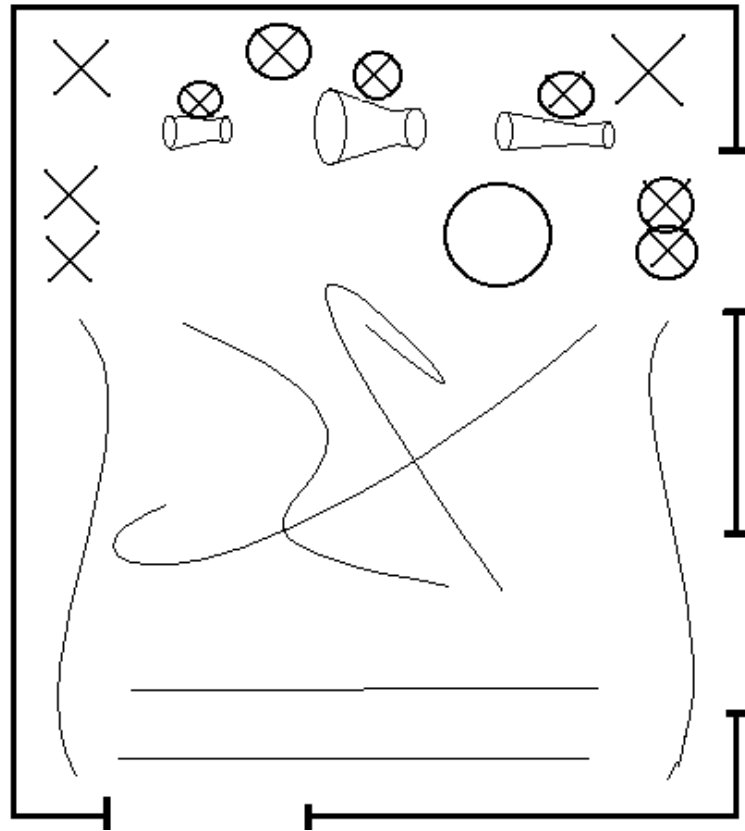
Key: Sitting musicians: X inside O
        Standing musicians: X
        Apón: O
        Participants: Swirling lines

Figure 40: Spatial arrangement of sitting musicians, standing musicians, *apón*, and participants.

While the room is full of excitement, pending the arrival of Eleguá, the *iyá*

player cannot accept the fact that non-initiates of the drumming fraternity, in particular

women, are too focused on the *orisha* to realize that their backs are dangerously close

to touching the consecrated *batá*. Such contact could damage the efficacy of the

drums. It may be detrimental to the offending party and, in some instances, is believed

to induce death. Further, the *iyá* player is equally concerned that practitioners are occupying the space between the *santero* and the *batá*. Repeatedly, he motions for everyone to move aside and create a clear line of sight to the *santero*. But, when his requests remain unheard or unheeded, he stops the drums and the onset of possession.

The aesthetic component of this string of events can be explained several ways. One might initially interpret the moment as a failure. Both the drummers and the practitioners would benefit from the "arrival" of Eleguá at the *toque de santo*. His presence is rewarding for the practitioners who can touch, engage, and receive wisdom from the *orisha*. For the drummers, Eleguá's presence would be a tangible indicator of an efficacious and successful ceremony. Therefore, one can sense the reluctance with which the *iyá* player would attempt to halt the music. But this is only one interpretation of the events. When one considers the association between aesthetics and *aché* in Yoruba art forms, the scene can be viewed quite differently.

Aché is a difficult concept to define. Rather than fashioning my own interpretation, I rely upon the definitions of others:

> *Ashe* [*sic*] is the animating force that moves both earth and cosmos. It can be found in a plant, an animal, a stone, a body of water, a hill, the heavens, the stars. But *ashe* is also present in human beings, and can be manifested through bodily actions, but is especially active in words (*afud'ashe*) (Ramos 1996: 59).

> *Ashe* [*sic*] is the current or flow, a "groove" that initiates can channel so that it carries them along their road in life. The prayers, rhythms, offerings, tabus of santería tune initiates into this flow (Murphy 1993: 131).

Though it is not difficult to get a sense of *aché*, no two printed definitions of the concept are identical. For Rowland Abiodun, *aché* is "enigmatic," yet essential for understanding Yoruba art aesthetics (Abiodun 1994).

> *Ase* [*sic*] fundamentally informs the Yoruba aesthetic. It is affective, triggering an emotional response in the audience even when this may not be fully and immediately comprehended. Outwardly expressed through verbal, visual, and performing arts, *ase* imbues sound, space, and matter with energy to restructure existence, to transform and control the physical world (Abiodun 1994: 78).

In statements such as these, Abiodun clearly establishes a precedent for examining the relationship between *aché*, aesthetics and the *batá* drumming at a *toque de santo*. This analysis continues by considering some of the sources of *aché* that are evident in my descriptions of Observation Five.

Though all humans are born with *aché*, *santeros*, by virtue of their initiations, are "further endowed by this ineffable force" (Ramos 1996: 59). By dancing before the drums, they "liberate" and "channel" *aché* (Murphy 1993: 131). The *apón* and *batá* musicians, similarly, are a focal point of this force: "Through sacrifices made in order to learn, develop as a musician, achieve endurance, go through initiations, and so on, a drummer develops *aché*" (Font 2003: communication). They play the *batá*, which are a sacred vessel for the *orisha* Aña and a powerful motivator of the vital force. Finally, there is *aché* in the songs of the *apón* and the rhythms of the *batá*, two arts closely connected to the verbal arts. Abiodun writes, "The air and space between the one who vocalizes [*aché*] and the recipient are believed to be so powerfully charged that it is unsafe for anyone to obstruct them" (Abiodun 1994: 74).

Though the arrival of an *orisha* is always a blessed occasion during a *toque de santo*, it is not the sole indicator of an effective ceremony. *Aché* manifests itself not only in *santeros*, who are the vessels of the *orisha*, but also in many forms. The *iyá* player was disturbed that the practitioners were neglecting the other powerful forces in

the room: First, by nearly touching the sacred drums, and second, by obstructing the space between the drummers and the *santero*. In doing so, the practitioners inadvertently challenged the efficacy of both the *batá* and the musicians. Had the possession been permitted to continue, the legitimacy of the drumming fraternity and the notion of "charged space" would have tacitly been brought into question. But by making a spectacle of the incorrect behavior, that is, by stopping the ceremony, the community was reminded of these important sources of *aché* and given a moment to reflect upon them. Soon after stopping, the music began again, apparently with a renewed sense of purpose and a higher level of excitement. The practitioners, likewise, seemed to be undaunted by the scolding they received and increased their involvement in the ceremony. Not long after the music restarted, Eleguá mounted the *santero*.

Whereas I originally believed that the stoppage of music in Observation Five indicated "failure," it is now evident that continuing would have been a bad decision. Instead, the *iyá* player stopped, made his point and then allowed the observances to continue. This interruption had a positive effect on the ceremony, both for its opportunity to address strongly held religious beliefs and for the renewed energy it infused into the drummers and practitioners. As Abiodun suggested, *aché* "is affective, triggering an emotional response in the audience even when this may not be fully and immediately comprehended."

These five observations provided an opportunity to discuss the central importance of the drumming fraternity in the *toque de santo*. The drummers do not simply exist to meet the needs of the practitioners. The cultivation, maintenance and identity of the fraternity are essential components of the aesthetic.

Analysis II: Thematic Acts

The divergent expectations of the various participants in a *toque de santo* need not always be in conflict. On the contrary, they usually peacefully coexist. This can be easily understood by analyzing the remaining observations with Friedman's (1982) conception of "thematic acts," a model in which various performer-defined themes of action, each with an independent purpose, develop concurrently. Due to the dynamic, shifting nature of the *wemilere* (i.e. the third phase of the ceremony that includes drumming, singing, dancing and possessions), thematic acts evolve unpredictably. Some exist for only short periods of time, while others may be entirely absent one evening, but extremely important the next. Friedman identifies four acts: the state of fiesta, song competitions, possession by the *orisha*, and salutation (Friedman 1982: 165). Through my research I have identified at least two additional thematic acts: drumming competitions, and teacher/student exchanges. In the discussion that follows I address all six, interspersing my own thematic acts with Friedman's.

The State of Fiesta

The first thematic act Friedman describes is the "state of the fiesta," which refers to the *apón*'s duty to create a fiesta-like atmosphere by encouraging the participants to sing and dance, and to "create a state of emotionally charged and focused interaction among participants" (Friedman 1982: 165). The *apón* accomplishes this with his/her ability "to touch, make contact with, and inspire participants through performance" (Friedman 1982: 166). The *apón* scans the room and makes decisions based upon who is present and how they are responding to the

music. He/she may focus songs at the entire crowd, a group or an individual. These actions exist at every *toque de santo* and provide an architecture upon which other thematic acts can be layered. Though none of my ten observations directly address the state of fiesta, each observation describes one or more of the five remaining thematic acts, which are capable of existing and developing concurrently with the state of fiesta and with each other.

Song Competitions and Drumming Competitions

Friedman's second thematic act is the "song competition." This type of behavior develops when there are several capable singers in attendance who want to test their knowledge of song. These acts are not an essential element of the *wemilere*, but provide opportunities for singers to compare and develop their abilities.

> When singers engage in [song competitions] their activity is not necessarily intended for everyone present. It is an activity aimed at those singers and <u>santeros</u> who have in depth knowledge of Lucumí and the foundations of Santería. … Sometimes those who do not have fluency in Lucumí are not even aware that a [song competition] is going on. This indicates that thematic acts in an event can be fragmented in that only certain individuals are involved in acts from either participant or observer standpoints. At the same time, they take on a layered aspect in that those participating in [song competitions] are involved in a number of thematic acts simultaneously (Friedman 1982: 173-74).

This act is very similar to what I identify as "drumming competitions." A regular occurrence at *toques de santo*, these involve competitive interactions among the drummers, usually between the *iyá* and the *itótele*. With many *toques*, particularly generic ones like "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon," drummers often engage playfully in a game of "cat and mouse," by testing each other's ability to react to conversational calls. By engaging each other in this way, drummers simultaneously develop their

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individual musical abilities, and their sense of unity and communitas with ensemble members. In the process of working on the latter, ensembles are capable of developing signature styles. This is an important form of creativity that often leads to innovations, and is considered by many drummers to be an important aspect of the performance aesthetic.

Though they operate with some independence, both song competitions and drumming competitions affect the state of fiesta. At the height of the cat and mouse game, it is often difficult to hear the downbeats or the implied clave pattern that keeps the drums together. Sometimes, the drummers push their game to the edge and occasionally stumble before returning to a basic pattern. Rather than view these "errors" as signs of inexperience and weakness, such instances are often capable of injecting waves of excitement and energy into the ceremony. Reflecting back upon Observation One, it is possible that the drumming mistakes and errors that my American friend identified, were actually the result of drumming competitions. This would explain why I found those particular moments so exciting. Not only were the drumming competitions interesting within themselves, but also they simultaneously functioned to elevate the entire state of fiesta.

Teacher/Student Exchanges

In Observation Six, I cross the line from observer to participant, when I am invited to sit with the *okónkolo* and perform on a sacred set of *batá*. It begins very tense, as I am consumed with the fear that my relative inexperience will upset the flow of the event, disappointing the drummers, *apón*, practitioners and *orisha*. From this

vantage point, from the perspective of a less-than-experienced ritual drummer, I begin to appreciate first-hand the effectiveness and efficiency of this pedagogical method. The supporting musicians quickly and quietly put me at ease, feeding me my part moments before I was expected to enter. My inexperience was invisible to many of the attendees, most of whom were completely unaware that the drummers were participating in multiple thematic acts, i.e. creating a state of fiesta and engaging in a "teacher/student exchange."

The coinciding of a state of fiesta and a teacher/student exchange continues in Observation Seven. Earlier that same afternoon, I had participated in a drumming lesson with the *apón*. We rehearsed the *toques* for Ochún and Obatalá, which are mentioned in the observation, until he was confident I knew them. He warned me not to forget what we had covered, because he expected me to play them later that evening, at the *toque de santo*. At the time, I underestimated what he meant by this. I assumed that there was likelihood that we may play some small sampling of the material we had covered. After all, how could he know, hours in advance, what songs he would be inspired to sing? As I have been repeatedly told, and have experienced first-hand, *toques de santo* are dynamic events. Generally, during the fiesta, there is no predetermined script for the *apón* or the drummers. Indeed, I was genuinely surprised when we carved out a forty-five minute period, where the songs chosen by the *apón* were completely determined by the context of my earlier lesson and revolved entirely around teaching me. While I played, many *santeros* moved to the middle of the room, contributing to the state of fiesta by dancing and singing. Since they were not aware of the lesson that had taken place earlier that day between the *apón* and myself, the

practitioners in the room were completely unaware of the teacher/student exchanges taking place, that is, that this portion of the ceremony had any connection to a lesson conducted earlier in the *apon's* home.

Orisha Possession

Friedman's third thematic act involves possession by the *orisha*. Not a requisite act in every *toque de santo*, it is always a blessed event that demands the respect and focus of everyone present, both participants and musicians. However, encouraging a possession to occur is not an exact science, but rather an art form. First, the *apón* works on creating the state of fiesta. This not only puts the participant in the state of mind to accept the possession, but also creates an appealing environment for the *orisha*, who are believed to enjoy these parties and the earthly pleasures of song and dance that accompany them. Second, the *apón* spends significant amounts of time scanning the crowd looking for signs that one of the *santeros* is ready to be mounted. When identified, the *apón* will direct songs towards this person. This routine may be repeated several times, as *santeros* will exhibit signs for a period of time and then completely stop, requiring the *apón* to begin his search anew.

During the initial stages of this thematic act, other themes of action may occur simultaneously. We see an example of this in Observation Eight, where the various drummers help an inexperienced *okónkolo* player navigate his way through tough spots in the music. The musicians patiently help and, essentially, teach the novice drummer how to play. As later developments indicate, three thematic acts proceeded simultaneously: the state of fiesta, an informal student/teacher exchange, and the early

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stages of an "*orisha* possession." While it was acceptable for the *okónkolo* player to be a little out of time while the *santero* was dancing and the *apón* was trying to induce a possession, another drummer forcefully took reign of the *okónkolo* when Changó actually "mounted" his child.

This sudden shift towards heightened formality is mimicked around the entire performance space. Friedman notes that "when it becomes evident to performers through 'signs' that a specific individual is well on the way to being mounted, the center of the circle clears, and those who are dancing join the circle's border and sing in the [chorus]" (Friedman 1982: 188-89). Essentially, all other thematic acts are put on hold while an *orisha* "mounts" a *santero*.

Salutations

The final thematic acts that Friedman recognizes are "salutations," which consist of formalized greetings used to communicate respect. Sometimes salutations involve prostration; for example, after an *orisha* arrives at a *toque de santo*, he/she will salute the drums by prostrating on the floor in front of the *iyá*. At other times, they involve drumming; after an *orisha* mounts a *santero*, the drummers will often perform a salute *toque* on the *batá*, i.e. a *seco toque* (Sp. a *toque* performed on the drums without singing). In fact the *oro igbodú* could be interpreted as a string of salutations to the entire pantheon of *orishas*. Observation Four begins by describing a drummer who, upon arriving at a *toque de santo*, salutes Aña (the *orisha* that resides in the *batá* drums) by prostrating on the floor in front of the *iyá*, and then touches his head to the

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okónkolo and the *itótele*. After greeting Aña, he finishes by saluting the *iyá* player, touching him on the forehead with his fingers.

