

3-21-2014

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

CON LA MOCHA AL CUELLO: THE EMERGENCE AND NEGOTIATION OF
AFRO-CHINESE RELIGION IN CUBA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

GLOBAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES

by

Martin A. Tsang

2014

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Martin A. Tsang, and entitled *Con la Mocha al Cuello: The Emergence and Negotiation of Afro-Chinese Religion in Cuba*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 25, 2014

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Florida International University, 2014

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the ancestors, and my life-affirming committee: Elegua, Yemayá, Erinle, and all the orisha. Without their supervision, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the friends, family, colleagues and professors whose intellectual and emotional support made this dissertation possible. The enthusiasm with which my research topic was received spurred me on to form my dream team dissertation committee. They deserve a lot of applause for going above and beyond the call of academic duty. Collectively, my committee's dedication and feedback at every turn inspired me to always aim just that bit higher. My unreserved appreciation goes to Dr. Guillermo Grenier who has supported me from the inception of this project, and who gave me the insight that I needed to fashion the pieces into a whole and see the bigger picture. Dr. Jean M. Rahier has encouraged me to be an insightful scholar, to think critically at every turn, and helped me to understand my positionality, not just in relation to my work in Cuba, but also my place in academia. He is a true inspiration and ethnographic role model. Dr. Lisandro Pérez instilled in me a passion for studying Cuba and his scholarship continues to motivate me to strive for excellence. Dr. Albert K. Wuaku provided me with key insights into successfully navigating religious fieldwork and he has helped guide my research in important critical dimensions. I owe an immense debt to Dr. Andrea Queeley, it was only with her generous, thoughtful feedback, careful edits, and theoretical insights that made this work surmountable. Everyone should be blessed to experience a mentor like her.

There are numerous faculty dispersed in several institutions globally that have helped me craft this work in very real ways. Unfortunately, it would be impossible to mention them all and thank them adequately here. Thank you, Jean Stubbs, for setting me on this course all those years ago in a University of London conference room, what a life-

changing meeting that turned out to be! Professor Kathleen López at Rutgers University has been a mentor and guide from afar and her flawless work gives me something to aspire to.

This dissertation was made possible by the generous support I received at each stage of the process. I am particularly thankful for FIU's Dissertation Evidence Acquisition Award and Dissertation Year Fellowship from the University Graduate School. Fieldwork in Cuba was only made possible by substantial support from the Horniman Anthropological Scholarship Fund and the Sutasoma Award, both from the Royal Anthropological Institute in the UK, making this research a truly transnational endeavor. I am immensely proud to have been a fellow of the Cuban Heritage Collection of the University of Miami in both the pre- and post-prospectus categories. The people, intellectual environment, and resources I encountered at the CHC are unparalleled and impacted me on profound levels and my work is infinitely better for it. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange whose support of academic research on Chinese civilization both in China and abroad is a rare and important resource.

To Alá Leké, who influenced this dissertation in countless ways, I say bendición and modupé. To the people of Cuba, my compadres, and comadres: the way that you opened your doors and allowed me into your world without hesitation or reservation leaves me humbled and full of gratitude. I was guided by forces both seen and unseen to some incredible, life-changing, and life-affirming people and I hope that this small offering serves to illuminate your world. Ashé.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

CON LA MOCHA AL CUELLO: THE EMERGENCE AND NEGOTIATION OF
AFRO-CHINESE RELIGION IN CUBA

by

Martin A. Tsang

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Guillermo Grenier, Major Professor

Between 1847 and 1874 approximately 142,000 Chinese indentured laborers, commonly known as coolies, migrated to Cuba to work primarily on sugar plantations following the demise of African slavery. Comprised of 99.97% males and contracted to work for eight years or more, many of those coolies that survived the harsh conditions in Cuba formed consensual unions with freed and enslaved women of color. These intimate connections between Chinese indentures and Cubans of African descent developed not only because they shared the same living and working spaces, but also because they occupied similar sociocultural, political, and economic spheres in colonial society.

This ethnography investigates the rise of a discernible Afro-Chinese religiosity that emerged from the coming together of these two diasporic groups. The Lukumi religion, often described as being a syncretism between African and European elements, contains impressive articulations of Chinese and Afro-Chinese influences, particularly in the realm of material culture. On the basis of qualitative research that I conducted among Chinese and Afro-Chinese Lukumi practitioners in Cuba, this dissertation documents the development of syncretism and discursive religious practice between African and

Chinese diasporas. I conceptualize a framework of interdiasporic cross-fertilization and, in so doing, disassemble Cuba's racial and religious categories, which support a notion of Cubanidad that renders Chinese subjectivity invisible. I argue that Afro-Chinese religiosity became a space for a positive association that I call Sinalidad. I also argue that this religiosity has been elaborated upon largely because of transformations in Cuba's social and economic landscape that began during Cuba's Special Period. Thus, the dissertation uses religious practice as a lens through which I shed light upon another dimension of identity making, transnationalism and the political economy of tourism on the island.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	Archivo Nacional de Cuba
CCW	Casino Chung Wah
DM	Diario de la Marina
FGSC	Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil
FTG	Fondo Tenencia de Gobierno
GG	Gobierno General
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Queer
MCT	Min Chih Tang

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Jorge's Predicament: Bringing Glory to the Ancestors

For more than six years, Jorge has been doing a roaring trade in selling human bones he has pilfered from various cemeteries across Havana. According to him, his best sellers are the complete skulls and femurs of Chinese males. When he can acquire them, they net him approximately US\$20 apiece, about the equivalent of a month's wages for a Cuban government worker. "They are becoming harder to get. Sometimes I find them with hair still attached, which gets me a bit more money...every *brujo* [wizard] wants *un muerto chino* [a Chinese spirit]. Why? They work so hard and there is nothing they aren't willing to do. If you really want to mess someone up, send *un chino* after them. When they came to Cuba to cut cane, they used the *mocha* [machete] to kill their superiors and even themselves if they lost face. Imagine a machete at the neck! Brutal. I am saying 'they', but I really should say 'we' as I am part Chinese".

Jorge's paternal grandfather had migrated from Guangdong in 1902 and had married an Afro-Cuban woman whose parents were brought to the island as slaves. Jorge comes from a line of *paleros*, practitioners of Bakongo religion, and he had also been initiated as a priest of the Lukumi orisha, Shangó. In his house in Guanabacoa, which he shares with his wife and three children, he maintains a shrine for an inherited Sanfancón, the Chinese-Cuban god of war, whose statue stands sentry to the large wooden bowl that contains the consecrated emblems – stones, celts, wooden axes, and cowries – of his Shangó. On his roof, in a small metal shed, Jorge keeps his *prenda de palo*, Coyumbe, and in yet another part of the house is a box, tightly wrapped like a parcel in white cloth

and tied with a thin rope to which is attached a waxed paper seal with elaborate Chinese writing on it. These are the remains of his paternal grandfather's bones that were *legally* disinterred from one of the main cemeteries that otherwise act as Jorge's warehouse for his "merchandise". His Chinese *abuelo* [grandfather] had left money and detailed instructions for his remains to be returned to the southern Chinese village of his birth, his grandfather's desired final resting place. That was his dying wish, and by completing it, Jorge would be complying with the Chinese filial goal of "bringing glory to the ancestors".

Jorge is waiting for the papers to be issued from the Chinese association in Havana's Chinatown to advise him of an opening when the next round of Chinese remains will be repatriated, which he estimates may happen in the next year or so. Apparently, there is a considerable waiting list, with dozens of Chinese-Cuban families safeguarding such packages in their homes; eager to send their ancestors' remains to a homeland otherwise inaccessible to many of the living generation. In the meantime, his grandfather is safe in Jorge's house. Jorge is adamant that his grandfather's bones will not end up in the possession of a palero or santero where human remains are sometimes used for ritual purposes. No matter how bad things may be or get living in Cuba, such a fate is unthinkable to Jorge, and it would be the height of disrespect. I could tell he was offended that I would even ask about such a thing and I regretted it instantly.

Jorge is well aware of the paradox he lives by: being part Chinese and selling Chinese bones that will be used in a religion he also practices. The religious use of these Chinese remains is antithetical to the expressed wishes of Chinese who had migrated as laborers and who probably imagined would spend their last years in China rather than

dying in Cuba. Jorge's words belie a great deal of emotion when expressing what he feels he must do to survive, to care for his family, and also to do right by his Chinese ancestors and heritage. Jorge adroitly explains that living in Cuba is the ultimate paradox, where each action must be weighed against its own consequences and that these are the "things of life".

This is why Jorge prefers to sell *his* bones to foreigners, not only because the "yumas", as he refers to them, pay more money for the quarry but also because it allays the ambivalence of his own positionality, as the trade could easily be regarded as the selling of his ancestors; his family. Jorge refers not only to Americans, when he speaks of *las yumas* – its original definition – but to all foreigners that come to the island in ever growing numbers for the specific purpose of seeking Afro-Cuban religion, an unpredicted yet lucrative business for many in Cuba. "I feel a bit better when I sell one to a *yuma*, that way I know these spirits get to leave this island, something they could not do when they were alive." Jorge explains that the craniums and femurs are often used in *prendas*, Kongo-derived magico-medicinal assemblages that are spiritually reanimated for work by the spirit of the deceased. The spirit does the work on the behalf of the palero, whether it is for healing or harming. It is a form of indenture in the afterlife, and the antithesis of resting in peace. Bones are also ground up and used in *inshe* or "works" relating to some Lukumi orisha and rituals that are connected with the mysteries of death and dying, and the full range of Afro-Cuban religious uses means that fresh supplies of bones are always in demand.