Observation Nine, where the *apón* and I are playing the *seco toque* known as "Tuí-tuí," describes yet a different kind of salutation. In this instance, there were no *orishas* present and there was none of the dancing or singing that is needed to encourage a possession. In fact, much of the room had cleared out as people sought cigarettes, food, water, rum and fresh air. The fiesta was essentially placed on hold. During this pause the *apón* and I took the opportunity to engage in a student/teacher exchange, by playing the *toque* "Tuí-tuí," which we had begun working on during a lesson earlier that afternoon. But, this was not the only thematic act in which we were engaged. Though he was in the next room and out of our vision, the *apón* knew that the *dueño* could hear us playing. When we were close to concluding the *toque*, the *dueño* re-entered the performance space, nodded approvingly and touched his fingers to my forehead to indicate he was happy with the demonstration. He even leaned over to me and commented that the *apón* was a good teacher. In this way, he recognized both of us. Though there was no state of fiesta during this performance, several thematic acts occurred simultaneously: the completion of a formal lesson from earlier that afternoon (i.e. a student/teacher exchange), salutations to Oyá and Changó who are associated with the *toque* "Tuí-tuí," and salutations between myself and the *dueño*, and the *apón* and the *dueño*.

The intersection of multiple thematic acts is not limited to the *wemilere*. Observation 3 clearly describes a scene that includes both salutations and teacher/student exchanges during the *oro igbodú*. While the drummers salute the entire

pantheon of *orishas* with *seco toques*, a teacher stands behind the *okónkolo* player and guides him through each of the difficult changes in his part.

Similarly, Observation Ten addresses multiple thematic acts occurring during the *cierre*. In this observation, I am presented again with the nerve-racking prospect of being completely unprepared and unqualified to complete the task being handed to me. While making audible errors is commonplace and acceptable during the *oro igbodú*, *oro eyá aranla*, and *wemilere*, a flawless performance of the *cierre* is expected. In part, this is a function of the religious significance of the ritual's closing; it ensures that everyone leaves the *toque de santo* in good health. And in part, it is a matter of professionalism; during the *cierre* all the attendees focus their undivided attention on the drummers. As in the prior observation, we see that the *iyá* player is quite adept at communicating with me during the performance, and able to gracefully guide me through the closing. In this way, the drummers managed to successfully salute the *orisha* and *egun* (Lu. ancestors) while the *iyá* player successfully nurtured my ability to play the *cierre*.

Conclusions

The *omo* Aña are a fraternity of drummers, bound together as a collective whole by ritual initiation, and bound as a more intimate ensemble by common performance experiences. Most drummers do not simply enter the fraternity to pursue a profession; they are driven by their spirituality. As Font eloquently stated it, "Through sacrifices made in order to learn, develop as a musician, achieve endurance, go through initiations, and so on, a drummer develops *aché*." As a result, when they

are hired to perform at a *toque de santo*, the drummers often arrive with slightly different expectations than the practitioners, sometimes resulting in overt conflict. The drummers do not simply exist to meet the needs of the practitioners. The cultivation, maintenance and identity of the fraternity, and the relationship between these endeavors and *aché*, are essential components of the aesthetic.

Differing expectations among the participants (i.e. drummers, *apón*, and practitioners), however, need not result in conflict. In fact, such conflict as described in Observations Three and Five are rare. The existence and acceptance of overlapping and semi-independent thematic acts provides a structure within which musicians of all skill levels can contribute to the broad goals of the ritual. Informal lessons and playful interactions in the form of song competitions and drumming competitions are simultaneously tangential, that is, an end within themselves, and integral to the overriding goals of the *toque de santo*. Without them, the ritual performances would grow stagnant. While adherence to tradition is an important attribute in Santería, innovation and individuality are highly regarded and necessary components of the belief and aesthetic systems. Whereas a *batá* performance in a concert venue might be judged for its flawless execution, the participants, musicians and even the *orisha* might best receive a ritual performance when individuals foster a learning environment and extend their abilities to and beyond their limits.

CHAPTER 6

LEARNING THE IYÁ AND DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALITY

When Chapter Four situates the *iyá* player as a teacher, and the musicians on the two smaller drums as students, one is left wondering how drummers learn to play the *iyá*. Much like *okónkolo* and *itótele* players, *iyá* players rely on vocal, visual and tactile cues, from both the *apón* and other non-drumming musicians.[54] They also rely heavily on repeated exposure to the performances of other *iyá* players, which is effective both when the student is playing the other two drums,[55] and when the student is participating as a non-drumming musician who sings, claps and observes. Because the nature of learning the *iyá* is less standardized than learning the *okónkolo* or *itótele*, I avoid making sweeping statements regarding the mechanics of learning specific *toques* and rhythms.

An *iyá* player is not simply expected to execute the correct rhythms at the correct moment. A good player moves beyond this, and is admired for his individual sound and style. It is difficult to define the source of individuality, but it is likely a combination of innate disposition and unique experiences. Unable to generalize the nature of this individuality, I investigate the playing style of master drummer, Pancho Quinto, and examine how his playing style shapes and informs his teaching

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[54] Vocal, visual and tactile cues are addressed in Chapter Five.

[55] In Chapter Four, I describe a process that helps drummers prepare to play the *itótele*, while they are playing the *okónkolo*. The process of learning the *iyá* is, in many ways, similar. While playing the *itótele*, drummers have ample opportunity to observe the *iyá*.

techniques. Beginning by examining Pancho Quinto's career, reputation and well-known playing style, it proceeds to consider how Pancho identifies himself and how his personal sense of identity pervades his playing and teaching styles. The following pages weave two stories: one of a master drummer who exemplifies what it means to play as a creative individual, and another of a teacher who tries to pass on these traits to his students. Though much of my interactions with Pancho take place in a secular setting, i.e. in his home with unconsecrated *batá*, the secular and the sacred are intimately linked.

Pancho Quinto: Rumbero and Batalero

In the 1970s the legendary group Afrocuba de Matanzas developed and premiered a new genre, the *batarumba*, breaking the boundaries between secular rumba and sacred *batá* drumming. In this style, a *batá toque* like *chachalekefon* is juxtaposed over the *tres golpes* rhythm that defines the medium-tempo rumba, *guaguancó*. The result is a highly charged, rhythmically dense hybrid.

With the late 1980s emergence of another fusion genre, *guarapachangéo*, Pancho Quinto positioned himself as a cutting edge musician.

> The *guarapachangéo* is a relatively modern style of rumba perhaps best exemplified by the legendary Pancho Kinto [*sic*] and one of Cuba's greatest groups, the Grupo Yoruba Andabo. The style is identified by the extensive freedom and 'conversation' among the drums. . . (Santos 1996, liner notes)

In the *guarapachangéo*, Pancho incorporates *batá* within rumba.[56] Unlike the

Afrocuba de Matanzas creation, which requires three *batá* players in addition to the

normal complement of rumba drummers, Pancho plays all the drums by himself. This

provides him the freedom to shape and control the drum conversation and allows him

to borrow rhythmic ideas from the rumba genres – *yambú, guaguancó, and columbia* –

as well as from the *batá* repertoire. In Figure 41 he demonstrates his unique

performing style. Sitting on a *cajón* (Sp. wood box), he holds a spoon in his left hand,

which he alternately strikes against the front of the *cajón* and a cowbell that is firmly

held in place by his right foot. His right hand may strike any of the *enú* heads of the

three *batá* that are stacked to his right, the side of the *cajón*, or the *conga* that is laying

on its side behind him, barely visible in this photo.

Figure 41: Pancho playing *guarapachangéo*
(Courtesy of Steve Bloom)

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[56] As many in the *batá* community are already aware, Pancho suffered severe strokes
in August and November of 2002. At the present time, much of his playing activities
are on hold until he recovers. As a sign of hope that he will again define cutting-edge
rumba, I use active, present tense verbs throughout this chapter.

Many know of Pancho's role as a founding member of the famous rumba group Yoruba Andabo, forged among Havana dockworkers in 1961. The group appears in the documentary by *El País de los Oricha* (Ruíz 1986), which features clips of Pancho both dancing and drumming rumba in his style. In 1990, Pancho was interviewed in the Cuban documentary, *Quién baila aquí la rumba sin lentejuelas*, which was re-released in Brooklyn by Blackmind Book Boutique in 1993 (Ruíz 1990).

Yoruba Andabo and Pancho Quinto received significant international attention in 1992 when they collaborated with Canadian Saxophonist, Jane Bunnett and appeared on her CD, *Spirits of Havana*. This was followed by a successful North American release of *Callejón de los Rumberos* by Yoruba Andabo in 1996. Though Pancho no longer works with the rumba group, he continues to record and travel internationally with Bunnett, and has appeared on three more of her recordings: *Chamalongo* (1997), *Ritmo & Soul* (2000) and *Cuban Odyssey* (2003). In 1998, he released his own album, *En el Solar la Cueva del Humo* [sic]. Additionally, Pancho has recorded with Omar Sosa on *Spirit of Roots* and *Bembón* (1999), Puentes Brothers on *Morumba Cubana* (2001), Caravana Cubana on *Del Alma* (2002), and Los Hombres Calientes on *Vodou Dance, Vol. 4* (2003).

Among his earliest influences was the legendary *batá* master, Jesús Pérez, with whom Pancho often played during his youth. Pérez was an original informant for the *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional*, which was established after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. It is an honor that was also extended to Pancho Quinto, though he left within a year, disillusioned with the constraints of folkloric performances and missing the vitality of the religious context.

Beyond his performing reputation, Pancho Quinto identifies himself, and is highly regarded, as a teacher. His individual style aims to open drummers' minds to the creative spirit of the *batá*. Some Cuban *batá* drummers deride Pancho's creativity, describing it as a liability that stems from his lack of knowledge of the fundamentals. Though he is my *padrino* (Sp. godfather) and primary influence, I have developed a comparative base by playing in multiple contexts and enlisting the instruction of several masters of the tradition. Pancho's teachings appear to be accurate transmission of the traditional *batá* repertoire and continue to inform every context I perform in. Master drummer Angel Bolaños, frankly criticizing the lack of respect for tradition among the youth, mentioned Pancho in a short list of elders he believes youth should seek to learn from and emulate (Bolaños 2003: communication).

Omo Eleguá (a Child of Eleguá)

In addition to being *omo* Aña and a master drummer, Pancho is a child of Eleguá, the *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) who manifests as a little boy, a trickster, and one who guards the crossroads. Pancho identifies very closely with his *orisha*, and openly displays his affection. One afternoon, when I was admiring the cabinet in his home where he stores his *orisha* and other ritual items, Pancho removed my video camera from its tripod and offered to film each of the shelves for me. In return, he only asked that I give him a copy of the video. Afterwards he removed a statue of the Infant of Atocha, a Catholic figure syncretized in Cuba with Eleguá, and proudly posed for a picture (Figure 42). The red and black

strings of beads draped over the statue represent Eleguá's colors. Notice the cabinet

behind Pancho, a permanent shrine to Eleguá and all the *orisha*.

Figure 42: Pancho Quinto holding a statuette of "El Ñino de Atoche"

After leaving Yoruba Andabo, Pancho cultivated a new ensemble he calls

Añagi, which is named after his spiritual path, the road of Eleguá that he follows. This

further exemplifies his close identification with his guardian *orisha*.[57]

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[57] Eleguá is said to have twenty-one aspects, roads, or avatars. It is difficult to find references to Añagi in the literature. According to Gonzalez-Wippler, "Anagüi, one of the most important aspects of the orisha, is the guardian of the cemetery's doors" (1973: 107). Añagi also figures prominently in a *patakín* (Lu. origin myth) chronicled by Natalia Bolívar where she describes Eleguá as "the son of *Okuboro* who was the king of Añagui" (1993: 140). Miguel Ramos states "*Eshú Ayankí* (*Añagui*) – lives at

The Little Boy

Like Eleguá, Pancho can be a child. His energy and youthfulness belie his advanced years. He walks through the streets of his neighborhood yelling to his friends and flirting with all the young women. He is often seen laughing, joking and making light of serious situations. He likes to exercise the extremes of his emotions. One moment, he is quiet and still, measuring the people and commotion around him with his shifting glances. In the next, he becomes animated, raising his arms above his head, pointing fingers and laughing at his own jokes. It is a wonderful, ever-present, quality that accompanies both his performance and his teaching. After my first lesson in Pancho's home in Vibora, Havana, in January 1999, we posed together for a picture (Figure 43). His childlike playfulness was immediately evident when he grabbed the shell of a *batá* and pulled it over my head.

Figure 43: Pancho Quinto and the author at Pancho's home in Vibora, Havana
(Courtesy of Linette Tobin)

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the shores of the ocean and is the origin of all *Elegbá*"
(http://ilarioba.tripod.com/articlesmine/Pantheon.htm (accessed November 30, 2002).

Most *batá* drummers are concerned with their physical presence, i.e. "looking cool." This translates to sitting with good posture, keeping your shoulders relaxed and executing rhythms with minimum exertion, giving the appearance that you are completely in control. To some degree it also means that if you make any mistakes, don't show it in your face. And if the entire ensemble falters because of the mistake, quickly blame another player! Pancho is completely comfortable with his physical presence; he doesn't worry about "looking cool." In Figure 44, Pancho and I are practicing in his front room. Sitting on a tiny chair with the *okónkolo* in his lap, he looks like a little boy. Acutely aware that there is both a video camera in the room and a photographer present, he comfortably sits in the little chair and continues to conduct our lesson.

Figure 44: Pancho Quinto and the author playing *batá* in the living room of his home in Vibora, Havana (Courtesy of Kevin McRae)

After one of our lessons, Pancho asked me to video his entire home and family. Pushing me out the front door, he locked me outside while he remained in the house. I turned on the camera and after about 10 seconds he opened the door, as if I had just

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knocked, and greeted me, "Ken! My friend! Welcome to my home. Come in." From there, we proceeded to film every room, greeting family and friends as they continued their daily chores. He took me into his backyard where we filmed the chickens and his fruit trees.

The following day, Pancho was still in a playful mood. Usually I set my video camera on a tripod in the corner of the room, trying to reduce its intrusion into our workspace. On this day, however, three Cuban drummers were at our lesson and I decided to let them play while I observed. Taking advantage of the occasion, I held the video camera in my hand and focused on Pancho to get close-ups of his technique. In the middle of the *toque*, while playing *iyá*, Pancho looked up, saw the camera and ran across the room, hunched over playing the *iyá* that still lay across his lap. He never missed a note. Three minutes later, Pancho and I reversed roles. I now had the *iyá* while he was holding the camera. For ten minutes he zoomed in and out on our faces, drums and hands, moving around the room trying to get each player from several angles.

During our early encounters, I was a little hesitant to pull out a notebook and paper, afraid that Pancho would dislike my desire to notate rhythms. Indeed, he didn't take to it well at first; he believed it was a distraction and impeded my learning. He acquiesced to my practice when he realized that my comprehension was significantly aided by what I wrote. I used these opportunities to analyze rhythms and support my aural abilities with a visual aid. When playing, I would never read from my notes. In his presence, I always played from memory. Ones' mind must be free to react to the

other drummers (and singers) in the room. Pancho made it clear to me, through his actions, that written notation does not accurately represent the musical tradition.

One afternoon, I asked Pancho to teach me a particularly difficult *toque*. It was late in the day and he was hesitant to begin something new. But I persisted; I explained that I would like to record it so I could study it that night. While he sat with the *iyá* and I sat with the *itótele*, we played it once or twice. After playing, I grabbed a pen and began feverishly writing down the rhythms. Pancho left the room to talk with some friends who had recently arrived. When he returned, I had the *iyá* in my lap, and played the *toque* flawlessly for him. His eyes nearly jumped out of his head, as he ran up to me with a finger pointed in my face yelling, "yeah, yeah, yeah man, yeah, yeah man." He jumped up and down, like a little child who was experiencing a sugar rush. He ran back out of the house and yelled for his friends to come and listen. He raced back into the room, and asked me to play it again. With his friends watching, it was impossible to miss the grin on his face, the pride he felt for his student and his work as a teacher. When we finished he was bouncing up and down and yelling again. His friends weren't half as impressed as he was, but this is Pancho's way. When he likes what you do, he shows it. Like a child, he doesn't try to hide his emotions. This type of overt recognition is rare among *batá* teachers. Others usually have a more tempered reaction. They may simply comment that I played it correctly, or indicate that I did some things correctly, but still need to work on others. But these outbursts are endemic to Pancho.

When Pancho teaches a *toque*, whether the student sits with the *okónkolo*, *itótele* or *iyá*, he plays everything at several tempos. Every *toque* has an acceptable

range of tempos. These are usually a factor of the song or dance that accompanies the *toque*, or some something related to theology (i.e. old *orishas* require slow tempos, while younger ones might prefer something quick). Pancho pushes tempos to the extremes, beyond the acceptable bounds. After I learn a *toque*, he plays them ridiculously fast and then shifts to the opposite extreme and plays the *toque* so painfully slow it is unrecognizable. Finally, he will return to the standard tempos, presumably with the hope that the student is rewarded with the ability to play more smoothly and that these outbursts towards the extremes have encouraged hands and mind to become more comfortable with the *toque*.

If he's not sitting behind a drum, Pancho is always in motion. He teaches from a standing position. His energy is boundless as he shifts from dancing to wagging his finger in my face. In Figure 45, Pancho stands in front of me while I play, one hand on the *batá* shell. He listens and watches closely, critical of my every move. When he likes what I've done he often backs up and dances.

Figure 45: Pancho Quinto and the author in Pancho's living room in Vibora, Havana. The author plays the *iyá* while Pancho stands with one hand on the *batá*.
(Courtesy of Kevin McCrae)

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The Trickster

His extreme playfulness earns Pancho the reputation of a trickster, particularly when he plays and teaches the *batá*. During our meetings in the US and Havana, from the summer of 1998 to January 2002, Pancho systematically taught me the entire *oro igbodú*, as well as much of remaining repertoire, on all three drums. Though I always recognized his penchant for trickery, it was during my lessons in 2002 that he revealed what a truly mischievous player/teacher he could be.

On January 5 we sat in his home with the *iyá* on my lap. Pancho picked up the *itótele* and I assumed he would tell me what to play so I could initiate the call on the *iyá*. Rather than speak, he surprised me by playing. In traditional circumstances, the *itótele* never enters first, and I was admittedly bewildered as I tried to determine what he was playing. A few moments passed before I recognized the *toque* "Tani tani shobi" for the *orisha* Inle. I tried to fit my part inside his, but repeatedly fumbled. Eventually Pancho stopped playing and laughed. He was enjoying my frustration. I took advantage of the pause and decided to play the call, hoping he would enter in the traditional manner (i.e. after the *iyá*), so that we might leave this uncomfortable moment behind us and play through the *toque* in a manner with which I was comfortable. Unfortunately, he stopped me and played the *itótele* part again, expecting me to follow. Again, I found it impossible to enter. We repeated this cycle one more time. When I finally figured it out, he paused and quietly spoke with his friend who was observing our lesson.

Suddenly, in mid-sentence with his friend, without looking in my direction or providing a verbal cue, Pancho again began to play and initiated a game of follow-the-

leader; he led on the *itótele*, while I followed on the *iyá*. First, he played "Lalubanche" for Eleguá. In this instance, I had no problem entering with my part. But as soon as I did it, he changed and played "Latopa," another *toque* for Eleguá. With this *toque*, I had trouble fitting my part inside his, just as with "Tani tani shobi." Once I got it right, he changed to Ogún and then to Changó. The *toque* for Changó, *titilaro*, has four distinct sections for the *itótele*. He played each of them, expecting me to follow.

Reviewing the video footage at a later date, I laugh at how silly I looked. Both the *itótele* and *iyá* parts for "Tani tani shobi" and "Latopa" are simple. That is to say, I knew them well. But the way I heard them and played them in the past led me to understand them only one way. Pancho taught me to rethink how I approach the *toque*.

Later in the lesson, Pancho returned to the game of follow-the-leader. This time he played the *iyá,* while I played *itótele*. Of course, this felt more natural to me. One after another, he played the calls for each of the following *toques*: "Chachalekefon," "Chenche kururu, " "Alaro," Ibeji, "Tuí-tuí," "Lalunbanche," "Chenche kururu," "Alaro," the *toque* for Obatalá, the *toque* for Ogún and "Oferere." In each instance, he waited for me to enter. Once he was confident I knew it, he stopped us and immediately called the next.

Several days later, Pancho surprised me yet another time. While this game of follow-the-leader feels natural when he plays the *iyá*, and I've come to expect it while he plays the *itótele*, I never expected to hear him do the same thing with the *okónkolo*. But this is precisely what he did. The first series of *toques* played were: Agayú, "Tuí-tuí," "Taniboya" and "Meta-meta." These were followed by: "Tuí-tuí," "Alaro," the *toque* for Ochosi, "Tuí-tuí," and "Egguado." Just when I think I had him figured out,

he plays something unexpected. He is a trickster, always trying to catch the other drummers with an unexpected musical gesture. His approach prepares his students to be ready for anything and encourages them to think creatively. His unique style of teaching prepares *iyá* players to not only lead the ensemble, but to respond and follow. It challenges the premise that the ensemble is a hierarchy with the *iyá* on top and the *okónkolo* at the bottom. The role of each of the three drums, and their relationship to one another, are not so simple as they often appear. Rhythms, along with their meanings and usages, are taught and learned from many sources.

The Trickster Teaches Itótele

Chapter Four discussed traditional techniques used to transmit information between the *iyá* and *itótele* players. The following discussion reiterates some of these points, illustrating how Pancho applies standard techniques with a personal touch, in a manner consistent with his playful nature. This analysis discusses observations I made while Pancho demonstrated the *toque* "Elekoto" for the *orisha* Agayú. Figure 46contains three versions of the 4-measure cycle that comprise the third part of "Elekoto." With respect to my various teachers, I mark the *itótele* hit in mm. 2 with parenthesis. Though Pancho teaches me to strike this note, most players and teachers I've engaged omit it. When included, we see exact coincidence between the *iyá enú* and *itótele chachá*. This is a common structural phenomenon in many *toques* and resembles how Pancho plays the *toque* when he first teaches it. When his students become comfortable playing this *toque* on the *itótele*, Pancho varies the *iyá chachá* (B). Rather than mark all the *itótele enú* hits, he delays the *chachá* notes in mm. 3-4

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and strikes them together with his own *iyá enú*. This is a common *chachá* delaying technique used to vary this *iyá* drum.

The third 4-measure cycle (C), however, illustrates Pancho as a trickster. He executed this pattern during one of our lessons, while playing with two experienced Cuban drummers. When Pancho played his tricky variation, the *itótele* player looked over at Pancho with a bewildered expression on his face. By omitting the hits in measure 3 and avoiding the downbeat of measure 4, Pancho significantly altered the melody that exists between the *enú* heads of the two drums. In instances where the drum melodies are fixed and predictable, as they are in this case, drummers rely upon them to remain oriented within the polyphonic texture. Aware of this crutch, Pancho undermined the *itótele's* confidence, causing the performer to think harder about his part and, presumably, develop a deeper understanding of it.

Figure 46: *Toque* **"Elekoto" for** *orisha* **Agayú (Excerpt)**

The Crossroads

Crossroads are places where two or more things meet. Eleguá is present at all crossroads. In the Lucumí worldview, this refers to ritual spaces and events where communication exists between humans, the *orisha* and the *egun* (Lu. ancestors). Eleguá, the messenger of the *orisha*, is honored first on all ritual occasions to guarantee success. The crossroads also refer to street corners and the doorways of houses. Eleguá lives behind the street door in the homes of believers and guards this important crossroad, ensuring that good enters and the bad is turned away.

Pancho is a musical explorer of crossroads, constantly exploiting the commonalities between various genres of music. His accomplishments in *rumba*, where he combines *batá* with *yambú, guaguancó*, and *columbia,* are a testament to this trait. He also explores connections between various *batá toques*, and links pieces of music that are not traditionally performed together. This section recalls three occasions when Pancho played a sequence of *toques* that defied accepted traditions.

In the first example, Pancho recognizes similarities between a section of the *toque* for Agayú (presented without variations or conversations in Figure 47) and section of the *toque* for Oyá (presented as an excerpt in Figure 48). Measures 5-6 of Figure 47 and measures 6-7 of Figure 48 contain identical *itótele* and *iyá* parts. They both also contain similar *okónkolo* parts, characterized by steady quarter-note *chachá* hits and a two-measure pattern on the *enú*. Using this section as a means to pivot between the two *toques*, Pancho creates a hybrid *toque*, which includes the first-half of Agayú and the second-half of Oyá. The *oro igbodú*, as it is commonly played, inserts several *toques* between Agayú and Oyá. I have never heard these two *toques* played

sequentially and have certainly never heard another drummer link them in the same manner. Some patakín describe Agayú and Oyá as husband and wife (Cortez 2000: 170-182). Perhaps this bond explains the musical similarities between the two *toques*.

Figure 47: *Toque* for Agayú (without variations or conversations)

Figure 48: Excerpt of *toque* for Oyá (Excludes material both before and after)

The second example highlights the fact that the *toques* for Osun, Orishaoko and Oba each begin with the same rhythm, often called "Kan-kan" or "Hueso." Actually the *toque* for Oba is slightly different from the other two, but Pancho downplays this difference. Figure 49 illustrates the two versions of "Kan-kan;" only one note differs between the two examples.

Figure 49: Opening rhythm ("Kan-kan"or "Hueso") for *iyá* in (A) Osun and Orishaoko, and (B) Oba

The "game" Pancho plays with these *toques* is very similar to follow-the-leader, described earlier. He initiates the sequence by playing "Kan-kan" on the *iyá*, but offers no indication which *toque* he intends to play; Pancho expects the *itótele* player to be ready for any of the three. This is particularly devious when Pancho begins by playing Orishaoko, and shifts to Osun. The Orishaoko *toque* begins with "Kan-kan" (A), continues to a contrasting section (B) before returning to "Kan-kan" (A). Then it moves to a second contrasting section (C) before returning to the first contrasting section (B) and finally concluding (ABACB). Osun also begins with "Kan-kan" and proceeds through two contrasting sections (D and E) before returning to the first contrasting section (D) and ending (ADED). When Pancho wants to test the *itótele* player's attentiveness he may initiate Orishaoko and play the first three

sections: ABA. Instead of continuing to sections C and B, he will substitute D, E, and D from Osun. The result is a composite of the two *toques*, ABADED.

The third example demonstrates how a song can become the thread that links various *toques*. While three students sing the song "Ogúndé arere," Pancho leads the *batá* ensemble through several changes. He initiates the sequence with the most likely accompaniment to the song, the salute *toque* for Ogún. Without pausing the song, he changes *toques*, moving from the *seco toque* for Ogún to the *seco toque* for Obaloke (used to accompany many songs, especially ones for Ochún), and then to the generic *toques* "Nyongo" and "Chachalekefon." His demonstration initially strikes me as unconventional because, to that date, I had never heard drummers change *toques* under a single song in a performance situation. Later, after finally witnessing it in a *toque de santo*, I learned that this does indeed occur. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to see if Pancho was willing to perform this sequence, or a portion of it, in a *toque de santo*; I suspect he would. Experiencing *toques* in new contexts, as with unusual tempos and unexpected juxtapositions, helps to fine-tune *batá* drummers' understanding of the repertoire. After sharing the observations I made throughout this chapter with David Font (2003), he admitted that he has witnessed all these teaching techniques, and concluded, "This playfulness creates familiarity, ease, and sophistication."

Teaching Creativity

Creativity is a central component of Pancho Quinto's persona, playing and teaching. It is a contagious attribute that becomes readily posited in his students. Pedro

Martinez, an emerging Cuban artist in New York, and close personal friend and student of Pancho, reveals that he had many influences while learning the *batá* and formulating his personal style.[58] Though he prefers to emulate the style of master drummer Regino Jimenez, he admits that Pancho is the source of much of his creativity. This extends beyond *batá* drumming and into popular Latin styles that are Pedro's mainstay in New York. During informal interviews and conversations, Pedro demonstrates how he incorporates *batá toques* into conga riffs. The trick, he explains, is to pick a *toque* and play it at an odd tempo or to phase it by an eighth-note with respect to the clave rhythm, thereby obscuring the reference and creating something original. It is little surprise that students of Pancho would "cross" genres and use *batá* rhythms in a secular style.

Though one learns many things about creativity simply by listening to, playing with, and emulating Pancho, it is also important to identify instances when he explicitly tries to teach these values. One afternoon while we were working on the *toque* "Alaro," Pancho played the *iyá* and I played the *itótele*. After the lesson concluded, I went back to my house and studied the videotape, trying to emulate his style as accurately as possible. When I returned for my lesson the next morning, I attempted to play "Alaro" on the *iyá*. He stopped me short, sensing that I was trying to copy his style and said to me, "Don't play for me. Play for you. Play whatever you want; from your heart."

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[58] Pedro "Pedrito" Martinez is introduced in the "Personal Experience and Fieldwork " section of my introduction.

Standing in front of me, flailing his arms as if he was playing the *iyá*, Pancho

spurted out the following syllables, in an effort to imitate free-time drumming:

dah, dah, dah, goh-goh-goh-dah-goh-goh, dah-goh-goh-dah,…
dah,...,dah,…,dah-dah, goh-goh-goh-goh-goh-goh, dah-goh-goh-dah

He allowed me a chance to execute this type of playing, but clearly I didn't succeed.

He patiently stopped me and requested the *iyá*, proceeding to demonstrate his intent.

After playing the call, and allowing the *itótele* and *okónkolo* to enter, Pancho

started to improvise. It was completely "out of time," and consisted of sporadic bursts

of notes followed by unmeasured pauses. He exhibited a wide range of dynamics and

colors as he struck the drums several different ways. It wasn't long before he managed

to knock the *okónkolo*, an advanced player, off the beat. He stopped playing, and

began yelling and laughing. He asked me if I saw what he was trying to do, and set me

back on the task. Each time I perform this *toque* on the *iyá*, I recall his instructions that

day: "Play from your heart!" It is a small piece of guidance that I believe applies to all

the *toques*

Conclusions

Pancho's distinct style of playing and teaching derive from his relationship

with Eleguá, the *orisha* who owns his head and to whom he is strongly devoted.

Eleguá is a little boy, a trickster, and the guardian of the crossroads. Pancho's youthful

energy masks his advanced years. At heart, he is a child. He jokes, laughs, and plays.

Sometimes he even looks like a little boy. And like all little boys, he wraps himself in

mischief, which earns himself the reputation of a trickster. This is particularly true when he plays *rumba* and *batá*.