Jorge has witnessed a steady rise in his business from such foreign-derived trade, and they are playing an increasingly important economic role since the Soviet collapse

and Cuba's growing reliance on tourist dollars, euros and pounds. Jorge's actions belie what many Cubans call a *doble cara*, expressing the ability, and necessity to have "two faces", or seemingly contradictory stances or beliefs. The need to profess conflicting standpoints depending on the situation and audience has developed in earnest following the incredibly difficult and austere decade of the 1990s, still very much at the forefront of Cuban minds and continues to inflect strategies for day-to-day survival. Jorge's precarious positionality with regard to Chinese identity, his religious practices, the need for economic survival, and morality all weigh heavily on his mind and heart, and he expresses this in terms of being in the fight, "*estamos en la lucha*". Jorge's startling narrative and its associated clandestine bone trade speaks of a Cuban religious setting in which Chinese people, or at least ideas of being Chinese have a unique, subtle, yet integral presence; "*el chino no descansa*" Jorge explains with a harried sigh, "the Chinese man does not rest."

The current state of affairs in Cuba is indicative of a complex story of cultural and religious syncretism (a concept that is defined in depth in Chapter III) that sets various standards and imaginaries for diasporas in Cuba and their related ethnic and cultural intersections. These ideas have met and melded into a landscape; both real and metaphorical and are comprised of contrasts and selective Orientalist-inspired imports. People and their objects circulate, collide, and adapt to produce new iterations of existing experiences and practices. I examine in the present research how massive inflows of Chinese from indenture and later, as waves of free migration, led to prolonged and intimate contact with Afro-Cuban people, culminating in rich intertwined concepts of religious practices.

I became invested in the topic after observing first hand, a startling and spectacular array of imagery of Chinese gods, symbols, narratives, implements, practices, and foods in the unlikeliest of settings: Afro-Cuban orisha shrines, their rituals, and celebrations. I first travelled to Cuba in 2005, having completed a Masters dissertation on Afro-diasporic religious communities in Europe at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. I was eager to see for myself the living, tropical crucible that has seemingly generated and sustained a global florescence of orisha practitioners. Cuba was envisioned as the spiritual birthplace of countless Lukumi practitioners in Europe and North America, even though many of the practitioners I had met had never visited said island, nor had any plans to do so. What struck me the most in Cuba was encountering many Lukumi priests that could easily have been my close biological relatives. These priests were phenotypically (or stereotypically) Chinese/Asian looking, and occupying prestigious and vociferous positions within their religious communities and fields of praxis. While there are Cuban-born olorisha (orisha priests) of every perceivable ethnicity and phenotype, there is a sizable and prominent corps of olorisha, babalawo, Abakuá, paleros, and *espiritistas* that take immense pride in their Chinese heritage. Perhaps admixture is to be expected in religious traditions in diaspora, yet it was glaringly absent from their attendant literatures.

On a practical note, to prepare myself for this study, I completed several years of Spanish language training prior to fieldwork to have the ability to converse freely with my interlocutors without the need of a translator. The travels to Cuba I had made before commencing fieldwork proper helped to acclimatize my ear to the rigors of “Cuban” Spanish and the religious settings in which I would conduct my research. Both the

language and ritual practices encountered contained vernaculars, which could not be pre-emptively prepared for or readily taught outside of the country. My early exposure to these settings eased my entrance into the lives and practices of Chinese-Cuban orisha worshippers.

Research Objectives

I set the stage for the present study by first examining existing literature for instances of the Chinese in Cuba and their particular and peculiar histories from indenture to the present day. I attend to the intersections of transnationalism, diasporic experience, and culture contact that have produced new religious expressions and by providing ethnographic examples and lived experiences, I explore what can be called Afro-Chinese religiosity in Cuba. Central to the research enterprise is the requirement that I reframe the existing conceptualizations of a slippery and elusive theory – syncretism – upon which much of the material here follows. I do this ethnographically, offering evidence and consequently developing a conceptual framework that illuminates not simply the products but also the processes of religious synthesis and how such syncretism occurs inter-diasporically, between two ethnic groups, such as the Chinese and African experiences related here. My proposed framework is a stark departure from previous theorizing that has explored religious syncretism in terms of disjointed and imbalanced power relations, i.e., the abstract, dominant and imposing Catholic Church and the marginalized, new world practices of African “primitive” and Chinese “folk” religions. The plundering of graves in Cuba belies a complex juncture of race, religion and identities that occurs in Cuba. The vignette above hinges on the imagined “power” of what constitutes the

Chinese: not just in Afro-Cuban religiosity, but also in Cuba at large. The idea of the Chinese feature heavily in economies of religion, in mainstream ascriptions and adoptions of meaning, as well as their subjectivities within both national and transnational milieux.

My dissertation expands current scholarly discourse by examining how Chinese and Lukumi religious practices (see glossary of terms, Appendix I) have converged to shape new diasporic religious phenomena on the island. I investigate how a seemingly ambiguous and amorphous group of males from China came to have a massive and wide-ranging impact on Afro-Cuban religion that has, thus far, eluded academic examination. My ethnographic research explores contact and lived experiences of Chinese and black descendants in Cuba, an occurrence that forever changed the social and cultural horizons of the country, which is echoed in their constitutive diasporas. Over the course of different waves of migrations and their popular sentiments of their presence historically vacillating between tolerance and exclusion, the Chinese have been viewed as transitory guests or temporary residents that were required for work but not desired for immigration.

The machinations of indenture or contractual labor set these Chinese inflows apart from any other ethnic or social group present in Cuba, and their propensity to stay (or inability to leave), to settle and marry non-Chinese was an unwelcome surprise to the colonial regime. Both Spanish and later, Cuban political action, targeted anti-Chinese strictures and legislation that sought to thwart their imagined amoral and regressive cultural influence on the nation state's identity making processes.

These works were the baseline upon which ethnic labels became increasingly reified, sidestepping the issue of creolization and hybrid turns in ethnogenesis. Cuban culture and religiosity are produced and reproduced in transcultural models by the popular macro-level trope of the *ajiaco*, the Caribbean equivalent of a racial melting pot. Perhaps another, more apt culinary-derived example would be to account for and explore each component of a *mise en place*, and follow the trajectory of events of each ingredient and their relevant combinations. Good ethnographic study, much like *haute cuisine*, insists on full use of and explicit reference to provenance, timing, skill and training.

The starting point for my work has been based on the observation that the lives of Chinese and their descendants in Cuba have largely been ignored in important discussions of the Caribbean. The place and influence of the Chinese in Afro-Cuban religion is virtually unknown and undocumented. What spaces do the Chinese occupy in discourses of “African diasporic religion?” Not many, if the investigator is solely oriented to the schism of subjugated African influences juxtaposed to European penetration and dominance. Important discussions relating to situating the Chinese are erased as a result, and by recognizing the limits of skewed African diasporic discourse, a space is made for reconsidering all constitutive ethnic elements in religious production. Indeed, such a procedure calls for a refocus, starting with the admission that African cultural heritage, in a new setting, has to be defined in less concrete and reified terms than those previously adopted in nineteenth and twentieth century Afro-Atlantic acculturating paradigms. My approach centers interdiasporic strategies of reconciling distinct religious practices and I reevaluate these activities of religion making, restituting such actors from their marginalized positionality. I focus on interdiasporic intersections

to illuminate better the underlying consistencies and internal cultural dynamism (Mintz and Price 1992, 10).

What sets this study apart from a general headcount of the various identifications of practitioners and Cuban religious compositions, is its focus on the degree to which the Chinese are present and active, in terms of the priesthood, in material culture/iconography, institutions, and emic narratives in the instance of Afro-diasporic religion. Similarly, the literature and related language that deals with African presence in Cuba have been carefully codified as part of a selective, transcultural process, a scholarly enterprise initiated by a handful of academics that expertly treated black presence and experience as a homogenous entity within their conceptual models of achievement and integration. Existing studies have maintained an “Africanizing” religious paradigm in the Caribbean and Latin America that is premised on a discourse of “Africa” that was invented and incorporated in the European, colonial project (Yelvington 2001). The dominant view of diasporic religions in the Americas presupposes a linear past of amorphous cultural traits and knowledge that combined in a wholesale fashion with co-existing cultures to produce a vague cultural mass, described perfectly in transculturating terms as a stew or casserole. The pressing need for a sharper lens of cultural and religious understanding explores the idea of *cooking* religious history (Palmié 2013).

There are many official and officious discourses that circulate about Cuba, its people and diaspora[s]. In the case of the 125,000 plus Chinese that first arrived as indentures to the island and later as free migrants, is a sudden and significant addition to any country, and especially so in Cuba given its extant demographics and geography. The Chinese of Cuba and their descendants have gained very little academic attention in the

166 years they have been present, and their greater impact and influence has been largely ignored. The existence/presence of the Chinese in Cuba has often been reduced to little more than a footnote, or an inclusion in the odd statistic, with little in the way of explanation or theoretical and cultural understanding. Notable exceptions are the recent work by Kathleen López (2005; 2008; 2009 and 2013) Evelyn Hu-DeHart (1992; 1994; 2004 and 2010) and Lisa Yun (2004 and 2008) in English, as well as Antonio Chuffat Latour (1927), Juan Pérez de la Riva (1967 and 2000), and José Baltar Rodríguez (1997) in Spanish. My work is synergistic to the rare few published works invoked here, and it is the first to focus specifically on Afro-Chinese diasporic religiosity. What the Chinese contributed to Cuban culture, how they made their lives, how their identities have been forged and assigned, all operate within a discourse that vacillates between two poles. One pole evokes romanticized, ahistorical notions of an orientalist, atavistic fantasy of opiates, martial arts, and sensual pleasure, and – at the other extreme – as predisposed to submission and humility (Yun 2004).