Pancho flips performance conventions upside down. When it is well established that the *iyá* should lead, he forces the *iyá* to become a follower, leading instead with the *itótele* or even the *okónkolo*. When *toques* are clearly built upon a melody generated between the lowest drumheads, as in the *toque* "Elekoto," he fundamentally alters the melody, pulls the rug out from under the *itótele* player, and forces his students to expand their understanding of these *toques*.

Both as a *rumbero* (Sp. performer of rumba) and as a *batá* drummer, Pancho is widely recognized for his creativity. He is admired for fusing or "crossing" several genres of music, contributing to the development of a modern rumba known as *guarapachangéo*. He sees connections between *batá toques*, which are typically unnoticed by his peers, and illustrates them by making unlikely transitions. He explores the musical commonalities between divergent genres and pieces of music within a genre. He explores the musical crossroads of *batá*. Some of his contemporaries deride his playing because they believe it is too creative, deviating far from the established norm, and tradition. But I understand *batá* drumming to be a dynamic tradition.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF "NYONGO" (I)

"Nyongo" is a generic *toque* that accompanies hundreds of songs that match its 6/8-meter.[59] It is a deceptively simple two-bar pattern that is interrupted periodically by conversations between the *iyá* and the *itótele*. These call and response exchanges embody many of the aesthetic ideals presented and developed earlier in this dissertation. My analysis of nyongo, divided between two chapters, begins with an examination of clave, a rhythm and underlying principle that provides the foundation for this and many other *toques*. It continues by relating the principles of clave to nyongo's two structural components, basic patterns and conversations. Confirming the hierarchical nature of the musical system, where the *iyá* represents the leader of the musical ensemble, the first chapter draws initially from my broad experiences in ritual and secular contexts, and concludes by examining three well-known commercially produced and available recordings by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Emilio Barreto's ensemble and Abbilona.

The second chapter expands upon this analysis by focusing entirely on selected excerpts from the recordings of the three professional groups. It examines how call

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[59] Due to its extensive use in this chapter, I have chosen to remove all emphasis in future statements of the word nyongo. It will appear as any English noun, without quotation marks and capitalized according to usage.

and response conversations provide a forum for drummers, particularly the *iyá* and *itótele* players, to develop advanced music skills and sensibilities. Ritual performances of this *toque* promote creativity and individuality as ensembles develop signature conversations, which are crafted within the bounds of established rules and tradition.

Selection of Performances

Unlike previous chapters, which address extra-musical activities, the next two chapters focus on musical sound. When selecting appropriate performances to analyze, the first consideration was to decide whether to focus on live rituals or choose from the growing collection of commercially available recordings. In the studio, drummers make value-related decisions based primarily on sound and minimize the influence of thematic acts such as salutations, *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon) possession, and student/teacher exchanges. Though studio performances lack the spontaneity and engaged practitioners associated with live performance, they hold strong appeal because they provide opportunities for the drummers to carefully evaluate each of their takes and choose the performances they judge the best.

Further advantages are gained by using these commercial recordings. Paramount is the ease with which my transcriptions, analysis and conclusions can be scrutinized, challenged and expanded upon by the academic and Santería communities. These recordings, if not already in the personal collections of interested parties, are easily obtainable through most major outlets. Further, there is a level of disrespect associated with recording rituals performances that include possessions by the *orisha*. Concerned with alienating portions of the Santería community with whom

I hope to continue collaborating in the future, commercial recordings allow me to respect the privacy of the religious context by avoiding the uncomfortable and ethically questionable process of transcribing and publishing my field recordings.[60]

While *toques de santo* may extend from four to six hours, a compact disc can accommodate only a limited amount of recorded materials. The performance of individual *toques* and songs on the CD are typically abbreviated by the omission of some repetition. Drawing from my experiences as an observer and performer at ritual and concert performances, and agreeing with Hagedorn's (2001) assertions that the sacred and secular contexts mutually inform one another, I view these recordings as distilled versions of the live product. While the differences are real and may temper the following analysis, I contend that these recorded performances embody the essence of the religious context, and preserve the aesthetic ideals. Each of the following three excerpts have been transcribed and included in the appendix:

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[60] Though many members of the Santería community oppose audio recording both the sacred *batá* (Aña) and ritual performances, there are many precedents that suggest this taboo is negotiable. In the absence of a strong secular folkloric tradition, early studies likely recorded the sacred *batá* (Aña), as there were probably few, if any, sets of unconsecrated *batá*. This observation may be true for Fernando Ortiz, as well as, Lydia Cabrera and Josefina Tarafa, whose 1957 recordings were recently released by Smithsonian Folkways (2001). Slightly more controversial is another recent release, by Emilio Barreto (2001), which is comprised of excerpts from an actual ritual and includes instances where the *orisha* can be heard in the background. During my personal conversations with Angel Bolaños, the master drummer indicated that he audio and video recorded many of his rituals. These, he says, are sent to drummers in New York, for purposes of documentation. But he made it clear to me that such things should never become commercial and existed only for instruction and documentation. Though I often record ceremonies, I remain cognizant of the varied views of the community and, for the time, keep these in my personal collection.

1) Track thirteen of *Ito Iban Echu* (1996) by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas (0:00 – 2:35)
2) Track four of *Santisimo* [sic] (1996) (0:00-2:30) by Emilio Barreto's ensemble
3) Track two of *Oyá* (1999) by Abbilona (0-4:30)

Background of Groups/Artists

Los Muñequitos de Matanzas is among the oldest folkloric groups currently performing in Cuba. Formed in 1952, before the Cuban Revolution, they have weathered the political and economic turmoil of the last 50 years and surfaced as the best-known folk ensemble from the city of Matanzas. Respected around the world, as well as locally, the group began to tour internationally in the late 1980s, including several tours in the United States beginning in 1992. Though originally a rumba ensemble (secular Afro-Cuban drumming, singing and dancing genre), they later added religious music, including the *batá* drumming of Santería, to their performance repertoire. Their compact disc entitled *Ito Iban Echu* (1996) is devoted entirely to the music of Santería and is representative of the unique *batá* style that is performed in the province of Matanzas.

The compact disc *Santisimo* (1996) features master drummer and New York legend, Orlando "Puntilla" Rios, who arrived from Havana in 1981 during a phase of US-Cuba history known by some as the Mariel Boat Lift. His arrival in New York City ignited a young, but developing *batá*-drumming community, as he was "more than willing to teach New York drummers the intricacies of batá" (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 12). Soon after his arrival, Puntilla formed the group Nueva Generación and began presenting these sacred traditions in public venues. These early

accomplishments elevated Puntilla into a highly regarded position among *batá* drummers. Over twenty years later, many still consider Puntilla to be the most influential *batá* drummer in New York (Vélez 2000: 148) while others reach even farther and believe that he "is unquestionably the most popular and influential olubata [*batá* master] in the United States today" (Mason 1992: 20).

Abbilona is a relatively young ensemble from Havana that has recently dominated the Santería music market with the release of sixteen successful compact discs since 1999. The performers are in demand at *toques de santo* in Havana neighborhoods and their recordings are highly valued by *batá* drummers both in Cuba and the United States. Their style is representative of a younger generation and contrasts with the approaches of the established masters that perform on *Ito Iban Echu* (1996) and *Santisimo* (1996).

Together, these three recordings represent a wide sampling of *batá* styles by encompassing divergent regional (Havana, Matanzas and New York) and generational differences. Looking past the individualized approaches of each ensemble, the following analysis demonstrates the underlying rules and aesthetics that are ever-present during performances of the *toque* nyongo.

The Basic Pattern of Nyongo

Though there are several variants of the basic pattern, Figure 50 illustrates the first version of nyongo taught to me by all of my teachers in Havana and the United

States.[61] The individual parts of this *toque* can be heard and understood several ways. Figure 51a illustrates the composite melody that is created between the *chachá* heads of all three drums. This melody, with the highest pitch on the downbeat followed by descending figures, propels the music forward, providing an accented downbeat and rhythmic drive. Figure 51b illustrates its complement, the composite melody created between the three *enú* heads of the drums. Though it also contributes to the rhythmic drive, this five-pitch melody represents the primary source of melodic interest.
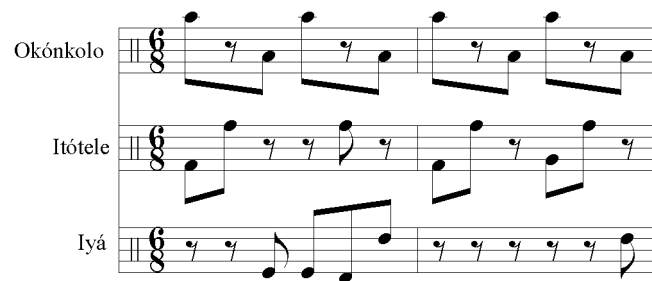
Figure 50: Basic pattern for nyongo

A

B
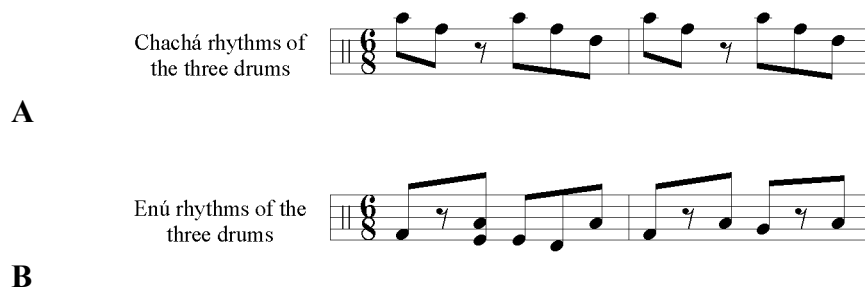
Figure 51: Composite melodies within nyongo.

Though there is logic to dividing the six drumheads into these two categories (*enú* vs. *chachá*), this approach fails to consider musical function. For instance, the *okónkolo* works in coordination with the *itótele enú* as a timekeeper. The regular

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[61] It is important to note that in Matanzas, *batá* drummers perform a slight variation in the *iyá* part. However, the analysis of a performance by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, in the second half of this chapter, reveals that the Matanzas drummers are familiar and comfortable with the above pattern and regard it as a variation on their basic pattern.

pattern of these three heads constitutes an ostinato that rarely deviates (Figure 52a). The *enú* of the *iyá* and *itótele* are heard as a simple melody (Figure 52b). Unlike the previous figures, this melody is regularly altered as the *batá* "call," "speak," and "converse" with one another (Figure 52c). Finally, the *iyá chachá* is employed in a variety of ways. Sometimes it appears to be a part of the timekeeping ostinato (Figure 52d) and at other times, it is used in conversations with the *enús* of the *iyá* and *itótele* (Figure 52e). Together, these three drumheads provide the ebb and flow of a rhythmic and melodic tension. They respond to the songs of the *apón*, the energy of the chorus, and the agility of the dancers. It is these three drum heads that comprise the bulk of my analysis of the *toque* nyongo.

Figure 52: Composite melodies within nyongo

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Clave: A Structural Principle

When first transcribing nyongo, I perceived it as a four-beat pattern with a triplet swing, and initially notated it in 12/8-meter. Through time, I began to sense the underlying structural principle that clearly divides this measure in half. In recognition of the organizing principle known as clave, which underpins a large portion of *batá* drumming and is the "cornerstone of Cuban music" (Santos 1986), nyongo is best represented as two measures in 6/8-meter, rather than as one measure of 12/8. Clave is not only a rhythmic pattern but is a set of "underlying rules" (Amira and Cornelius 1992: 23). In Cuban music, it is both "the most basic fundamental and a very complex concept at the same time" (Santos 1986: 32). Though there are several variations of the clave rhythm,[62] the one commonly known as "rumba clave" is most often associated with *batá*. This rhythm is represented by western music notation in both 4/4- and 6/8-meter (Figure 53a-b), but like most *batá* rhythms, it sometimes falls somewhere in between. Note how the bar line divides the five hits into a pattern of 3 and 2. This is called "3-2 clave." Clave can also be played by swapping the two

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[62] Two common variations of clave are known as "son clave" and "rumba clave," so-named due to their close association with the Cuban folkloric genres known as *son* and *rumba*, respectively. The more popularized former version, illustrated in Figure 87, is often refered to as "white clave," because of its associaton with European-influened Cuban popular and folkloric genres, and Afro-Cuban inspired western popular and classical music. By comparision, rumba clave, also refered to as "black clave," is considered more rhythmically challenging and is closey associated with Afro-Cuban genres like rumba and *batá*.

measures so that the bar line divides the five hits into a pattern of 2 and 3 (53c-d), termed "2-3 clave" (Santos 1986: 33). [63]

A: Rumba clave rhythm in in 4/4 meter (3-2)

B: Rumba clave rhythm in 6/8 meter (3-2)

C: Rumba clave rhythm in 4/4 meter (2-3)

D: Rumba clave rhythm in 6/8 meter (2-3)
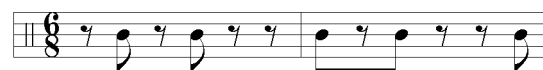
Figure 53: Rumba clave rhythm in 4/4 and 6/8 meters

Clave, therefore, is a two-bar rhythm. Afro-Cuban musicians often refer to the "two sides of clave" and may ask the typical question, "On what side of clave does the song begin?" They must keep track of where they are in clave at all times. Sometimes a singer will accidentally start a song on the "three-side" when it should have been started on the "two-side." When one does this, they are said to have "crossed clave." A musician can communicate this to the singer by taking the index finger of each hand and forming an "X" to indicate, "you have crossed clave." If the musician is the *iyá* player in the *batá* ensemble, and his hands are busily striking the drums, he may

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[63] For an excellent discussion of clave and its relationship to popular Latin styles, refer to Rebecca Mauleón's *Salsa Guidebook for Piano and Ensemble* (1993).

briefly free one of his hands and cross his index and middle fingers to indicate the same.

Each side of clave possesses a unique musical character, apparent in both the rhythm itself and in music that is organized by its principle. Generally, the three-side builds tension while the two-side provides resolution. This can best be visualized when looking at the example of 4/4-clave (Figure 53a-c). On the three-side, though the downbeat is stated, the second and third hits are syncopated, building the rhythmic tension. To maximize this tension, Afro-Cuban musicians usually de-emphasize the downbeat and emphasize the second hit (upbeat of beat 2), referred to as the *bombo*. On the two-side of clave, however, there are no offbeat syncopations. Both hits are on beats, the second beat being relatively strong. Hence, the two-side resolves the syncopated tension created on the three-side. In 6/8-meter (Figure 53b-d) the first hit on the two-side of clave no longer lands on a beat. The result is a smoother rhythm with slightly less contrast between the opposing sides of clave than in its 4/4 counterpart. Nonetheless, the general sense of rhythmic tension and resolution are still evident.

An individual *batá* drum rarely states the entire clave rhythm (Martinez 2002: communication). Instead, they make partial references or divide the rhythm among two or more drums. While in some cases a listener can easily discern clave, at other times one can only identify traces of the rhythm. Musicians must always track the clave; they need to understand where clave would fall if it were inserted by the clapping of hands or the shaking of an *achere* (Lu. a shaker similar to a maraca). When a novice first learns a *toque*, he is encouraged to ask, "Where is clave in this

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toque?" The student may clap a 6/8-clave pattern while the teacher plays, thereby illustrating the exact relationship between his pattern and clave. Most of my informants recognize clave as the primary reference tool for understanding the relationship between all parts of the *batá* ensemble, the singers and the dancers.

Figure 54a illustrates the relationship between clave and nyongo. The *iyá enú*, which is completely contained within the three-side (Figure 54b), provides the characteristic rhythmic tension by avoiding the downbeat, beginning on the *bombo*, and sounding its final note on an upbeat (i.e. 5th eighth note in a measure of 6/8). While the *iyá* leads this musical phrase, the *itótele* follows with three hits, which begin on the two-side and continue through to the following three-side (Figure 55c). Emphasizing strong beats, the *itótele* resolves the natural tension of the preceding measure.

Figure 54: 3-2 clave compared with the *iyá* and *itótele enú* drumheads of nyongo

In summary, of the six drumheads that constitute the *batá* ensemble; three (*enú* of the *okónkolo*, *chachá* of the *okónkolo* and *chachá* of the *itótele*) serve a metronomic function as they provide forward momentum and rhythmic drive; two (*enú* of the *itótele* and *enú* of the *iyá*) carry the melodic interest; and one (*chachá* of the *iyá*) shifts between these two roles. All *batá toques*, including nyongo, adhere to a set of underlying rules defined by both a concrete and an abstract conception of the rhythms known as clave. Within nyongo, the roles of the *itótele* and *iyá* are clearly demarcated. Each drum has a designated space within which it is allowed to "speak." The *iyá* dominates the three-side of clave and the *itótele* dominates the two-side. As a result, the drums embody the musical characteristics that are inherent to their respective sides of clave; tension for the *iyá* and resolution for the *itótele*.

A Note Regarding Transcription Conventions

Several conventions have been adopted to ease confusion in this analysis. Recognizing that two measures in 6/8-meter are required to complete a clave cycle, the performances from the three recordings, and all excerpted portions, are transcribed in the composite time signature 6/8 + 6/8 to ensure that measure numbers and cycles of clave coincide. When appropriate, the analysis provides specificity by indicating both the measure number and by specifying either the three-side or the two-side of clave.

In an effort to be concise and focused, the *okónkolo* has been omitted from the transcriptions and analysis. In this hierarchical ensemble, the *iyá* is permitted to play variant rhythms with both drumheads, while the *itótele* only alters the *enú*. At the

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bottom is the *okónkolo*, relegated to an ostinato. In nyongo, the *okónkolo* typically

plays the repetitive "ki-la" pattern that was illustrated in Figure 14. This pattern is

shown again in Figure 55a alongside several familiar variations. Though Figures 55b

and c are not very common, they are included here to provide a comprehensive

picture. When transcribing the three recordings, I was unable to discern any deviations

from Figure 6a.

Figure 55: Familiar *okónkolo* patterns in *toque* nyongo
Structural Components: Basic Patterns and Conversations

Though the basic pattern (Figure 50) represents the foundation of nyongo, this

toque is capable of extensive rhythmic, melodic and motivic development. A

combination of variations in the *iyá*, and interplay among the *itótele* and the *iyá*, can

add both musical tension and excitement to the performance. While casual listening

seemingly detects a chaotic interplay between the drums, a careful analysis exposes

the underlying structure of these conversations, which are governed by a tight set of

rules related, predictably, to clave. Unlike the multi-sectional *toques* of the *oro*

igbodú, nyongo consists of a single section created by the repetition and alternation of

two structural components, basic patterns and calls, both signaled by the *iyá*. When the

iyá sounds a basic pattern, the *itótele* simply rides its three-beat pattern as introduced

in Figure 50. By contrast, when the *iyá* disrupts the basic pattern with a call, the *itótele*

completes the conversation by issuing an altered response.

Basic Patterns – Havana v. Matanzas

In order to recognize calls, which develop into conversations, the common variants of the basic pattern must first be familiar. Two distinct styles of drumming have evolved in Cuba, one centered in the city of Havana and the other centered in the city of Matanzas. Though *batá* performance practice in the two regions share many commonalities, clear distinctions exist, especially with regard to the repertoire in the *oro igbodú*. Nyongo however, which is not part of the *oro igbodú*,[64] exhibits less pronounced stylistic distinctions. The conclusions developed here, therefore, are applicable to both traditions, and help reveal unifying aesthetic principles between the two traditions, which are sometimes appreciated for their distinctions.

Figure 56 identifies six motives that comprise the basic *iyá* pattern and several common variants. Motive-H is the basic pattern as it was introduced in Figure 50. It receives the label "H" to indicate that this exists primarily in the Havana style of playing. Motives-H^1 and -H^2 are variations that are characterized by identical rhythms and slightly altered pitches. Motive-M could be perceived as a variation of motive-H, as well. However, its label "M" indicates that it is the basic pattern in the Matanzas style of playing. Motives-M^1 and -M^2 appear as hybrids of motives-H and –M, respectively. While motive-M^1 contains the *chachá* pattern of motive-M and the *enú* pattern of motive-H, motive-M^2 substitutes the *enú* pattern of motive-H^2.

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[64] Thanks to David Font (2003) for refuting this statement by pointing me towards the *Sacred Rhythms of Cuban Santería* (CIDMUC 1995). The fifth selection in the Matanzas Oro Igbodú (Babalú Ayé) contains nyongo. Though this practice is common in Matanzas, it is not a part of the Havana tradition.
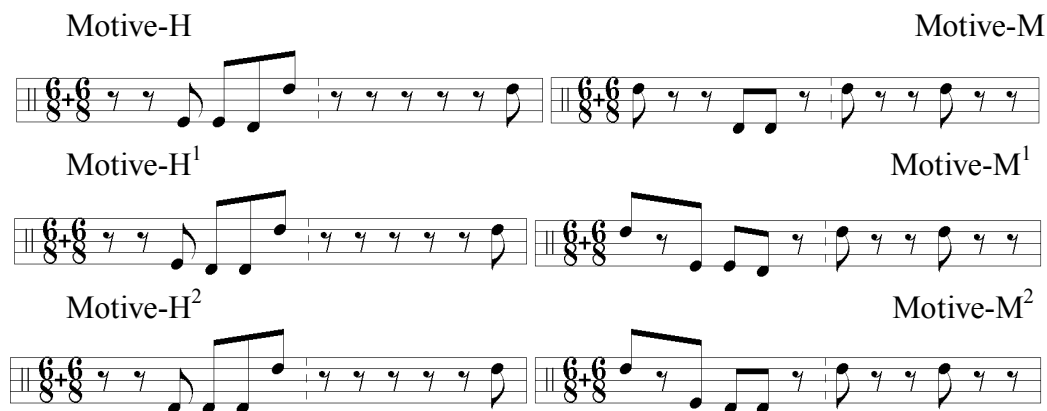
Figure 56: Six *iyá* variations in *toque* nyongo

The differences between the basic Havana and Matanzas patterns (motives-H and –M) are striking. While the *chachá* in the Havana pattern is syncopated, in the Matanzas pattern it clearly marks the strong beats (1st and 4th eighth notes in 6/8). Whereas the *enú* in the Havana pattern begins on the *bombo* (3rd eighth note in 6/8 on the three-side), the *enú* in the Matanzas pattern begins after the *bombo* on a strong beat (4th eighth note in 6/8). The downbeat oriented Matanzas pattern is more stable and static than the syncopated Havana version. These differences are often exploited by ensembles and are particularly evident in the music of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

A close study of the three transcriptions provided in the appendix reveals some interesting features of these motives. On the recordings, variants of the basic pattern account for a majority of the musical material (Table 1). In total, of the 255 measures transcribed, 150, or 59%, contain basic patterns. Further, there is a tendency to decreasingly employ the basic patterns as the performances progress. On average, in the first half of nyongo performances, drummers are occupied with the basic pattern 67% of the time. In the second half, this number reduces to 51%. Performances of

nyongo are generally perceived to grow in excitement and energy, achieved by the manipulation of a variety of musical features. This can be a product of textual choices by the *apón*, a gradually increasing tempo, or as illustrated here, by decreasing the usage of basic pattern variants and thereby replacing them with high-energy call and response conversations.

	# of mm.	# of mm. with basic patterns	% of mm. with basic patterns	% of mm. in 1st half with basic patterns	% of mm. in 2nd half with basic patterns
Muñequitos	62	41	66%	71%	61%
Emilio Barreto	59	36	61%	69%	52%
Abbilona	134	73	54%	64%	44%
Totals	255	150	59%	67%	51%

Table 1: *Frequency* of Basic Pattern in recorded performances by Los Muñequitos, Emilio Barreto's ensemble and Abbilona

Ensembles can also manipulate performative energy by selecting basic pattern variants with differing degrees of syncopation. Of the three ensembles chosen for this analysis, one (Los Muñequitos) performs in the Matanzas style and two (Emilio Barreto's ensemble and Abbilona) perform in the Havana style. Naturally, one would expect each to employ their motives from their respective traditions. Though this is true for the Havana groups, the Los Muñequitos *iyá* player displays a wide musical palette and freely borrows motives from both his native Matanzas tradition and from nearby Havana. By employing a wide range of motives, the *iyá* player controls the energy level.

Table 2 charts the motives used by the *iyá* drummer on the Los Muñequitos recording. The initial fifteen measures (mm.1-15) are dominated by the least

syncopated basic pattern variant described above with twelve statements of motive-M. In the remaining fifty measures, this stable motive appears only two more times (mm.33-34). The next twenty measures (mm. 16-35) alternate between motives-M^1, -M^2 and -H^2, but focus primarily on the Matanzas-based variants. The final twenty-six measures (mm. 35-62) are the most syncopated as they consist of sixteen measures of motive-H^2 and include no references to the Matanzas motives.

Measure Number	Motive		Measure Number	Motive		Measure Number	Motive
1-8	M		20	S. Call		32	M^1
9	S. Call		21	M^2		33-34	M
10	M^1		22	S. Call		35	S. Call
11-13	M		23	M^2		36-38	H^2
14	M^1		24	S. Call		39-41	C. Conv.
15	M		25	M^2		42-43	H^2
16	S. Call		26-27	H^2		44-46	C. Conv.
17	M^1		28	S. Call		47-50	H^2
18	S. Call		29	M^2		51-55	C. Conv.
19	M^2		30-31	S. Call		56-62	H^2

Table 2: Measure by measure outline of Los Muñequitos' performance. "M," "M^1," etc., refers to motive used in a basic pattern measure. "S. Call" is an abbreviation for "Simple Call." "C. Conv." is an abbreviation for "Continuing Conversation."

Conversations: Simple Calls

When becoming acquainted with nyongo on the *itótele*, the first calls I learned to recognize were simple calls (author's term)[65], which are the foundation of more complex conversations. The most common one is easy to identify because the *iyá*

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[65] Through this chapter and the following, I add qualifiers to the emic terminology. My *batá* informants readily use the term *llame* (Sp. call), but do not distinguish between various types. When I feel I have introduced a non-native term, I indicate this with a parenthetical note.

inserts a strong accent after the downbeat of the three-side and avoids the *bombo*.

They are contained within a single measure and are bracketed by the basic pattern.

Figure 57 compares the basic Havana pattern with two call and response episodes. In

this illustration, the *iyá* and *itótele* repeatedly perform their basic pattern (mm. 1).

When the *iyá* player wants to "converse" with the *itótele*, he plays a call as indicated

on the three-side of measure 2. After the *itótele* responds on the two-side, both

drummers return to basic pattern (mm. 3) until another call is issued. Though these

common *itótele* responses share the same rhythm, the pitches are slightly altered.

Figure 57: Common *iyá* call and two common *itótele* responses

It is interesting to compare these conversations with the unstated but ever-

present clave rhythm. Focusing on the *enú* heads, Figure 58 demonstrates how the *iyá*

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and the *itótele* appear to "dance" around the clave; with the exception of the downbeat, no other pitches sound simultaneously with the cornerstone rhythm.

Figure 58: Comparison of common *iyá* call and *itótele* responses with clave rhythm.

On the three recordings, simple calls appear only 19 times in 250 measures. Their simplicity in relation to more complex conversations positions them in the early portions of performances. In the Muñequitos performance (Table 2), they appear 8 times in the first 35 measures and do not appear again in the remaining 27. In Emilio Barreto's ensemble, they appear 4 times by measure 32, but not in the last 27. Only Abbilona performance breaks this pattern, their unique approach discussed at length in the following chapter. In every case, the *iyá* follows the conventions outlined above. Figures 59a illustrates the popularity of the call examined in Figure 57, which appears on the recordings ten times. Figures 59b-e account for the remaining nine simple calls. The first five rhythms of this figure contain identical *enú* rhythms, while the one in Figure 59e is varied only by the omission of a single tone. In all cases there is an *enú* tone added immediately after the downbeat and the *bombo* is avoided.

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A. *Iyá* call as it appears on Emilio Barreto's ensemble (mm. 10,18,32)
   and Abbilona (mm. 2, 44, 63, 67, 90, 11, 131)

B. *Iyá* call as it appears on Muñequitos (mm. 9, 16, 20, 22, 24, 35)

C. *Iyá* call as it appears on Muñequitos (mm. 18)

D. *Iyá* call as it appears on Muñequitos (mm. 28)

E. *Iyá* call as it appears on Emilio Barreto's ensemble (mm. 21)

Figure 59: Simple *Iyá* calls as they appear on three recordings

In general, simple *iyá* calls are usually answered with predictable responses.
Though *itótele* players are aware of the many possible choices, in practice, relatively
few represent the vast majority. The Emilio Barreto ensemble's *itótele* player restricts
his responses to the one illustrated in Figure 57a. The Abbilona drummer likewise
restricts himself, but relies on a different stock response illustrated in Figure 60a. The
Muñequitos *itótele* player explores three responses. In addition to the two diagrammed
in Figures 57a-b, he applies the one illustrated in Figure 60b. But, there are many
additional possible responses. Figure 61 contains several of these, and is by no means
exhaustive. In this illustration, all the responses are printed as open tones on the *enú*.
Simply replacing any combination of open tones with muffled tones generates
additional responses. While the *itótele* player is free to play any of these responses to a

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simple call, these are generally reserved for the more complex conversations that are introduced in the following chapter.

A. Response used by Abbilona *itótele* drummer

B. Response used by Muñequitos *itótele* drummer

Figure 60: *Itótele* responses used by Abbilona and Los Muñequitos

Figure 61: Other common *itótele* responses

Conclusions

Nyongo is a deceptively simple *toque* that is organized by an underlying principle and rhythm, known as clave, which pervades all performances and provides a common referent for drummers, singers and dancers. Though the *batá* drummers rarely state the entire rhythm, members of the tradition feel the presence of clave even

when it cannot be heard. Divisible into two halves, each side of clave possesses a unique musical character. While the three-side builds tension through syncopation, the two-side provides resolution. Accordingly, in the *toque* nyongo, the *iyá*, which is most closely associated with the three-side, has the most syncopated basic pattern; it avoids the downbeat, begins on the *bombo* and plays an accented open tone on an offbeat. In contrast, the *itótele*, which is most closely associated with the two-side, provides accented open tones on the strong beats and a muffled tone on beat four, a weak beat. The *iyá* generates musical tension by initiating calls. The *itótele* resolves each *iyá* figure with its responses. The *iyá* and *itótele enús* "dance" around the clave rhythm (Figure 58), when engaged in a simple call and response. This is a testament to how the clave is always felt by the drummers, even when it is silent and unstated. While the organization of individual measures is closely tied to the principles of clave, the macro structure of the *toque* is realized by the alternation of two components: basic patterns and conversations.