My work draws focus on Chinese and African syncretisms, a dialog that has been overshadowed in favor of European and Christian cultural contacts. In so doing I break from the tendency to explore Afro-diasporic religiosity solely in terms of Africa and a tireless search for “imported” or “retained” religious practices and knowledge and instead I attend to the interactions of Chinese and African derived diasporas in Cuba, which have been thus far treated as separate and isolated. I assert that such an approach offers a better understanding of diasporic religious interaction and I offer a departure from measures and descriptions of Afro-diasporic religiosity within discourses that places Europe and

Christianity – through their religious affiliation – as responsible for their elicitation and existence.

How could it be that Afro-Cuban religiosity, that has such a highly visible and lauded Chinese presence and influence at its core, is resolutely ignored in the literature? Perhaps the reason for this invisibility lies within the theoretical limits of the reigning epistemological lenses used to examine the Caribbean and Latin America, their cultures and religious practices. Academia and its assembled scribes are not immune to inadvertently flawed or un-critiqued ways of understanding, especially in marginalized and relatively new avenues of research concerning this present study.

I opened this chapter with the story of the plundering of Chinese bones for use in Afro-Cuban ritual that reveal intricate connections between African and Chinese diasporas, sometimes united in the same body. The story underscores first the need for greater understanding of the ways in which the Cuban-Chinese and Afro-Cubans are represented, their unions and strategies for living in Cuba that both defines and obviates discourse on race and interconnections. Perhaps the idea of the Chinese as having malefic powers is not just a skin-deep association, but also one that uncovers deep-rooted fear of the historical trajectory of the Chinese in their 166 years of presence in Cuba, which in turn, is rooted in notions and invocations of economies of labor, competition, and marginalization. I relate the story of the outsider, the unforeseen effects of slavery and indenture, and being othered, stigmatized, and objectified, even after death. My work here examines the discursive limits of current thinking in Caribbean and Latin American religiosity with specific reference to Chinese and Afro-Cuban religious practices. My research is born out of an understanding that existing approaches do not adequately

explore the dynamics and agency of culture contact and the ongoing development of religious practice, as occurring or co-occurring across two diasporas and evidenced through syncretism. These limitations have surreptitiously served to reify and affirm only part of an already blinkered framework, requiring a theoretical analysis that firmly grasps lived experience and religious practice in Cuba.

Perhaps the reason little scholarship has been produced on Chinese-Cubans lies in a pan-global, homogeneous assumption of Chinese diasporas: that the Chinese are present outside of their homeland, but separate and averse to engage in, and unwilling to assimilate to host cultures. The Chinese are deemed ideologically and culturally distinct and distant, stereotyped by José Martí as being “passive and exotic” (López 2013). Cantonese male workers were not meant to stay in Cuba after their indenture contracts had ended, let alone form relationships with the *other* other: black and mixed race women. These women were the guardians of a personal religion, a religion wherein women of color were the chief architects. The Chinese brought with them to Cuba their secretive societies and a sensibility of hospitality and religious co-option and intersectionality when confronted with other powers and modes of knowledge, tenets that are intrinsic and mirroring their own experiences of religiosity in China, itself a symphony of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. As well as these three religious areas and their interactions, the Chinese who came to Cuba via indenture were also guided by an abiding and deep sense of filial piety, and the assuredness of a common identity, itself rooted in a classical mythology of apotheosized ancestors, which, if well propitiated, continue to bestow their blessings. The religious interventions that resulted from these diasporic unions are the nuclei on which I premise the framework of cross-

fertilization, offering clear and tangible illustrations from Afro-Chinese religiosity in Cuba.

Chinese and Afro-Chinese priests in Cuba, are today worshipping their orishas and other deities, and are active members of the various religious communities they operate within. Some have accrued fame for their knowledge and power, being sought out for readings and rituals by both Cubans and foreigners alike – the latter including many who were initially attracted to Afro-Cuban religion through exposure to public spectacles of music and dance. My research advances our knowledge in a number of arenas. Among the multiple layers of Cuban identity, the large numbers of Chinese that have made their home there since the mid-nineteenth century have been labeled as innocuous, and invisibilized in mainstream Cuban culture. The Chinese as subaltern, liminal, and marginal has occurred through a number of gender, racial, and sexual hegemonies that have glossed over the Chinese diasporic experience as well as governmental ideologies that have engineered and erased differences.

Coinciding with twentieth century political events, changing allies and ties, and coupled with the ebb and tide of the influences of Chinese and Russian superpowers, Cuba today, more than ever before, demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to its Chinese heritage and Sino-Cuban identities of its population in relation to state governance and politicking. For example, the commemoration of the Chinese arrival as indentured workers during the nineteenth century is very active in today's Cuba, with monuments in Regla and Havana's chic Vedado district, attesting to the brave constitution of the Chinese and their unwavering fidelity to the cause of the 1959 Revolution. As I discuss in Chapter VI, the state's intervention in developing Havana's Chinatown as a tourist

destination and cultural diversion is a prime example of the recent co-option and projection of an inclusive and beneficial aspect of Cuba's identity.

Similarly, African-derived religiosity in Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America has itself been subject to extensive racism, essentialism and sociocultural marginalization (see Ortiz 1973). Afro-Cuban religions have alternatively been examined in two disjointed and polar lenses, one that conjures ideas of purity, legacy, and "African" retention and the other that is devoid of power, agency, and history—discounting their religions to the category of folklore and as lacking in structure, and thus relegated to a chaotic and untrammelled hybridity. I avoid these pitfalls by charting a path of Afro-Chinese religious discourse that differs greatly from preceding academic and cultural discourses. I demonstrate through ethnography the ways in which this challenge occurs and how the Chinese themselves, not just altered, but had a direct hand in shaping the trajectory and practice of Afro-Cuban religiosity.

Specific Research Aims

From the planning stages of this work, my research has been guided by the overarching question: How have Chinese religious practices influenced Afro-Cuban orisha worship? The orisha are deities of West Africa, brought to Cuba via the agencies of slavery and colonialism. Often called Lukumi, or *la regla de osha*, many of the deities were given Catholic guises to avoid persecution in covert worship. As discussed below, existing research on religions, such as *la regla de osha*, have almost exclusively treated them in light of their European and Christian elements and hybridity (Brown 2003a, Palmié 1995). Often excluded from this historical narrative is the fact that following the

collapse of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Chinese indentured laborers came to Cuba in large numbers to work the sugar mills populated by slaves to keep up with growing, global demand for sugar. Through inhabiting the same social spheres, Chinese and African-derived cultural processes met in Cuba, by sharing proximal living and working conditions and forging intimate relationships. Through the intimate meetings of two diasporas (referring to the discursive focus of the dispersal of people outside of their recognized homeland or particular nation state) in a colonial and Euro-centric environment led to the development of a spectacular array of Afro-Chinese syncretisms. My current ethnographic exercise adds richness to the existing body of knowledge by discussing the processes as well as the cultural and religious products resulting from this unique set of historical circumstances. I am further guided by the following questions:

- How did the Chinese become prominent in Afro-Cuban religious discourse? What were the avenues and processes through which this occurred?
- How is material culture and collective memory generated, motivated, and transferred between the Chinese and African diasporas of Cuba?
- In what ways do existing anthropological conceptualizations of religious syncretism and diasporic identity-making contest or reconcile religious change and innovation?
- How have the state's ideas of identity and politics influenced Afro-Chinese religious formation and its expression?
- What relation do these cross-diasporic syncretisms have to larger discourses of what it means to be Cuban?

Accessing the Field and the Im/Practicalities of Fieldwork in Cuba

I conducted the majority of fieldwork for this research in Cuba over thirteen months, which commenced in January 2012. I broke fieldwork periods into two and three month segments, punctuated with trips outside of the island to conduct research in

archival collections (see Appendix II), presentations at professional meetings and a related research fellowship at the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

My entrance to the Cuban field was greatly facilitated by pilot research trips undertaken during 2010 and 2011. The Tinker Foundation Field Research Grant, in particular, allowed me to visit Cuba in May 2010. That time in Cuba afforded me the opportunity to make contacts with several participants who would go on to be fundamental to the success of my later excursions. During that pilot study, I was able to travel to prospective sites outside of Havana, confirming that fieldwork was feasible, and reassured me that there was sufficient and significant data to collect. By making pilot trips I prospected the field locations which would yield the richest data: Havana, Matanzas, Sagua La Grande and Cienfuegos, and I was able to determine at the pilot survey stage, those potential sites that were not useful in this study.

I conducted archival, secondary and supplementary research in repositories and collections in North America and Europe, post fieldwork (see Appendix II). In addition to the original research plan I had developed, I had the fortune and opportunity to participate in research trips on Chinese indenture and African religiosity in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, and in Paramaribo, Suriname. These helped to holistically inform the present study to better understand and situate my research within the experiences of Chinese and African diasporas in the wider context of the Caribbean and Latin America.

The Population of the Study

I gathered data using the methods outlined below on a number of populations and individuals in Cuba, each directly helping to shape the study, and contribute data to the

underlying research goals. The definitions and descriptions of the persons that make up my study are intimately linked to their ethnicity, race and religious affiliation. Practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, of different Cuban ethnicities made up my study population. Those Cubans that identified as *los chinos-cubanos* “Chinese-Cubans”, and *los mulatos achinados* “mixed Afro-Chinese” formed a major proportion of this population. Throughout my fieldwork I encountered different terms for diasporic Afro-Cuban and Afro-Chinese identities and I do my best to represent the variation and highlight nuances in meaning when one term was chosen over another. In the main, the majority of terms applied, including “Sino” and “Chinese/Chino” are synonymous. Some Cubans that I interviewed foregrounded a particular aspect of their diasporic heritage through the choice of words, such as *Chino-Cubano* to emphasize Chinese heritage, and *mulato achinado* to convey being Chinese relative to an Afro-Cuban identity making perspective. Aside from wishing to convey the language of my interlocutors, I use the term Afro-Cuban and Chinese-Cuban in their broadest senses, to include mixed heritage when appropriate, both Cuban born and naturalized persons. During interviews I asked open-ended questions along two lines: one concerned with race, physiognomy and phenotype, and the other, ethnicity, family history and heritage. I followed up these lines of questioning by asking for further reflection on the ways my participants identify themselves and in turn, how others have identified them.

I affirm that race is socially constructed, and is indeed a very pervasive creation. Its use here is a heuristic move, to better grasp the schismogenesis of Cuba’s population and associated racial politics. Race and ethnicity are *immensely* popular topics in Cuba, despite the government’s best and prolonged efforts to eradicate race as a factor of

Cuba's national[ist] identity; it is continually discussed, contested, ascribed and encountered in Cuba in many socio-cultural dimensions. Indeed, I too became ascribed and described according to phenotype. I became *El Chino de Inglaterra* throughout my fieldwork, something that was apparently a lot more memorable than my actual name.

Analyzing Material Culture and Related Methodologies

I am interested in the tangible, multi-vocalic and multi-textural ways by which material culture, the past, identity, and memory are experienced and transmitted. I implement material cultural analysis and attendant methodologies to indicate and illuminate the processes of interdiasporic syncretism. The processes of mixing is most evident in ritual objects, performance and other sacred-making materials, as well as the spaces they occupy in relation to the diasporas that produced and provided them. Material analysis is a central component of this research, embedded within a mixed methods approach of participant observation, interviews, life histories and archival work that constitutes the thrust of this ethnography. The current investigation examines the provenance and associated meanings given to chosen objects used in ritual and worship and with collective religious memory that constitute these biographies so that I may map the syncretism that underpins Afro-Chinese culture contact. The inclusion of certain objects, their uses and accompanying definitions and explanations are examined in relation to tropes of identity, trans-nationality and religious change.

Syncretism and its cognates *creolization* and *hybridity* have equally powerful pasts and are tenacious and problematic to conceptualize. Syncretism's descriptive opacity is derived from its wide range of application and popular reach that have served

to distract from its use in contemporary anthropology of religion. Much of the work that follows interrogates the meaning and praxis of syncretism at its core. I conceptualize my own version of a syncretism model to provide a departure from existing understandings of an unbalanced dialogic of European Christian dominations extant in Afro-Cuban religion.

Syncretism can be an excellent lens for highlighting cross-cultural change if handled correctly. The key here is to regard diasporas as independent, dynamic terrains that are indeed informed by both their host and homelands yet still retain and attain their own diasporic identity which is augmented by the presence and subsequent interaction of further diasporas. My intervention highlights the importance of a bi- or multi-diasporic terrain, which elicits new responses and formations in terms of identity and socio-cultural practice such as is evidenced in Lukumi religion. Reconfiguring syncretism according to diaspora also has important consequences for understanding the translation and adoption of politics, transnationalism, the circuitous routes of people, goods, and ideas. Syncretism therefore needs careful unpacking if it is to offer the insight premised and promised here, and one of the first strategies I implement is to disentangle syncretism from the myriad of similar terms that are all deeply culturally rooted and open to various and nefarious interpretations.

Richard Werbner notes that the politics of syncretism is a politics of “interpretation and reinterpretation” (Werbner 1994, 212), and I agree that syncretism should be delineated specifically as an ongoing, continual contestation that operates across cultures and traditions diachronically, which reproduces and re-invents religious belief and practice. One historical, inscribed moment of syncretism should not be

conflated as an on-going dynamic process, which has too often been the case. If the study of religion outside of syncretism discourse routinely contests static notions of its practice, then strategies to understand the implications of diasporic movement and interaction in fashioning religion cannot succeed if attention is not duly paid to these same factors. Religion as syncretized product has dominated anthropological discourse specifically as concretized, completed and unanimously adjudicated, which is precisely the first major rupture I make here in defining syncretism. Through the examples afforded by the interaction of African and Chinese persons (and their mixed descendants) in their Cuban diaspora in terms of producing a different than previously reported understanding of Afro-Cuban religion that does not reify historical responses to interaction but seeks to understand the dual-sided development and approach to observable material culture.

Making Space for [My] Ethnographic Self

My identity as mixed-Chinese enhanced my ability to move between several distinct social, cultural, and political milieu during my fieldwork in Cuba. I operated in fields of meaning, some of which were new and some that were familiar, each requiring delicate evaluation and navigation in order to successfully build rapport and trustful relationships with persons whose voices and data I found beneficial to my research.

I identify as mixed-race, being the product of a Cantonese, Hakka father, a Swiss-German mother and an upbringing in the United Kingdom, in southeast England, in a small commuter town that serves London. I am a first generation born to immigrants, both of whom decided to have little contact with their respective homelands and whose struggles and felt cultural differences in the UK I was acutely aware of. I am a part of the

Chinese diaspora, however, that is a label I claim together with multi-heritage, one that I share with an ever-growing number of persons that have similar experiences as myself. I am well aware, nonetheless, that the identity that is often assigned to me is simply; “Chinese” rather than British, and in Cuba, being Chinese can refer to anyone with an epicanthic fold, regardless of actual nationality or particular genetic inheritance. Being “foreign” in and of itself in Cuba can be a barrier to building rapport and compounding language divides as well as political risk for Cuban nationals whose government takes a dim view of any recorded provocations on the subject of state operations to outsiders. These factors of fieldwork in Cuba all potentially posed methodological risks I was keen on mitigating. Lok Siu, a Chinese-American anthropologist who has studied the Chinese diaspora in Panama notes that she was accepted and treated as a “regular” Panamanian Chinese during her field research, which permitted her not only to enter the social world of her informants but also to inhabit it as a Panamanian (2005, xviii).

I believe that being perceived as someone sharing the same or similar diasporic ethnicity helped bridge the gap between my perceived foreignness when interacting with Chinese-Cubans. I inhabited the social world as a Chinese-Cuban and as an *olorisha*, helping to situate me within, rather than outside, because of the perception of *familiarity*, in every sense of the word. My interlocutors referred to me as a family member, whose experiences of living *afuera* [abroad] did not determine my outsider status. Paradoxically, the inability of many Cubans and Chinese-Cubans to freely travel outside of the island has not prevented their access or their place within transnational networks. Rather, there is great emphasis for family members to travel and on forming these webs and thus diasporic experience is an intrinsic aspect of Cuba’s current social order. It is therefore

very common for Cubans that have migrated abroad or whose recent descendants have been born in diaspora to be considered just as Cuban as someone that has never left the island. Barring socio-economic disparities, geographical location is not the sole indicator of *Cubanidad* or Cubanness. Interestingly, in a similar vein, the Chinese make little distinction between Chinese born in China, to those born in other countries, the latter labeled *Huáyì*, and both are considered culturally and ethnically Chinese, a designation that is not contingent on experiences of overseas upbringing or migration. A diasporic Chinese visiting or residing in China is thus termed a “returning” Chinese. The vast majority of participants welcomed me as a returned Cuban-Chinese, and demonstrated an exceptional level of openness, *confianza* [deep trust] and candidness that made the research process ever more rewarding and fruitful.

As someone that has been initiated as an orisha priest in the Lukumi tradition, I was welcomed in Cuban Lukumi religious settings as a peer and religious family member. I was not treated as an outsider, rather I had access to information and ceremonies inaccessible to Cuban non-initiates and I was expected to roll up my sleeves and help out. My ability to attain an elevated level of rapport occurred after a few discreet enquiries as to my initiatory credentials were made through the vast international network of orisha priests as Lukumi initiations presage “witnesses” to the rites that a person claims he or she has undertaken. Upon receipt of confirmation from foreign sources of my Afro-Cuban initiatory status, my relational positioning as “*abure*”, a Lukumi term for brother/sister, one of the many kinship terms fostered within orisha religion, was unequivocally established. The use of *abure* denotes a profound, personal level of respect, trust and camaraderie, a religious *confianza* – a concept I return to further on.

Both my ethnicity and religious identification greatly smoothed access and integration in a variety of fieldwork settings, it allowed me to participate in “off the record” conversations, news and gossip that often proved as scintillating as they were useful. I was given intimate portraits of people, hidden perceptions and access to guarded, emic knowledge. On occasion, when my own various attempts of gaining access to someone had failed, one of my Cuban-Chinese informants stepped in and introduced me as his or her nephew visiting from abroad, granting me access and relieving me of the task of having to overly elaborate on my back story.

The Afro-Cuban and Afro-Chinese Lukumi environment is also extremely open and celebratory of its LGBTQ members. Many lesbian and gay persons, especially those of color, hold elevated positions within the Lukumi world, presiding over large and influential heterogeneous conglomerations of initiates. My field of study was an alternative one, where race, religion and sexuality were all non-normative factors in an otherwise normalizing and homogenizing environment whose state regulates, to a high degree, the actions and interactions of its citizens.