I examined the commonalities and distinctions of several variants of the *iyá* basic pattern (Figure 56), which were associated with Havana and Matanzas. Though the Havana versions possess more syncopation in the *chachá*, all six variants contain identical or similar patterns in the *enú*. While there are appreciable differences between the two regional styles, the forces that govern conversations are similar, if not identical. In this discussion of the nature of the *toque* nyongo, I have identified those elements that are universal to all *batá* traditions and those that are idiomatic to regions or possibly, individual groups. In the next chapter, I continue this analysis by focusing

entirely on the selected recordings and examining how individual drummers and

ensembles develop creativity and individuality through ritual performances.

CHAPTER 8

ANALYSIS OF "NYONGO" (II)

The *toque* "Nyongo" accompanies hundreds of songs and is appropriate for any *orisha* (Lu. deity in the Yoruba-Lucumí pantheon).[66] During a typical *toque de santo* it is performed more than many of the other esoteric and specialized *toques*. Not bound to a specific literary text, song or even *orisha*, this *toque*'s extensive use and generic qualities, encourages the creativity that leads to innovation, and group identity and cohesion. Though present at all levels of performance, creativity is most pronounced in the long, complex conversations of nyongo, which are generated when the artists overlap and weave successive simple call and response figures in a seemingly endless array of combinations. These continuing conversations (author's term) rely on an intimate interplay between the *iyá* and *itotele*, and constitute a forum where drummers can engage one another as peers, developing advanced musical skills and sensibilities. In this chapter, I expand on the ideas of the previous, by focusing solely on the continuing conversation of the three selected recordings. I examine how drummers learn from their peers, and how ensembles create communitas and develop group identity through ritual performances.

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[66] Due to its extensive use in this chapter, I have chosen to remove all emphasis in future statements of the word nyongo. It will appear as any English noun, without quotation marks and capitalized according to usage.

Each of the performing musicians presented in these recordings has undoubtedly logged hundreds of hours within the religious context, and has developed a distinct way of playing continuing conversations while remaining bound to the traditions and underlying principles associated with nyongo. Beginning with excerpts from *Ito Iban Echu* (1996) by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, my analysis looks at several relatively simple, short, continuing conversations. Whereas the conversations on the second recording, *Santisimo* (1996), share many traits with *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), it displays a higher degree of syncopation that result not only from choices made by the lead drum, the *iyá*, but the *itótele*, as well. In stark contrast to either of these recordings, Abbilona, on *Oyá* (1999), offers a performance with exceptionally long continuing conversations. While the first two recordings present conversations that average less than four measures in length, Abbilona's average over ten measures, including one that is sixteen measures long.

Los Muñequitos de Matanzas

On the Muñequitos recording of nyongo (*Ito Iban Echu,* track 13) four continuing conversations occur between the *iyá enú* and *itótele enú*. In theory, the most basic continuing conversations consist of two back-to-back simple calls and responses (Figure 62); while more advanced versions contain overlapping calls and responses (Figure 63). Overlapping occurs when the *iyá* begins a call before the *itótele* completes a prior response, by beginning on the two-side of clave. On the Muñequitos recording, anticipated calls (author's term) consistently elicit anticipated responses, i.e. responses that begin on the three-side.

Figure 62: Basic continuing conversation

Figure 63: A more complex continuing conversation

The first continuing conversation is comprised of two *iyá* calls (Figure 64, mm. 29-31). Even though both appear to anticipate the three-side of clave, the *itótele* responds to them differently. He answers the first simple call with a basic response (discussed and illustrated in Figure 57 of the previous chapter) and answers the second anticipated call with an overlapping response that anticipates the two-side of clave. This suggests that the *itótele* player perceives the *iyá* hit at the end of measure 29 to be a pick-up note, i.e. functionally part of measure 30. Further, reacting to the increased syncopation generated by the *iyá* in the second call, the *itótele*'s response is also highly syncopated. It avoids the strong beats of the two-side and sounds only on weak eighth notes (i.e. 2, 3 and 5).

Figure 64: Mm. 29-31 of Los Muñequitos, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), track 13

The second continuing conversation is generated by a succession of three calls and responses (Figure 65, mm. 39-41). The first two are simply performed back-to-back, while the third resembles the concluding response of the previous figure. That is, it contains an overlapping, anticipated call that is answered with an appropriate overlapping, anticipated and syncopated response.

Figure 65: Mm. 39-41 of Los Muñequitos, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), track 13

The third continuing conversation (Figure 66, mm. 44-46) derives from repetitions of the simple call introduced in measure 30 (Figure 64). The figure repeats four times and is sounded on both sides of the clave, essentially obscuring the polar nature of these measures. This common continuing conversation requires a strong

statement of the meter from the *itótele*, which can be accomplished with open tones or by the alternation of open tones and muffled tones.

Figure 66: Mm. 44-46 of Los Muñequitos, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), track 13

It is particularly insightful to compare measure 30 from the second conversation with measure 44 from the third conversation (Figure 67). In each of these measures, the three-side of clave is identical for both the *iyá* and the *itótele*. While on the two-side, though the *iyá* is radically different, the *itótele* differs only by a single hit. In measure 30, the *itótele* player selects a flexible response. With hits on the 1st and 4th eighth notes, he prepares for several contingencies. If the call ends on the three-side as it did in measure 30, the *itótele* closes off his response by adding a hit on the 6th eighth note. If the call continues on the two-side as it did in measure 44, he remains on the strong beats until a simple call, like the one in measure 46, provides a cadence.

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**Figure 67: Comparison of two similar calls in mm. 30 and 44 of Los Muñequitos,
Ito Iban Echu (1996), track 13**

The fourth continuing conversation exhibits many of the same properties as the previous ones (Figure 68, mm. 51-55). Two simple *iyá* calls initiate the figure, producing predictable *itótele* responses that are contained within the two-side of clave. The third call is similar to both measure 41 (Figure 64) and measure 31 (Figure 65). In all three instances, the *itótele* provides anticipated and syncopated responses. Whereas in the earlier instances this gesture occurred at the conclusion of a continuing conversation, here it falls in the middle of a long five-measure phrase. By omitting the hit on the 5th eighth note in measure 53 that would make this measure identical to both measures 31 and 41, the *iyá* communicates that he is not finished "speaking." Indeed, the *iyá* begins the next call on the 2nd eighth note of the two-side of measure 53. While previous instances of overlapping only anticipated the three-side by two eighth notes,

in this instance it is anticipated by 5 eighth notes, allowing for three hits on the two-side.

Figure 68: Mm. 51-54 of Los Muñequitos, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), track 13

It is interesting to note that at the conclusion of this complex set of calls, the *itótele* player inserts one final response before returning to his basic pattern, in the absence of a true call from the *iyá* (mm. 54). Perhaps the *itótele* player sensed a lack of resolution and felt a need to extend the conversation for an additional measure. This action breaks from the strict rules of call and response, but is justifiable within the larger scheme of tension and resolution that are generated from extensive continuing conversations. Though this could simply be a mistake, one might read further into the response and deem it a critque of the *iyá*'s failing to recognize the need for one additional call before returning to the basic pattern. In such a way, drummers can

communicate aesthetics critique upon each other. When the *iyá* and *itótele* players are peers, learning is constant and works in both directions.[67]

The analysis of these four excerpts from the Los Muñequitos compact disc *Ito Iban Echu* shows that continuing conversations consist of sequential statements of call and response episodes. The simplest episodes are narrowly confined to discreet amounts of sonic space; the *iyá* issues calls within the three-side of clave and the *itótele* responds on two-side with a concluding tone on the downbeat of the following measure. By contrast, the more interesting episodes expand beyond these boundaries, either by anticipation or continuation. The result is overlapping episodes where the *iyá*'s call begins to sound before the *itótele* concludes and the *itótele* sounds before the *iyá* finishes inserting a call. Within these bounds, the possibilities are endless. In the following pages, I examine continuing conversations that appear on the Emilio Barreto and Abbilona recordings. By comparing these with each other and with the Muñequitos, I demonstrate how ensembles work creatively within the established bounds of the tradition to develop signature approaches to conversation, providing a means to express both individual and group identities.

Emilio Barreto's Ensemble

Whereas continuing conversations for the Muñequitos are comprised of calls and responses between the *iyá enú* and the *itótele enú*, Orlando "Puntilla" Rios on the Emilio Barreto recording extensively employs the *iyá chachá*, as well. As a result, the

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[67] During a personal interview in May 2003, David Font agreed with my assertions that drummers share aesthetic critique in manner.

continuing conversations on *Santisimo* (1996) have a distinct flavor, though they obviously derive from common roots. Isolating the *iyá,* Figure 69 compares the two continuing calls from both recordings that exhibit the most commonalities (mm. 44-46 of Los Muñequitos and mm. 14-16 of Emilio Barreto). Iso-rhythmic for two measures, the Emilio Barreto example is distinguishable from its counterpart by the introduction of a repeating melodic motive that generates a series of displaced accents. When this three-note motive is successively sounded, as in Figure 70, it becomes rhythmically displaced, generating a perceived accent (marked by an *), which shifts in relation to the meter. Or, if felt as a hemiola, produces a series of measures in 9/16-meter (Figure 71). Hereafter, I identify this motive as the 9/16-motive.

A. Mm. 44-46 of Los Muñequitos, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996), track 13

B. Mm. 14-16 of Emilio Barreto, *Santisimo* (1996), track 4

Figure 69: Comparison of the *iyá* from two conversations

Figure 70: Three-note motive that upon successive repetitions generates displaced perceived accents, indicated by asterisks

Figure 71: 9/16-motive

The Emilio Barreto ensemble's *iyá* player applies this motive in nine of the eighteen measures dedicated to continuing conversations, and in four of five continuing conversations (Table 3). Though this motive has precedence in the Muñequitos performance, its metrical qualities and persistent use by master drummer Puntilla on the Emilio Barreto recording, set the two performances apart and exemplifies how an *iyá* player works within strict bounds to develop a signature sound.

Continuing Conversations	Measures which contain 9/16-motive
mm. 14-16	mm. 14-16
mm. 24-25	mm. 24
mm. 38-43	mm. 40-41
mm. 47-49	mm. 47-48
mm. 54-57	
18 Measures Total	9 measures total

Table 3: Summary of continuing conversations by the Emilio Barreto and performance and instances of the 9/16-motive

Just as an *iyá* player distinguishes his playing with signature calls, an *itótele* player can achieve the same with his responses. The *itótele* players on the Muñequitos and Emilio Barreto recordings exhibit performance styles that are easily discernable. As performances of nyongo progress, continuing conversations generally grow in length and employ various rhythmic devices that increase syncopation and musical tension. Whereas the Muñequitos *itótele* matches the *iyá*'s increasingly expansive calls, the Emilio Barreto ensemble's *itótele* uses sparse responses and increases the sparseness as the musical intensity of the performance increases.

By leaving conspicuous gaps in his pattern, the Emilio Barreto *itótele* player undermines the meter and increases syncopation. In both the initial and second continuing calls (mm. 14-16 and mm. 24-25, respectively), the Emilio Barreto *itótele* provides characteristically simple responses (Figures 72 and 73). Though the *iyá* calls stretch well beyond the bounds of the three-side, the *itótele* restricts his response to the two-side of clave, using the common response presented in the previous chapter (Figure 57). The *itótele* avoids the beats marked by asterisks. This is in stark contrast to the responses offered by the *itótele* player with the Muñequitos whom, I believe, would have filled in these beats, thereby providing responses that also overlap.

Figure 72: Mm. 14-16 of *Santisimo* (1996), track 4

Figure 73: Mm. 24-25 of *Santisimo* (1996), track 4

In this performance by Emilio Barreto's ensemble, the third continuing conversation is three times longer than the previous and twice the length of the initial, extending from measure 38 to measure 43 (Figure 74). The *itótele* produces syncopation and tension by becoming increasingly sparse. In its first response, the *itótele* omits a note from the basic pattern and plays only the downbeat on each side of clave; the second beat of the two-side, which contains a muffled tone during statements of the basic pattern, is rendered silent (*1). In its second response, the *itótele* omits all the *enú* tones (*2). When the *iyá* begins to apply the familiar three-note 9/16-motive in its third call, the *itótele* re-enters by playing a modified version of the common response. The *enú* hit expected on the 5th eighth note of the two-side of clave is omitted (*3), and open tone downbeats are replaced with muffled tones, which have a distinctly different texture and are generally quieter. They result in a significantly reduced presence from the *itótele*, confirming that this *itótele* player relies on sparseness to increase tension.

Figure 74: Mm. 38-42 of *Santisimo* (1996), track 4

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The length of this continuing conversation, combined with the high level of tension created by the 9/16–motive in the *iyá* and the sparse responses in the *itótele*, suggests that this conversation is unable to satisfactorily resolve with a single concluding simple call. Rather, the fifth and six calls combine in measures 42-43 to create what I interpret as an extended cadence and a two-measure resolution. In the penultimate measure, the *iyá* plays a resolving figure, which resembles the cadential figures of earlier continuing conversations. Reversing the established trend, the flourish of notes emitted from the *itótele* in response to the call is dense and explosive. This activity carries the cadence into the final measure where both the *iyá* and the *itótele* resolve by playing a simple call and response before smoothly returning to the basic pattern. Within the highly energized experience of continuing calls, simple calls serve as points of release and resolution.

The fourth continuing conversation (Figure 75, mm. 47-50) resembles the third one, with the *itótele* again answering a string of 9/16-motives with very sparse responses. The first response consists of a single muffled tone, while the second uses two tones, exactly as appeared in measure 40. Measures 49-50 contain an extended resolution similar to the one in measures 42-43. In measure 49, the *itótele* inserts a flourish of notes in response to the simple cadential call of the *iyá*. These flourishes extend across the bar line and continue on the three-side of the following measure. Unlike in the previous continuing conversation, the *iyá* player does not play a second cadential call. In spite of its absence, the *itótele* plays a "response."

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Figure 75: Mm. 47-50 of *Santisimo* (1996), track 4

Itótele players rarely insert a response without an explicit call from the *iyá* player. On these three recordings, it occurs ten times, which may be explained as mistakes, critiques, or reactions to other musical and extra-musical elements (i.e. song and dance). One can appreciate, however, the *itótele* player's motivation for intentionally breaking with convention in this example. Several factors combine at this point in the performance to create rhythmic tension and performative energy. Simple calls and short continuing conversations, which dominate the earlier portion of the performance, give way to increasingly extended and syncopated continuing conversations. The highly energized third conversation, which extends across six measures and requires a cadential extension to dissipate the energy and provide a convincing resolution, is followed by only three measures of the basic pattern before delving into the fourth extended continuing conversation. These purely instrumental

observations, combined with the lyrical developments of the song and the expectation that the *toque* will soon shift to the energetic 4/4-*toque chachalekefon*, provides the *itótele* with justification for musically expressing himself outside the tight conventions. During these moments of heightened music, the *itótele* and *iyá* become nearly equal partners in the conversations. The both are given opportunities to work on their individual musical skills, as well as to develop as an ensemble.

The fifth continuing conversation (mm. 54-57) represents a significant departure from preceding ones, in that it does not use the 9/16-motive. Instead, it resembles the third continuing conversation of the Muñequitos performance (Figure 66), with a simple recurring rhythmic pattern in the *iyá* answered by steady beats on the *itótele enú*. Figure 76, presents the first two measures of each conversation for comparison.

Figure 76: Comparison of two conversations

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An alternate interpretation for this continuing conversation requires familiarity with another conversation, which is standard in ritual performances but absent from these recordings. This conversation derives by contracting the basic pattern. Rather than alternate the three-side portion with its relatively empty two-side, the *iyá* repeatedly states the three-side. In response, the *itótele* repeats the two-side. Figures 77a-b compare the basic pattern with the contracted pattern. Figure 77c displays a further contraction where the *iyá* drops a note (*) that interfered with the muffled tone of the *itótele*. Figure 77d presents a further reduced version of this conversation, in which the remaining muffled tone is also removed, leaving only a single open tone accented by an accompanying *chachá* slap. This final version is the same pattern as presented in Figure 25b.

A. Basic pattern of nyongo for *iyá* and *itótele*

B. Continuing conversation generated by contraction

C. Variation of (B). Created by omitting *iyá enú* muffled tone (*) that would otherwise interfere with *itótele enú* muffled tone (*)

D. Variation of (B). Created by omitting *bombo* and moving *chachá* hit

Figure 77: Nyongo basic pattern and three related continuing conversations that derive from contracting the basic pattern

Continuing from the position that the fifth continuing conversation begins with a contraction of the basic pattern, Figure 78 provides an analysis of the entire conversation. In this figure, the measure preceding the conversation (mm. 53) is included for reference. Once the conversation begins (mm. 54), the *iyá* inserts calls on both the three-side and two-side of clave. Particularly interesting is how the sixth, seventh and eighth calls contract even further and occupy only a single beat. Similarly, the *itótele* response also consists of only one beat. As a result, the alternating pattern of open tones and muffled tones is now simplified to all open tones. Finally, the last two calls overlap. The eighth call sounds identical to the preceding three calls. But it also sounds like the beginning of a simple call. It is impossible to tell which of these it

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is intended to be until the remainder of the simple call is sounded. Therefore, it is both

its own call and a piece of a larger call.

Figure 78: mm. 53-57 of Santisimo (1996), track 4

Abbilona

The nyongo selection by the young group Abbilona represents a strong stylistic

contrast to the two previous examples. With 134 measures it is more than twice as

long as the previous excerpts. Yet, there are still only five continuing conversations.

With an average length of 10.6 measures (compared to 3.25 and 3.8 for Los

Muñequitos and Emilio Barreto, respectively) and one as long as 16 measures, the

nature of continuing conversations has shifted. They now resemble mini-sections with

time to develop and evolve.

The first continuing conversation (mm. 14- 20) has three distinct parts (Figure

79). Part A and C are both very familiar. Part A contains two identical call and

response episodes. Both calls resemble the Muñequitos conversation in measure 30 (Figure 65), but differ in that they include anticipations. Part C is a string of simple calls that easily fit within any of the three recordings.

The intervening material, Part B, is unlike anything heard on the previous recordings. This section is representative of a fairly new style of conversation, which is common among present day drummers, and is worthy of substantial analysis. When the *iyá* calls this type of conversation, both the *iyá* and the *itótele* move away from the basic pattern and improvise. Though they appear to complement one another, they are not engaged in strict call and response. This type of interaction is maintained until the *iyá* plays a familiar simple call or extended call, as in measures 18-19, and returns the ensemble to a more traditional style of conversing.

Figure 79: Mm. 14-20 of Abbilona, *Oyá* **(1996), track 2**

Within this looser type of conversation, drummers have increased freedom to be creative. In some ways the *iyá* and *itótele* are equal partners, though it is always the *iyá* that signals the beginning and end of the section. While in earlier portions of this analysis it was essential to treat the *iyá* and *itótele* simultaneously, the semi-independent nature of the two drums suggests that an analysis of this style of conversation should focus initially on the *iyá,* shift to the *itótele*, and then finally treat them both together.

Figure 80 presents the *iyá* drum as it appears in three of Abbilona's continuing conversations of this type (A-C) and compares them with statements of the basic pattern (D). The common element in each of the conversations is a steady *chachá*. While the *iyá enú* is more or less free to improvise around this steady *chachá*, there is a tendency to lead into or away from the *chachá* hit that falls on the second beat of the three-side of clave. In the first conversation (A) this is clearly achieved by three *enú* hits in measure 25. The second conversation (B), which begins identically to the first, additionally contains a pickup to this beat in measure 17, and figures that lead both into and away from this beat in measure 18. The third conversation (C) begins without the three introductory tones, but contains figures in each measure that lead away from the second beat of the three-side. The second beat of the three-side is clearly the focal point of the *iyá* in this type of conversation. It is likewise an important beat in the *itótele* responses and serves to unify the *iyá* and *itótele* improvisations.

Figure 80: Comparison of the *iyá* in three conversations plus the basic pattern as they appear on Abbilona, *Oyá* (1996), track 2

Each of the *itótele* responses in Part B of Figure 79 have at least two notes in common. First, they each sound the *enú* on the second beat of the three-side, simultaneously with the *iyá chachá*. Secondly, they strike the third eighth note of the two-side. Figure 81 illustrates the origin/significance of these two tones in the *itótele* responses. In this figure, each line begins with a measure of basic pattern, followed by two measures of conversational responses. The first line (A) includes the most common response as seen multiple times in the analysis. The second line (B) is similar to the first but begins with an anticipation on the three-side. Presumably this type of response would be offered by the *itótele* when he hears an anticipated call from the *iyá*. The third line (C) is similar to the previous except that it is silent on the downbeats, which increases the syncopated feel in a manner as discussed in the Emilio Barreto section. The fourth line (D) is derived from the previous by omitting the second hit of the two-side, providing a template for the *itótele* improvisation we see

originally in Figure 79 (Part B), and witness again throughout Figure 81 (Part A). In both of these conversations the improvised responses from the *itótele* include, at least, these two notes.

Figure 81: Origin/evolution of *itótele* responses as they appear on Abbilona, *Oyá* (1996), track 2

The second continuing conversation of the Abbilona recording consists of two parts (Figure 82). Part A contains seven measures of this loosely styled conversation and is followed by part B with five simple and extended calls. The *iyá* improvisations in the first part include three evenly spaced *chachá* hits per measure and emphasize the second beat of the three-side with *enú* figures that lead into or away from this beat. In all but one measure, the *itótele* improvisations sound on the second beat of the three-side and the third eighth note of the two-side. The one exception, in measure 29, results from an *itótele* gesture that begins in the previous measure and extends across

the bar line. When the drummer concludes his musical idea, there is no time to insert yet another tone. Hence, the *itótele* player is not strictly bound to the template described in the previous paragraph (Figure 80d).

Figure 82: Mm. 25-36 of Abbilona, *Oyá* (1996), track

The third continuing conversation (mm. 70-85) is sixteen measures in length and is divisible into five parts (Figure 83). Measures 70-72 (A) contain a loosely styled conversation where the *iyá* appropriately emphasizes the second beat of the three-side. Unlike previous statements of this style of conversation, the *itótele* leaves the three-side empty and, instead, responds only on the two-side. Interestingly, each of the three measures in this part is identical. Unlike a similar conversation in the previous figure (Mm. 29-30), these measures sound like explicit call and responses. From this loosely styled conversation, the *iyá* progresses towards simple and extended calls in measures 73-75 (Part B). Rather than answering with basic responses, the *itótele* continues to maintain a highly syncopated style of conversation. Perhaps sensing this, the *iyá* quickly returns to the loosely styled conversation in measures 76-78 (C), where the *iyá* exhibits increased freedom by alternately omitting and displacing expected *chachá* hits (Mm. 76 and 77, respectively). Finally, this continuing conversation concludes with two more sections. The penultimate (D) resembles the Muñequitos conversation illustrated in Figure 66 and the final portion (E) includes a series of simple extended calls where the *itótele* appropriately inserts the downbeats he omitted in Part B, indicating a willingness to conclude this extremely long and complex continuing conversation.

Figure 83: Mm. 70-84 of Abbilona, *Oyá* **(1996), track 2**

The final two continuing conversations, measures 93-99 and measures 115-125, apply and develop many of the ideas presented in the previous three conversations. Though each is worthy of close study, they introduce no new major concepts and are left out of the current analysis. Like all the continuing conversations on this Abbilona recording these conversations are multi-sectional. In comparison to Los Muñequitos and Emilio Barreto's ensemble, they are long and provide ample time to shift between several types of call and response.

Conclusions

Continuing conversations in nyongo are generated when *batá* drummers perform successive call and response episodes. Of the three recordings analyzed, *Ito Iban Echu* (1996) by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas represents the most conservative style. Calls from the *iyá*, which are restricted to the three-side of clave, are answered in kind by responses from the *itótele* that begin on the two-side and end on the downbeat of the following measure. Calls that anticipate the three-side are followed by *itótele* responses, which begin before the *iyá* call is finished, thereby creating overlapping gestures. Each of the conversations concludes with a rhythmic cadence. In some cases, this is accomplished in a single measure. While in others, the cadence extends across several bars.

Master drummer Orlando "Puntilla" Rios, featured on *Santisimo* (1996), exhibits a markedly different style of playing than his Matanzas counterpart. He regularly employs a figure on the *iyá* that is absent from either of the other two recordings. Though this figure, identified as the 9/16-motive, shares a common

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rhythmic formula with conversations from both Los Muñequitos and Abbilona, its melodic contour provides it with shifting accents and an unmistakable character. On this recording, the *itótele* player demonstrates his individuality, as well. Whereas the Muñequitos *itótele* relies upon overlapping, the Emilio Barreto ensemble's *itótele* exploits the effects of syncopation by tending towards increasing sparseness. Both styles achieve the same ultimate goal, by infusing rhythmic energy and creating moments of tension that resolve when the conversation concludes.

If the first two recordings are conservative, Abbilona's performance on *Oyá* (1999) is cutting-edge. Their conversations are extremely long, and are comprised of multiple sections. The sense of tension and resolution can be manipulated within a single continuing conversation and the need to return to the basic pattern is markedly reduced. Abbilona employs a loosely styled conversation where the interplay between the drums is freer than in other types of conversations. In many ways, the *iyá* and *itótele* appear to be near equals. In one crucial moment, during the longest conversation, we notice how the *itótele* is central to deciding when the conversation will end. The result was a sixteen measure continuing conversation with five distinct sections.

Chosen for their widely varied approaches to playing nyongo, these three recordings provide a glimpse of the endless possibilities that exist within *batá* drumming. Nyongo is at its root a simple *toque*. It is organized by the concept of clave and adheres to a strict conception of call and response. Innovations are limited by the simple fact that any three drummers of the tradition may be called upon to play alongside one another. If either drummer's approach becomes too idiosyncratic, the

ability to communicate, "converse", "call" or "speak" breaks down. I contend that in all probability, any of the nine players featured on these three recordings could sit in any configuration with two other players and successfully perform. This is to say, that although each group had an individual or signature way to navigate the *toque*, none bends the rules in a manner that renders their musical cues unintelligible.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Trance possessions during *toques de santo* (Sp. drumming ceremony for Yoruba-Lucumí deities known as *orisha*) are dramatic expressions of Lucumí faith and are powerful indicators of communication between the visible and invisible realms. However, the drama and excitement surrounding these possessions often occludes other equally important thematic acts. In this dissertation, I diffuse the focus of aesthetic studies away from the highly charged musical environment that accompanies the incidence of trance, and extend it throughout the entire four to six hour *toque de santo*. I question the premise that inducing and supporting trance possession is the focal point of performative energy and that *batá* drummers are singularly concerned with bringing down the *orisha*. On the contrary, I show that while satisfying the expectations of their hosts is important, *batá* drummers simultaneously aggressively engage in several highly valued thematic acts, including some which are inwardly focused on the cultivation and maintenance of their drumming fraternity. Specifically, I focus on learning and teaching, the development of group identity or signature sound, and the desire for the musicians to achieve communitas. To achieve this, I draw on my experiences in both sacred and secular

contexts, exploiting the interrelatedness of ritual performances, recorded performances, live concerts and private lessons.

Batá drummers are ritual specialists who, during the course of a *toque de santo*, exercise wide latitude in determining the shape of the event. Those who have completed their initiation into the Lucumí musical community are known as children of Aña, or *omo* Aña, and are linked by a web of fictive kinships. Each *omo* Aña shares a strong bond with their *padrinos* (Sp. godfathers) and brothers in Aña, and extend respect to all drummers who have been sworn. This extended ritual family is an essential component of a drummer's identity.

In January 2000, I had my hands washed to Aña in the home of Pancho Quinto. A first step of initiation into the Lucumí musical community, this commitment is regarded by many *dueños* (Sp. owners of the *batá*) as a minimum requirement for touching their drums. As a result of this initiation, I have had ample opportunities to play both consecrated and unconsecrated *batá* in a ritual context. While interviews, observations and analyses are illuminating, some portion of the knowledge that *batá* drummers possess about their craft can only be known experientially.

Teaching and Learning Activities

In 1936, Fernando Ortiz commissioned the first set of unconsecrated *batá* as part of a public display of Lucumí music at an ethnographic conference. Subsequently the single most profound event for the development of non-consecrated *batá* was the 1959 Cuban Revolution, which resulted in the development of ideologies that espoused the value of folklore and, as a result, endorsed and supported the art and

culture of Afro-Cubans in the form of secular concerts. Prior to these events, and for many years afterwards, most drummers learned to play on *batá fundamento* (Sp. consecrated *batá*).

Since these *batá* are used only for ritual purposes, such casual events as lessons and workshops were not a part of the tradition. This history is still deeply a part of present day practices. Aside from cultural outsiders, most drummers still learn to play *batá* in the context of performance. Learning takes two forms; it occurs not only within the traditional student-teacher relationship, but is present among peers, whenever three drummers perform together.

Teacher-Student Pedagogy

The Cuban *batá* pedagogical system pervades this musical style, and is central to understanding performance aesthetics. It exists at the level of ritual structure, the level of individual *toques*, and on the micro level of moment-to-moment interactions between the three drums. On the macro structural level, we witness the intersection of mythological stories (natural and human qualities), musical sounds, and pedagogical technique (Becker and Becker 1981; Keil 1979; Feld 1981, 1988). The warriors – Eleguá, Ogún and Ochosi – are noted for their role in opening and clearing paths, both in a spiritual and musical sense. On the micro structural level, the *iyá* communicates with the *okónkolo* by enunciating non-lexical vocables, permitting the *iyá* to teach an *okónkolo* player without interrupting his own playing. Because he can easily reorient the *okónkolo* player with a few spoken syllables, this pedagogical tool allows the *iyá* to freely choose esoteric *toques* (Sp. drum pieces) and attempt complex variations,

regardless of his *okónkolo* player's experience. The *iyá* also communicates with the *itótele* by relying on a non-verbal micro structural convention that exploits the spatial relationship between the drums. While the *itótele chachá* typically performs an ostinato pattern, the *itótele* player can generally rest assured that his *enú* will closely resemble the *iyá chachá*, which, for right-handed drummers, are only inches away from each other. If the *iyá* player wants to keeps things simple and grounded, he matches the *itótele enú*. If he wants to put some energy into the *toque*, he can alter and syncopate his part. He makes these judgments based on both the ability of the *itótele* player, and his perception of the needs/desires of the *apón* and the participants.

While the *iyá* player is usually regarded as the leader and, therefore, teacher of the ensemble, other drummers often share this role. Though only three musicians may perform the *batá* at any one moment, there are usually several other drummers present during a *toque de santo* who engage in singing, clapping, teaching. Teachers can stand behind a player and tap on his shoulders, or stand in front and play the drum behind their backs. Musicians around the room can give verbal and visual clues, and can aid a drummer by loudly clapping the beat or clave rhythms in his ear. There are times when the *apón* (Lu. soloist) takes on the role of teacher, as well. In one of my descriptions (Chapter 5), I describe an instance where the *apón* directed a trusted friend to take the *iyá* while I played the *itótele*. He then went through a series of songs in a predetermined order, hoping that I would recall the order from a lesson we engaged in earlier, and expecting that the *iyá* player would completely follow his lead and not try to take the performance in a contrary direction.