Conducting Fieldwork

To meet the objectives of my study, I used a combination of qualitative research methodologies to craft an ethnography that affords for the collection of both contemporary and historical-anthropological data. This mixed-methods approach enabled me to utilize a wide range of data to realize my research goals and present and produce a nuanced understanding of findings (Bernard 2006). The mixed-methods approach of my dissertation combines participant observation, interviews, material analysis, and

collective memory. I use ethnohistorical methods to triangulate these data along with data from archival research to produce a rich ethnographic text that captures the lives and experiences of Afro-Chinese peoples in the emergence and negotiation of cross-diasporic religiosity.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution effectively curtailed new Chinese migration to Cuba and also witnessed a massive outflow of Chinese-Cubans to New York, South Florida and parts of Spain and Canada. With only a handful of elderly Chinese-born Cubans left on the island, the majority of my interviewees and participants were Cubans born of Chinese and mixed Chinese-black and white/ European heritages.

Coolies entering Cuba were sent to the sugar mills that operated in Havana and Matanzas Provinces. Following the subsequent downscaling, and in many areas, the deconstruction of the sugar industry, these ex-sugar mill locations have retained high concentrations of Chinese and Afro-Cuban persons. These were the sites of my study where the successive generations of those once employed in plantations live in the same vicinities and family homes that served the mills of Havana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos and Sagua la Grande were regionally important sites for sugar production and these locations, to this day, have large numbers of Chinese-Cubans.

Our Man in Havana

Havana is the largest city by area in the Caribbean. It is the capital, commercial and most metropolitan hub of Cuba with a recorded population of 2.1 million (2009 Cuban census). It was one of the major ports by which the Chinese arrived, and it is to Havana that many Chinese relocated from other more rural provinces post indenture.

From 1847, the start of coolie contract labor, Havana had a visible Asian presence, which led to the development of the oldest Chinatown in the Caribbean. Today, *El Barrio Chino de la Habana* spans approximately 45 square blocks, comprising of a multi-use environment of living quarters and economic ventures, Chinese associations, and a high concentration of restaurants, both Chinese and creole. Together, Chinatown and greater Havana are a major tourist destination, and are also the sites for a highly visible presence of African and Afro-Cuban culture and religiosity.

A key source of data for the present research is the network of Chinese societies active on the island. There are thirteen Chinese associations in Havana, concentrated in Havana's Chinatown, with some of these organizations having regional branches in provinces throughout Cuba. These associations are key repositories of Cuban-Chinese demographics previously inadequately captured by Cuban censuses; they also proved a public means of contact in my research. They hold data on the financial, cultural and religious affairs of their members and facilitated Chinese settlement in Cuba and enabled correspondence with China. Nineteenth century Chinese arrivals were quickly plugged into Cuban society through their affiliation with one or more of these associations, which provided orientation, bureaucratic and legal aid, translation services, letter writing, temporary lodging and emergency funds. They are sources of historical narratives, genealogies as well as sites of Chinese community activity, recreation and education. These associations acted as points of access and entry to Chinese and Chinese-Cuban *mestizo* informants through their networks of people of Chinese descent. Informally, they are also networks and gateways for Chinese-Cuban orisha practitioners: santeros and

babalawos, and sites for Chinese and Afro-Chinese religious iconography and rituals which are discussed in Chapter VII.

Interviews

One of the principal methodological strategies of my study is the use of interviews for the collection of oral accounts to understand how the Chinese of Cuba negotiate their identity and religious practices along with black subjects. I interviewed a total 87 people, collecting personal histories, narratives, and commentaries on material culture and lived experiences relating to the formation and production of Afro-Chinese worship in Cuba. I constructed genealogical maps of religious and biological descent from interviews with key correspondents. I documented my research through photographs and video footage to further illustrate the material culture and religious world.

Interviewing is an intrinsic part of humanistic qualitative data methods, which are subject to an on-going process of constant revision (Creswell 2009, 181). I tried as much as possible to be recursive in my interviewing approach for several reasons. I sought from the start to establish a relationship and atmosphere conducive to sharing personal information. This was key in the Cuba setting, as mentioned above, where communication, especially with foreigners, can have serious ramifications. I took time to explain the nature of my research, to offer information about me, and to discuss the ways the person would be comfortable in being represented and referred to in text, agreeing to pseudonyms and other measures for comfort and anonymity. I was happily surprised by the enthusiasm trust, and generosity my participants displayed in my project. I had

entered the field with a predisposition that I would be met with suspicion at best, and hostility at worst. Perhaps that is part of the anxiety that comes with finding one's ethnographic feet and I am happy to report that those feelings were wholly unfounded and quickly dispelled.

The ways in which interviews are structured are acknowledged as comprising a "family of qualitative interviews" (Rubin & Rubin 2004), and can be grouped into three discernible categories: standardized, semi-standardized and un-standardized (Babbie 2007). Interviews differ by their degrees of structural rigidity and perhaps formality. In this study, all three techniques within this family of interviews were utilized according to the participant, the setting, and the data to be collected. The choice of style of interview technique was ascertained on a case-by-case basis, often it was not appropriate and neither the environment conducive to "interview" in ideal conditions.

I performed in-depth life history interviews with several key participants. I implemented an on-going process of reviewing my data collected and refining techniques during the course of fieldwork and I incorporated these in both follow-up and new interviews. Past interviews were recapped and discussed with returning participants and allowed for reflection by both parties. Reviewing previous discussions with returning interviewees led to interesting tangents in conversation that greatly enriched the entire interviewing process, with the person often adding supplemental data to a previously discussed topic. All interviews were recorded when granted permission, and they were transcribed, translated and coded. Inductive and deductive coding of data enabled me to index and summarize data for analysis in terms of emerging frequency, patterns, and themes. Like interviews, I adopted a recursive, developmental coding protocol that

required ongoing refinement, definition and elaboration of both data and the units of analysis.

Through the course of conducting fieldwork and implementing the qualitative methodologies I had been trained in, I soon found myself being a student of the Cuban field, where I learned two extremely valuable lessons on conducting successful fieldwork – especially interviews.

Lesson One: La Visita/The Visit

I collected a great deal of data by adopting a uniquely Cuban methodology – the *visita*, or “visit”. Cubans are much practiced in the art of unannounced socializing. Friends will stop by, en route to an errand, or simply in the course of a *visita* tour of neighbors and friends’ houses that often involve a café, and some minutes to catch up on the gossip of the day. This was, by far, my most trusted and useful methodological tool. However it can backfire, as Nadine T. Fernandez discovered while collecting data on interracial couples in Cuba, “At times I was stuck at home and resented hosting the seemingly endless *visitas* when I had planned a different agenda for the day” (Fernandez 2010, 16). I found my most productive hours for *visita* practice and interviewing were the afternoon and evening hours, carefully scheduled to avoid coinciding with the must-see television *novelas*. Sometimes these *visitas* were short, often though, they turned into protracted evenings of deep conversation, punctuated with food and the occasional beer (depending on the host it would be *Cristal* or *Bucanero*, never a mix of both brands). These *visitas* were an opportunity for letting one’s hair down and integrating a whole range of topics, jambalaya style, into the ether that is a curious mix of communication

with little linearity or quiet gaps in the ongoing dialogue. They were often animated, and included a revolving cast of neighbors and friends dropping in and out of scene according to their own schedules of *visitas*. On several, very fortunate occasions where a point was to be made or a discussion elaborated upon, more spontaneity ensured as the conversations progressed, leading to impromptu jaunts in a friend's car to a destination that would yield an incredible new contact, or the discovery of a new orisha shrine, or document or related artifact. I am at risk of belaboring the importance of this method, however I offer this explanation to help future researchers and to honor my Cuban interlocutors, whom through their pride and graciousness continually surprised me with their depth of care for capturing detail and willingness introduce me as family to persons that enriched this dissertation.

Lesson Two: The Importance of Being Formal

The unconventional *visita* allowed me to enter a veneer of Cuban discourse that is important to my work and reflects a mode of communication that is both a staid element of Cuban conversation and one that is particularly engaged by participants of Afro-Cuban religion. Informality works well for a number of situations, especially when dealing with people and discussing matters that have been relegated to marginalized and discriminated notions of contemporary Cuban experience. I found that several collaborators were empowered and ennobled through the formal interview process rather than the *visita*. The formalities of signing a consent form, and associated ritualized operations instilled, in some of my participants, a great measure of purpose and professionalism that they were proud to be a part of. Many in these settings wanted their life histories and experiences to

be heard and also *recorded*. The formalized interview process lent credence and dignity to the subjects of discussion and related to a perceptible need for the voices of the subjugated to be heard and taken into consideration. It was the hope that their experiences and histories would not be lost or rewritten by dominating official discourses, nor relegated to niche roles of folklore.

Participant Observation

Participant observation has been identified as a crucial methodological tool in this study for capturing the rich ethnographic data of Chinese involvement and influence in Afro-Cuban religion. Lukumi religion is physical and performative. There is a wealth of ceremonies, festivities, rites and gatherings in which to participate. Some of these events are open to the public; others are for initiates only, as well as countless “folkloric” cultural and non-religious events in which Afro-Cuban religious worship, its symbols, signification, premises and materials are present. In Cuba, Afro-Cuban religion is not relegated to any particular domain or solely observable in ceremonial circumstances. It is present in the streets, stores, and theatres. It is on television – including children’s cartoons, in the music, and peppered through many casual conversations.