Peer-to-Peer Transmission

Transmission, i.e. teaching and learning, occurs not only within the traditional student-teacher relationship, but is a continuing process among peers. Pancho Quinto demonstrates (Chapter 6) that learning is not always an issue of hierarchy. That is, information does not necessarily flow from the *iyá* to the other two drums, but may actually move in reverse. This process is also visible in the extended continuing conversations of "Nyongo," where an *itótele*'s choice of response, lack of response, or unsolicited response can both shape the direction of the performance and communicate aesthetic critiques to the *iyá* player.

Drumming competitions provide a forum for drummers to compare and develop their abilities by engaging playfully in a game of "cat and mouse," or by playing highly syncopated versions of their rhythms with the intent to throw the other drummer off the beat. The competitions often go unnoticed by many of the participants in a *toque de santo*. Without insider knowledge as a drummer, it is difficult to tell if the musicians are involved in simple call and response conversations that are reacting to the song, dancers and general energy of the room, or if they are competing with one another. The ability for a *toque de santo* to support multiple thematic acts simultaneously makes this distinction a non-issue. It is quite possible for an *okónkolo* player to be engaged in a teacher/student exchange, for the *iyá* and *itótele* players to be engaged in a drumming competition, and for the *apón* to be directing his songs towards a *santero* that he believes is close to being possessed. In these ways, not only can an *itótele* player learn from the *iyá*, but also the *iyá* player can learn from the *itótele* and even the *okónkolo*.

Beyond Rhythms and Technique

Batá drummers need to learn more than just rhythms. Master drummers Angel Bolaños (Chapter One), Julito Collazo (Chapter Two),[68] and Pancho Quinto (Chapter Six) each emphasize the value of developing individuality. In his interview, Bolaños infers a delicate balance between adhering to expectations and expressing individuality. He has strong feelings about each drummer having their own sound, and says, "What works well for one person, doesn't work for another." Pancho Quinto knows that individuality and creativity are not always innate, and feels he needs to teach them. Repeatedly he tells me to "play from my heart" and chastises me when I try to imitate his style too closely saying, "Don't play for me. Play for you." Many of his playful antics are intended to foster individuality. On multiple occasions, Pancho has had me sing a song while he accompanied it with several different *toques*. These demonstrations were intended to show me the wide variety of choices facing me as an *iyá* player, and that my choices would help define my unique sound.

Rubén Bulnes, a Havana *apón* (Chapter 3), points out that *batá* drummers must know not only the *toques,* but should become familiar with the songs, dances and the mythology that links them all together. By understanding the connection between each of these realms (Becker and Becker 1981; Feld 1981,1988), *batá* drummers can interpret, through sound, the *orishas* stories (Flores-Peña 1994; Font 2002: communication). *Batá* drummers are valued less for knowing how to play the rhythms well, and more for their ability to know how to relate their *toques* to the songs and

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[68] Friedman (1982), whose primary informant was Julito Collazo, repeatedly stresses the importance of "putting oneself into the music."

dances, and to use this knowledge as they develop their own individual interpretations of the *orishas'* stories.

Development of Group Identity or Signature Sound

For *batá* drummers it is important, possibly essential, to foster and maintain a collective identity. This refers, on a grand scale, to the bond felt between all *omo* Aña, and, on a more intimate scale, to the bond created between members of an ensemble. In Cuba, as a drummer with "washed hands," I was repeatedly regarded as an insider by the various ensembles, while other long-term, well-known Cuban members of the religion, were treated as outsiders. This was instantly apparent on January 2, 2003 at the ceremony for Odudua in the Museum of the Orisha, when I was asked to stand out of the crowd, behind the drummers. An event of this magnitude draws hundreds of *santeros*, and yet I was given a privileged position over them. The reality of being a member of a professional ensemble in Havana often means that drummers will neither know, nor socialize with the members of the house-temple. They practice exclusivity. They position themselves along the walls next to the drums, always careful to keep a buffer between the *batá* and the members of the house temple. When other *omo* Aña arrived at the *toques de santo* in Havana, even those that were members of other ensembles, they were always openly welcomed and invited to stand among the drummers.

In Chapter Five, I illustrate an incident where the needs of the ensemble conflicted with the needs/desires of the participants. The line of sight between the drummers and a *santero* who is about to be possessed became cluttered with

practitioners. Simultaneously, many of these same practitioners, especially the women, came dangerously close to pushing up against the *batá*. These two observations led the *dueño* (Sp. owner of the *batá*) to stop the drumming, thereby pausing the fiesta and delaying the *orisha* possession that moments earlier appeared to be imminent. This dramatic gesture, combined with a theatrical speech about the dangers of both acts, provided an opportunity for the *dueño* to reinforce the primal role of the drummers in the ceremony. Had the possession been permitted to continue, the belief that the drums are vessels that house the deity Aña, the notion that *aché* (Lu. the animating force that moves both earth and cosmos) creates "charged space" between the drummers and the *orisha*, and, ultimately, the legitimacy of the drumming fraternity would have been tacitly questioned.

By stopping the ceremony, the participants were reminded of the many important sources of *aché* that contribute to create a successful ritual. Among these are the blood sacrifices that the *dueño* and his ensemble make to the *orisha* Aña, the initiations individuals make to become *omo* Aña, and the sacrifices the ensemble makes night after night, at *toques de santo*, to foster technique, increase endurance and to develop musically as group.

At a more intimate level, at the level of the individual ensemble, I illustrate the concept of a signature sound in my analysis of three recordings of the *toque* "Nyongo," by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Emilio Barreto's ensemble, and Abbilona. A highly improvised *toque*, "Nyongo" is defined and restricted by a tight set of conventions that are linked to the concepts of clave and conversation. The drummers, especially the *itótele* and the *iyá*, must constantly track an implied clave

pattern while alternating between a basic pattern and a series of call and response gestures. This results in an endless array of possibilities. In my analysis of these three performances, I demonstrate that, rather than explore a wide variety of improvisation styles; each ensemble employs a limited conversational vocabulary providing each of these three groups with a signature sound.

The Muñequitos employ the simplest style, restricting the conversational interplay to the *enú* heads of the *iyá* and *itótele*, and using the *iyá chachá* only to accent the *iyá enú*. The Emilio Barreto *iyá* player, Puntilla, repeatedly employs a figure that I identify as the 9/16-motive. In his playing style, the *iyá chachá* functions independently from the *iyá enú* and is an equal partner in the conversations with the *itótele enú*. Even the approaches of the *itótele* players of these two groups are distinct. When the *iyá* calls begin to overlap and become increasingly syncopated, the Muñequitos *itótele* player follows the *iyá*'s lead by creating overlapping responses, while the Emilio Barreto *itótele* player produces increasingly sparse responses that do not even span one side of clave. Finally, Abbilona works with a much more syncopated and free style of conversation than either the Muñequitos or Emilio Barreto's ensemble. While the concept of call and response is never fully abandoned, in many ways, the *iyá* and *itótele* appear to be near equals. During these relatively free conversations, neither the *iyá* nor the *itótele* stray far from the improvisational templates I illustrate in my analysis. The extent to which any of these groups are free to develop a signature sound is limited only by the simple fact that their style should be sufficiently conforming so that any three drummers of *batá* can sit down and play alongside one another.

An *iyá* player, to a great extent, defines the signature sound of a group. Chapter 6 introduces the distinct style of master drummer, Pancho Quinto. Derived, in part, from his relationship with the *orisha* Eleguá, Pancho's playing mirrors the qualities of this *orisha* who is known as a little boy, a trickster, and the guardian of the crossroads. At heart, Pancho is a child, always joking, laughing, and playing. He often surrounds himself in mischief, which earns himself the reputation of a trickster.

Both as a *rumbero* (Sp. performer of rumba) and as a *batá* drummer, Pancho is widely recognized for his creativity. In *rumba* he is admired for fusing or "crossing" several genres of music, contributing to the development of a modern *rumba* known as *guarapachangeo*. When playing *batá* Pancho also has a tendency to fuse, by identifying connections between *batá toques*, which are typically unnoticed by his peers, and making unlikely transitions. As a result, Pancho's ensembles have a distinct playful quality.

Communitas

Replacing the sense of self with a communal oneness is an important goal for *batá* drummers. While any three, experienced drummers can negotiate a ritual performance, drummers who become comfortable and familiar with each other's playing styles, and actively work to reduce response times to the point that that it feels instantaneous, are rewarded with the intimacy associated with communitas. Commonly, drummers achieve this by engaging in play, an activity that appears throughout this dissertation.

In Chapter Four, I introduce play when describing the transitions between the seven sections of the *toque* for Ochosi (Figure 25). If an ensemble were to perform this *toque* as I notated, it would be regarded as correct, though boring. In reality, most *iyá* players improvise around the basic structure of this and other *toques*. Rather than make the transitions clear and easy to follow, many *iyá* drummers playfully engage in a drumming competitions, where they try to "trip up" the *okónkolo* and *itótele* by playing alternate transitional passages that catch members of the ensemble "off guard," or by playing sectional variants that sound similar to transitions, thereby tricking them into moving to the next section.

The Ochosi example focuses on the role of the *iyá*, as he leads his ensemble through a predictable sequence of changes. That is, the trick for the ensemble is not to determine where the *iyá* will go next, but when the call will come. Pancho Quinto's very playful teaching and playing style (Chapter 6) provides an illustration of a more complex type of competitive drumming. Pancho re-contextualizes *toques*, by calling changes in an unpredictable manner and playing at extreme tempos, both slow and fast. Further, he does not limit himself to making calls from the *iyá*, but does it when he plays both the *itótele* and *okónkolo*. Approached this way, drumming competitions can be very complicated affairs, full of mistakes. Groups often make severe, audible mistakes. But over time, it produces a more intimate ensemble; one that feels it can sense each other's moves instantaneously. Rewarded with a feeling of unity, ensembles often sacrifice flawless ritual performances, to develop, through time and repeated performances, a sense of communitas.

In Closing

Drummers constantly make musical decisions based not only the desires of the *apón* who leads the music with his songs, and the spiritual needs of the participants, but also based on the technical proficiency of the drummers, and their desire to cultivate creativity, individuality, a group identity and signature sound, and communitas among the ensemble members. In a *batá* performance greater value is often placed upon putting oneself into the music than on playing everything conservatively, simply and correctly.

APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF NYONGO EXCERPTS

Track thirteen on Ito Iban Echu (1996) by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas (0:00 - 2:35)

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Track four of Santisimo (1996) (0:00-2:30)

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Track two of Oyá (1999) by Abbilona (0-4:30)

APPENDIX B

MUSICAL EXAMPLES RECORDED ON COMPACT DISC

Track	Figure	Page	Description
1	10	79	Description of what transpired during a moment of my drumming lesson with Angel Bolaños on January 3, 2003
2	15	98	Typical *okónkolo* patterns matched with non-lexical vocables
3	16	103	*Iyá* call and entrance (*iyá* and *okónkolo* only) for *toque* Ochosi
4	17	104	*Iyá* call and entrance for *toque* Ogún
5	18	104	Son clave
6	19	105	*Iyá* call for *toque* Eleguá (un-metered)
7-8	22	106	*Iyá* calls and entrances for Eleguá *toque* when interpreted incorrectly by the *okónkolo* player
9	24	107	*Iyá* call and entrance for Eleguá *toque* when played correctly
10	25	110	Complete transcription of the *toque* for Ochosi
11	27	112	Excerpts from the *toque* for Babalú Ayé on all six heads
12	27	112	Excerpts from the *toque* for Babalú Ayé on *itótele* and *iyá enus*
13	29,31	116	Excerpt of the *toque* for Osain played first on all six heads followed by same on only the three *chachás*
14	33	119	*Toque* that accompanies the song "Kowo-kowo" all six heads
15	34	119	*Toque* that accompanies the song "Kowo-kowo" on *itótele* and *iyá enus*
16	36-39	121	*Iyá chachá* variations in *toque* for Eleguá

GLOSSARY

Aberikula	L	See *Batá Aberikula*
Apón	L	Vocal soloist
Aña	L	Orisha that resides within consecrated *batá*, *iyesá* and *bembé* drums
Barrio	S	Neighborhood
Batá	L	Double-headed, hourglass-shaped membranophone.
Batá Aberikula	L	*Batá* drums that are not consecrated
Batá Fundamento	L	*Batá* drums that are consecrated
Batalero	S	*Batá* drummer
Bembé	S	Ritual drumming ceremony for the *orisha*. Also known as a *toque de santo* or *tambor*. Also, a double-headed cylindrical membranophone used in Lucumí rituals
Boca	S	Mouth, implying the *enú* head of the *batá*. Also, an exclamation calling for people to sing.
Cabildo	S	A mutual aid society
Chachá	L	The small-diameter, high-pitched head of a *batá* drum
Cierre	S	The closing section of a *toque de santo*
Columbia	S	A type of *rumba* in 6/8-meter distinguished by a solo male dancer
Comparsa	S	Afro-Cuban folkloric genre of music and dance
Dueño	S	Owner of a set of *batá*
Enú	L	Larger-diameter, low-pitched head of a *batá* drum
Fundamento	S	See *Batá Fundamento*
Guaguancó	S	Type of *rumba* in 4/4-meter distinguished by a competitive couples dance.
Guarapachangéo	S	A free style of *rumba* that combines *Yambú*, *Guaguancó*, *Columbia,* and *batá* rhythms.
Güiro	S	An instrument comprised of a gourd wrapped in beads. Also, a Lucumí performance style that uses three gourds.

Igbodú	L	Sacred room or corner of a room that holds an altar for the *orisha.*
Itótele	L	Middle drum of the *batá* ensemble
Iyá	L	Large drum of the *batá* ensemble
Iyawó	L	New Lucumí initiate. Usually accompanied with a restrictive lifestyle for one year.
Iyesá	L	Ethnic group in Africa and Cuba. Also a style of performance and a rhythm for the *batá*
Okónkolo	L	Smallest drum in the *batá* ensemble
Olubatá	L	*Batá* master
Orisha	L	Yoruba-Lucumí deities with human-like personalities who are associated with, and are believed to control, natural phenomena.
Oro	L	Liturgical sequence
Oro Igbodú	L	Sequence of *seco toques* performed in front of the *igbodú* in honor of all the *orisha*
Oro Eyá Aranla	L	Sequence of songs accompanied by *toques* in honor of all the *orisha*
Padrino	S	Godfather
Regla de Ocha	S	Rule of the *orisha*. Synonymous with Santería and Lucumí religion.
Rumba	S	Afro-Cuban style of music and dance
Rumbero	S	Performer of *rumba*
Toque	S	Drum piece
Toque de Santo	S	Ritual ceremony for the *orisha*
Toques Especial	S	*Toque* not traditionally associated with the *oro igbodú*
Santería	S	Lukumí religion
Santero	S	Male initiate of Santería
Santera	S	Female initiate of Santería
Santo	S	Literally, saint. Refers to the *orisha*
Tambor	S	Literally, drum. Also drumming, which is synonymous with *toque de santo* and *bembé*
Yambú	S	Type of *rumba* in 4/4-meter. Characterized by a non-competitive couples dance.
Wemilere	L	Third phase of a *toque de santo*, also referred to as the fiesta

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