Those who have visited Cuba may see *iyawó*, newly initiated priests entirely dressed in white on the street. What normally sets this religious attire apart visually from being modish, is that everything: the sunglasses, watch, bag and the shoes are white. One may also see people walking with a live chicken or rooster on their way to a cleansing, or holding a huge sheet cake bearing the names of the orishas in piped icing, or drummers carrying the covered but unmistakable trio of *fundamento batá* drums, *Anya*, to their next

ceremonial performance. Everyone is either going to, or coming from some form of orisha-inspired event, and if not physically en route, then they are discussed and weighed against previous great or terrible celebrations and rituals. Participant observation can be an overwhelming but immensely enjoyable task in the Afro-Cuban religious world. I incorporate here a variety of vignettes that illustrate the range of situations where material culture is present, where memory is evoked and re/constructed through conversation and where syncretism as a process occurs.

Ethno-historical research methods are used in conjunction with participant observation in analyzing the material culture produced by the Chinese and Afro-Cuban populations in Cuba. The use and negotiation of artwork, images, icons, texts, musical instruments and other products form an intrinsic aspect of this investigation, adding understanding to the cultural and religious employment of select articles. Data from ethnohistorical lines of enquiry will add to the growing body of knowledge that is being produced by this methodology (Barber & Berdan 1988).

Reflections on Fieldwork in Cuba

Afro-Cuban religious practitioners have a difficult and confusing relationship with the state. Much of this stems from the turmoil experienced through the post-Soviet transition whose impact is still felt in broader understandings of Cuban cultural and state structuration, as well as influencing personal socioeconomic constraints. Kevin Delgado posits that post-Soviet economic austerity made for an environment that opened avenues for change and innovation in Lukumi, and he views these as fundamental practical tenets of the religion throughout its history (Delgado 2009, 53). While the poorly defined and

precarious relationship that religious members have with the strictly secularizing state is not a new phenomenon, practitioners of Lukumi and other Afro-Cuban religions have received patronage by foreigners in ever increasing numbers since the 1990s. Individual foreign attention and personal “investment” in otherwise socially marginalized practices have aided in alleviating some of the repression felt by its practitioners from the state. However, along with amplified foreign interest in Lukumi has resulted in tightened controls to religious access, swift penalties for Cuban nationals flouting these rules, and also an increase in the commodification of Afro-Cuban religiosity for its consumption for tourists.

There is a great risk of unwanted attention, fines and allegations that can be made against a Cuban practicing their religion with or for foreigners. On one hand, foreigners and their interest in Afro-Cuban religion, dubbed *Santería*, and associated culture is a lucrative opportunity, creating much needed income and access to overseas commodities. However, being “caught” is a very real worry. Naturally, my presence in rites and celebrations were concerns for some of my participants who were often more worried about gossiping, witchcraft and jealous neighbors who might inform the local police. Thankfully, we did not experience any issues with the authorities during my fieldwork, however I was sensibly asked to do my part to mitigate attention in terms of dressing down, and avoiding holding anything of value in plain sight, especially when entering or exiting a neighborhood venue as ways of avoiding undue attention.

Doing anything in Havana can take an inordinate amount of time, effort, and a great deal of pre-emptive tactical discussion. Announce your plans for the day to a Cuban friend, be it get bread, host a party or explore Chinese culture on the island, and your

proposal will immediately be verbally picked apart, both before and after any event (or non-event) in a most forensic fashion. *Pastelería La Francésa* is a bustling coffee shop overlooking Havana's Parque Central. Its central location sandwiched between the Hotels Inglaterra and Telégrafo on El Prado makes it a buzzing nexus, wherein you can witness the glorious interactions and collisions of many apposite worlds. It is an excellent spot where you can get your feet wet in Cuban culture and a crash course in how things work in Cuba: namely you have to go for what you want and project what you wish to receive.

In my ethnographic experience, there is nothing more thrilling, and simultaneously chilling, as that moment of knocking at the door of a potential participant, cold calling if you will, exclaiming as best as you can what you are there for, and being ushered both literally and figuratively into a world so private, that very few get to witness. I knocked at many doors during my fieldwork and found the responses to be equally intriguing and enthralling. Over the course of my work, I found myself in the company of a startling spectrum of Cuba's population. This included one of *El Jefe's* retired personal bodyguards that moonlights as a babalawo, to a woman that clandestinely sells *refrescos* [home made soda], phone cards, and sex from her small house, sometimes all three to the same punter, and who also happens to be *una tremenda espiritista*, a gifted spirit medium.

These are just some of the very real examples of the Cuban lives I have had the privilege to experience. Being welcomed inside the inner sanctum where a person has often nothing more precious to offer than their stories, their history and their experiences were worthy of ethnographic contemplation in their own right. Cuba as a noisy, imposing and intrusive backdrop colors all of this, and while only a small fraction of data gathered

during these experiences may ever make it to some form of analysis or published textual outing, the context of these lives and oft-regarded special circumstances of Cuba resound here.

These lived and living experiences are somewhat implicit and all too often explicit, overshadowing conversations that hinge on survival, perseverance and dignity requiring a thick skin, a long measure of tolerance and sometimes, but rarely, a dared promise of reprieve. Moreover, by reprieve I refer specifically to the strictures and limitations many of my participants expressed by living through more than fifty years of revolution and feeling the pinch of *el bloqueo*¹. These aspects of Cuban life often appeared as specters at the periphery of our conversations. I soon learned that to speak directly about such matters was most vulgar, and exposed emotions too raw to be suitable for conversations with someone from abroad. Instead, body language, verbal clues, and other gestures would make it very evident that the conversation was headed for rocky and dangerous territory; giving a palpable sense of a Foucauldian panopticon in action. One June field working day, I stopped off at the *pastelería* for a mango juice and guava pastry. Truthfully, I needed a blast of air conditioning to counteract a ferocious, beating sun redolent of Albert Camus prose, and to retreat, for a spell, from the streets filled with its shimmering, animated citizens. The café allowed me some moments of respite to strategize the next move on my anthropological agenda. By chance, I was sitting next to a

¹ The United States government has imposed and continually enforced an economic embargo, announced on February 3, 1962, and enacted February 7, 1962. There was also the military blockade, known as *el bloqueo* imposed during the Missile Crisis on 19 October 1962. The specific terms of the economic embargo have varied over the years according to different presidential administrations. The current regulation prevents US citizens from spending money in Cuba under most circumstances. Similarly, US businesses are prevented from conducting commercial transactions with businesses that have Cuban interests.

rather calm looking mustached man. He radiated a sense of peace and repose, quite out of fashion for the café, and indeed Havana. Sitting there, surrounded by peacock-like *jineteras* and tables full of wide-eyed furtive looking European tourists each with a guidebook and camera to hand, this gentleman was a true anomaly, both his clothes and his demeanor were understated and he seemed so at home in the café that he could have easily been mistaken for the owner. I soon struck up a conversation with Emilio, who turned out to be Italian and living in Cuba through some bureaucratic international trade loophole he had managed to take advantage of. He offered me his business card, which was in the shape and style of a US dollar bill, but with Emilio's face and address on them. Sitting there, on the terrace looking over the bustle of Paseo Martí, this honorary Cuban citizen offered me his succinct experienced summation of his surroundings, "Cuba begins where logic ends" and with that magic five word mantra, I too have developed an ability to smile and better compose myself while going about my Cuban endeavors.

Understanding Diaspora

To examine and define these processes from a singular, diasporic angle for example, from the vantage point of Chinese or black diasporas, would result in the loss of the majority of ethnographic richness intended in my understanding of syncretism, and would induce theoretical myopia. The processes that occur at the point of contact between two diasporas lay outside of the purview of current diasporic definitions, which I attend to here.

The term 'diaspora' has historically been associated with the "classic diasporas" of Jewish, Greek and Armenian experiences, conforming to the idea of a dispersed,

culturally coherent people that share a common religious and cultural heritage. Robin Cohen (1997), writing after William Safran (1991), sought to typologize the features of diaspora that include: a collective myth about homeland, a strong ethnic group consciousness, and a sense of empathy with co-ethnic members in other countries and settlements to name but three (Cohen 1997, 26). However, Kachig Tölölyan, editor of the now defunct journal, *Diaspora*, contends that the rapidity of material and discursive change witnessed in the past three decades has increased both the number of global diasporas and the range and diversity of the new semantic domain that the term ‘diaspora’ inhabits” (Tölölyan 1996, 3).

The noticeable shift in the discursive category of diaspora has a compelling relationship to discourses of religion and the study of diasporic religiosity. One of the overarching themes of Cohen’s understanding of diaspora, whether they are of the classical type or not, is the presence of hostility and alienation as a critical element and experience within the host nation, against which diasporic peoples necessarily build a sense of social cohesion. The considerations of colonial and postcolonial racial hierarchies as well as differential access to social and cultural capital in the host country all serve to forge diasporic identities in situ, in the host land. Michelle Wright offers a significant theorization of the creation of identity with specific regard to the African diaspora. Wright underscores the nature of making, and objectifying African diasporic peoples in terms of a dialectic of race, reifying pure, white, and European as self, and creating as a result, the negro, other, and object, through the auspices of migration, contact, and domination (Wright 2004, 48-51). Wright points to the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and others that have worked in or on the African

diaspora as collectively forming an intellectual diasporic consciousness. Their work served to respond to the dialectic specter of “Negro-as-void, as their responses were not predetermined by colonialist discourse, culture, or ideology; rather, their own philosophies of the meaning of Blackness within the contexts they had experienced and observed” (Wright 2004, 96).

Lok Siu’s work on the Chinese diaspora in Panama explains that there is an “irreconcilable tension” inherent in the notion of diaspora (Siu 2005, 76). In this vein, the concept of diaspora hinges on its dual understanding and double experiences of people sharing a communal sense of homeland, while also referring to and invoking “the double relationship or dual loyalty... to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with ‘back home’” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996, 15). This binary of experience, place, and action specifically relates to the dualism inherent in trying to reconcile “where you are at” and “where you are from”, effectively engendering a third space that reconfigures the tension to understanding diasporic experience as a combination of “here *and* there” with “now *and* then” (Gilroy 1990; Siu 2005; Hall 1994 and Ang 2001).

Diasporas have been routinely envisaged and regarded as extensions of the same, stable communities in a new setting, bent on preserving ties through the continuity of culture, albeit adapted to the new geographic locale, and framed within a diachronic process whereby successive generations “lose” ties and markers to their ancestral homeland. In addition to revoking commonplace ideas of diaspora as occurring to a singular people and their trajectory into new territories by the examination of two (or more) diasporas in Cuba, my work here contests existing ideas about diaspora as

continuation and eventual loss of cultural difference, by foregrounding and using the lens of religion. Martin Baumann (1998) notes that while there have been some recent attempts to theorize diaspora that begin to clarify a number of religious dimensions surrounding dispersed populations. In the main, religious elements have received relatively little attention. Baumann argues that existing work on diaspora has in fact, “marginalized the factor of religion and relegated it to a place not often explored, in favor of ‘ethnicity’ or ‘nationality’” (Baumann 1998, 95). An encouraging sign of religion being included in diaspora examination has begun to emerge in academia that seeks to question existing concepts of diasporas; what constitutes them and how the discursive terrain of diaspora is opening up, to effectively situate religion and religious change.

One response to this is evidenced in the work of Ninian Smart (1999), who offers three reasons why it is imperative to study the connections between religion and diaspora, and in particular, the religious aspects of diasporic experience. First, focusing on diaspora aids in understanding processes of adaptation and religious transformations. Second, Smart notes that the high incidence of diasporas in the modern world (both ascribed and self-identified) is framed as “multi-ethnicity” and very much commonplace. Third, diasporas themselves directly affect the development of religion in the homeland whose impact is evidenced in terms of transnational, economic, and commodity ties that account for increased wealth transmission, education and ideological linkages (Smart 1999, 421). Economic and related movements occur through close connections and agents that operate simultaneously in both the homeland and host community, enabling flows of goods, services, and knowledge. Diasporas need to be examined individually, rather than being compared to a perfect or ideal type, with a view to both their internal and external

fields of operation. I am examining here, not a singular diasporic experience of either the Chinese or African presence in Cuba, but the diasporic intersection in which these two cultures met and proceeded to form religious practice that were neither only Chinese, nor solely African /Afro-Cuban. They were directly born from interdiasporic processes.

Underscoring the difference of meaning in diaspora and its association with the cultural and religious contact of what can be shorthand as Afro-Chinese, I draw attention here to the accompanying terms of syncretism, creolization and hybridity.

Getting to Grips with the “S” Word

By focusing on one aspect of Afro-Chinese syncretic discourse, I pick up the thread of the problematic of syncretism as ambiguous and offer a way forward by which we can conceptualize this phenomenon with regard to the meeting and convergence of two distinct diasporas. Syncretism has a special problem of definition resulting from the long and winding history of the term. Syncretism has a conflicting genesis and etymology, with its root located in the ancient Greek word, *syncretismos*, which refers to “Cretan behavior” (Pakkanen 1996, 86) once used to warn against the infiltration of what was then seen as disruptive and intrusive influence. This Plutarchian Irenic version and use has seemingly little in common with existing conceptualizing of the word (Leopold & Jensen 2004). Most possibly, the modern day rendering of religious syncretism has its Greek roots in *synkerannumi*, to “mix things that are incompatible” (Usener 1896, 337 quoted in Leopold & Jensen 2004) and related to unification attempts of early Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy. Syncretism was thus deemed “opportunistic, being secular and negative in essence, as it stands in opposition to what was evinced as true

religion, or divine revelation (Leopold & Jensen 2004). In addition to, or maybe because of these origins, syncretism in religious discourse has sought to further a paradigm of purity and authenticity in religious practice. This is most evident in texts that take as its theme one core religion in light of tradition and creativity in conversation with outside, previously unrelated elements. This can take the form of negative connotations, in terms of impurity and inauthenticity, especially when sullied by local, unwarranted practices (Stewart & Shaw 1994). The alternative view affirms that such syncretisms are viewed as modes and weapons of resistance to sociocultural dominance (Scott 1985).

It quickly becomes clear that syncretism and its counterpoint, anti-syncretism, readily forms a discussion about the power and authority to make claims within religious discourse and its associated cultural politics and critiques. I do not subscribe to the abandonment of syncretism and creolization within theoretical discussions of cultural contact because of the long and indeterminate history syncretism as a term invokes. I show here, a way of engaging syncretism as described and ascribed to cultural religious contact as a way of offering greater insight into the ways two different diasporas create cross-fertilization. I find it telling that these terms have been rooted in ethnic and racial mixing (and similarly, notions of purity) and a lot can be said about the abiding racialization inherent in the legacies of such terms. I think such past racial uses have direct bearing on religious discourse itself, especially when dealing with diasporas. Historically, whites in the Caribbean and Latin America were called creoles as a class of distinction in a multicultural, or mixed society to set them discursively apart. Discourse on religious mixing in these same locales has engaged syncretism exclusively in relation

to hegemonic, Christian and colonial religiosity and in many cases mirroring powerful racial categorizations.

In the present study I move beyond the reported religious syncretism between Afro-Cuban and Christian religions, which have saturated academic and popular discourse to date. As evidenced here, the interactions between African and Chinese diasporas in Cuba offers a unique and heretofore under-researched cache of synthesis and lived experience. I invoke diaspora in relation to syncretism, however, unlike syncretism; diaspora in current discourse is determined to be “about relationality and the re-imagination of various, often contradictory, “traditions”” (Allen 2011, 197).

We find significant inference of this articulation of diaspora in the work of anthropologists such as Maxine Kamari Clarke who focuses on transnational Yorùbá Networks in de-territorialized contexts (2004, 2007, and 2010). I am guided, also, by Edmund Gordon’s ethnography of coastal creole communities in Nicaragua that shows how particular Afro-Caribbean black communities make use of different and shifting types of memories, ideologies and political assuages (1998) that become part of their cultural repertoire. Following Clarke and Gordon’s respective works and nuanced renderings of diaspora, I posit that syncretism is intimately linked to diaspora in such complex and inseparable ways and that they should be understood together and with special attention being paid when syncretism happens across diasporas as is the case here. Through this linkage of syncretism and diaspora in what I call *interdiasporic cross-fertilization*, we are better able to grasp the significant formation of new knowledge that is Afro-Chinese religiosity.

The Special Period and its Aftershocks

Cuba has experienced incredible shifts and dramatic social changes in the twentieth century. Notably, the pre-1959 socio-political undertakings, the incipience of an intensely revolutionary and independent nation state in the 1960s-70s and the most recent palpable crises of the 1990s, deemed the Special Period², resulting from the collapse of eastern bloc socialism and the dramatic halting of economic support from the Soviet Union. I was acutely aware of the specter of the Special Period and the shadow that it left on all forms of sociocultural and economic discourses I experienced in Cuba, and I wish to reflect those pre-occupations as a major factor that contributes and impacts religiosity on the island. I underscore here this particular moment in Cuba's history more than others and return to it periodically throughout the following chapters. This is in response to the discursive presence felt while discussing religious matters, self-identifications according to race and the state's perceived interventions in these arenas. My work here is informed by the implications of the Special Period, not so much as the origin of discourse but as action from the recent past that has sizable reverberations to the present day. It is this temporal and economic proximity that my interlocutors were evidently still working and thinking through. Indeed, the appearance and wider acceptance of diasporic religion and alternative ideas of race, especially the diversification of black and Chinese subjectivities were made possible through the experiences of the Special Period and this will be further explored also.

² The Special Period is formally known as *El período especial en tiempo de paz* – the Special Period in the Time of Peace and is demarcated as starting in 1990 and lasting for approximately a decade (Hernández-Reguant 2009, 1).

Dissertation Outline and Contents by Chapter

I have designed the layout of the chapters in this dissertation to be cumulative, where each part offers fieldwork data and insights into the development of the framework of interdiasporic cross-fertilization. This present chapter serves as the outline of aims and methodologies I enlisted in the production of this ethnography. This chapter begins laying the foundations of terms used and to introduce the field under focus and the people present. I discuss in detail both syncretism and diaspora which serves as a roadmap for the aims and challenges this dissertation addresses. The study involves many languages according to the diasporas involved. I have thus compiled a separate glossary of terms that contains descriptions of Spanish, Cantonese, Yorùbá/Lukumi and other non-English words and phrases employed in Cuba and can be found in Appendix I. In Chapters II and III, I review current and past literatures on the substantive and analytical articulations of the work. I have interwoven within these discussions vignettes from the field to further contextualize the project. As an anthropologist, I describe and produce my work reflexively, as I deem it imperative to situate myself within the text and to alert the reader to the ways my own presence, actions, and relationships with interlocutors affect and effect the work at hand and the data gathered. Historical and religious anthropology, as well as its impact and relation drive me to broader sociocultural experiences of the present day and my place within it.

I divided the argument derived from the literature review into two chapters. In Chapter II, I explore the history and trajectory of the Chinese in Cuba, their relations to and configurations in official and popular Cuban ideas of identity. I seek to understand “*Cubanidad*” [Cubanness or Cubanity], a trait that is bandied around far too often with

little objective study, and introduce as a discursive counterpoint “*Sinalidad*”, or ways of being and seeing “Chineseness” in the Cuban setting. I also examine the changing nature of what it means to be part of the Chinese diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean and how that ties in with broader political economies and transnational relations. Chapter III is devoted to Afro-Cuban religiosity in Cuba. I explore the nature of religion in Cuba, the parameters of existing discourse on culture contact, and interrogate paradigms of diasporic and religious mixing and their attendant archaeologies, something that has dominated academic research on Afro-Cuban and Afro-diasporic religion to date.

Chapter IV illustrates the “bones” that comprise the skeleton of my research. I present data on material culture that forms the fundament of *Sinalidad* in Afro-Cuban religion, rendering these influences into four major categories. I offer different examples, which portray the wide range and variety of Afro-Chinese cross-fertilization. These icons, images, shrines, people and ideas do not fit into a neat whole, rather they are different instances and occurrences of Afro-Chinese religious material culture, with different histories and implemented for varying purposes. Through interviews I expound on the reasons for the observed syncretisms and the meanings given to them by practitioners. I observe the case of Oyiya Oba, a Chinese deity within Ifá worship, and the place of *inventos* (inventions/creations) as idea and practice within Afro-Cuban religion. I present detailed biographies and life experiences of two Chinese-Cuban priests in Chapter V. I offer in depth life histories of these important figures of the Afro-Cuban religious world to understand the nature of Afro-Cuban religion and its ethnic constructions. Narratives of the priests reveal complex interdiasporic spaces of experience where identity determined through Afro, Euro and Chinese markers becomes

negotiated. Their Lukumi identities overturn assumptions of secular and genetic determinations of race and ethnicity, wherein their Afro-Cuban and multiracial initiatory elders and orisha family help determine identity and status. I further explore ideas of *Cubanidad*, “Cubanness” a provocative ideology with a nationalistic agenda appended to it, and how particular historical moments of race making factor into Afro-Chinese religiosity. I juxtapose these discussions with my introduced term of *Sinalidad* – “Chineseness”, designed to bring attention to this otherwise historically silenced and ignored contribution and facet of identity making in Cuba. I explore the ways that these Chinese-Cuban priests are participating in a transnational religious dialogue that adds a much-needed layer of understanding to existing (touristic) political economies and flows of people, goods, ideas and money through Cuba. Finally, I discuss how such participation by Sino-Cuban priests may pose a challenge to state policies.

Chapter V is followed by two complementary chapters that look at religious and social institutions and their roles in producing and promoting Afro-Chinese cultural and religious contact. Chapter VI is an ethnography of Havana’s Chinese associations, temples, and secretive societies, contextualizing them in terms of their historical assemblage and their current socio-cultural milieu. I situate these discussions against the changing backdrop of Havana’s Chinatown that is currently being developed as a space directed to tourism and for fostering links with China. I am interested in the ways that Chinatown continues to have relevance for its now largely mixed-race Chinese-Cuban population, a stark demographic change from its establishment at turn of the nineteenth century. I investigate these factors with reference to key individuals who are actively

shaping Chinatown's physical and cultural spaces. These Chinese-Cubans are in turn influencing Afro-Chinese religious practices.

Chapter VII explores interdiasporic cross-fertilization in the center of the island. Here, I examine an Afro-Chinese *cabildo de nación*, a religious mutual aid institution. The *cabildo*, which has been governed by three generations of mixed Afro-Chinese orisha practitioners, disassembles ideas of *cabildo* membership as derived solely from Afro-Cuban practitioners. *Cabildos* such as the one explored here were spaces where multiple racial identities and religions overlapped, providing a key understanding for the formation of interdiasporic religious practices. The *cabildo*, one of the last to still be in operation and offers a glimpse of organized Lukumi religious practice derived from a longstanding alliance of Afro and Chinese practitioners, indicating the temporal timeframe according to social and economic changes occurring in the province. These *cabildo* findings indicate that Afro-Chinese religious mixing took place in the nineteenth century, operating throughout Cuba's formulation of *Cubanidad*, and was thus overlooked completely by Fernando Ortiz and those influenced by his works, negating Chinese inclusion in transculturative ideas.

Chapter VIII concludes this dissertation. I gather the numerous strands of the preceding chapters to ascertain their contribution to understanding interdiasporic cross-fertilization. I link the totality of these ideas to a wider contemporary responses of the material economy of religions, and how that fits into both national and transnational conceptualizations of being and identity. The final chapter offers some seeds of thought and direction for future study.

CHAPTER II THE CHINESE IN CUBA

This morning I saw a natty and clean young Chinaman passing along the street with an equally good-looking girl. She was young and vivacious, and they evidently belonged together. But the girl's eyes and color showed that she was the daughter of a Chinaman herself, and a quite plausible argument in favor of the mixture of the Asiatic and the negro.

Cuban Sketches, James William Steele (1881, 98).

I draw on historical anthropology to situate the Chinese in Cuba and conceptualize both their place in Cuba and in the country's broader ethnic milieu. I also incorporate the Chinese experiences, actions, and response to their environment. The official arrival of the Chinese is now nationally remembered and celebrated on the 3rd of June 1847, when the maiden cargo of the British-owned ship, the *Oquendo* carrying fully indentured workers arrived at the Port of Regla, the harbor municipality of Havana. Although the human cargo that arrived in such ways was by far the largest swathe of Asian migration to Cuba there were other smaller Asian migrations that occurred around this time, yet were overshadowed by the scale of Chinese indenture. These other influxes include a notable Japanese presence of economic migrants, *dekasegui*, which commenced in 1868 (Estévez 2003). Fewer numbers of Vietnamese and Filipinos arrived during the first half of the twentieth century as part of failed pilot schemes to entice new forms of contracted labor to the island (Álvarez Ríos 1995). Aside from these studies, the majority of existing work on Asians in Cuba focuses exclusively on the Chinese in Cuba.

The close economic and investment ties China and Cuba are currently fostering, directly impact the rather aggressive presence of Chinese commodities and resources on the island. Walking in to any of the government-owned and operated stores in Carlos III – an approximation of an American shopping mall in Havana – reveals a cacophony of

consumables, plastic ware and dry goods all manufactured in China, complete with labels in Mandarin. Indeed, China has a direct hand in improving Cuba's crumbling infrastructure. The oldest of Havana's distinctive and bone shaking "*camellos*", the Soviet-era public transport buses, so called because of their humped dual-carriage appearance reminiscent of camels, were retired and replaced with a fleet of 243 coaches imported from the Zhengzhou Yutong Group in China³ in December 2009. These imposing, air conditioned vehicles dwarf the "*carros de diez pesos*" [ten Cuban peso taxis] and existing buses by comparison and "*un yutong*" is now a vernacular expression, like "*un montón*" for a large or exaggerated amount. The five Cuban television stations broadcast an inordinate amount of imported programs on Chinese arts and culture, including martial arts, crafts, and cooking, badly dubbed and approximately subtitled in Spanish. Chinese concerts and opera are repeated in primetime spots several times each week.

I introduce in the present chapter the relevant elements of ethnohistory of the Chinese in Cuba that shape what Turner would have called the Afro-Cuban religious field of meaning (Turner 1974). This includes the historical and contemporary placement of the Chinese, their changing identity in accordance with sociocultural, political, and economical valences in Cuba, local intimacies that resulted in culture contact and global and transnational ties that fostered political economies.

³ An announcement can be seen at the following website as well as details of subsequent Cuban orders for "Yutongs": <http://www.yutong.com/english/news/press/12/14261.shtml>.

Asians in the Caribbean

Christine Ayorinde warns us that identity is a complex and slippery thing especially when applied to both individuals and to nations (Ayorinde 2004a, xii). Identity can be self-selected; we may be free to self-identify as we please. However, we are often subjected to the imposition of labels and identities from outside sources out of our control and thus experience our being through others (Fanon 1967, 109).

Firstly there is a conundrum of scale and approach. The parameters that delineate the broader concepts of America, the Caribbean, and Latin America often shift and blur surreptitiously. Often we have to grope and to deduce the size and lens of ethnographic enquiry in these areas when no clear key is given. We are also faced with textual imaginations of the Americas and the Caribbean, which focuses on specific discursive groups people as if they live segregated to all other ethnicities/identities. The diverse peoples of Asia, for example, are all too often glossed and collectively referred to as *los chinos* that exist in an environment that is filled with “*los indios*”, “*los negros*”, and “*los blancos*” or “*los españoles*” yet hardly ever textually or discursively become united. Similarly the diverse peoples that originate from Africa, who are especially renowned for their complex heterogeneity, are reduced to a monochromatic color term, “negro” (Whitten and Corr 2011, 46). These schemas further categorize and delineate “native” populations in yet another separate niche of academic examination. Following five hundred years of colonial history, the people of the Americas were known as *los indios*, an enduring legacy on the part of Christopher Columbus, and are still regarded, conceptually, as different and hermetically sealed-off from intellectual discussions of black, Asian or European identities.

In reading the work of those that unwittingly pursue such lines of examination, the Caribbean became several, mutually exclusive Caribbeans, which are as much a phantasm of academia as they are removed from lived reality. We must treat Cuba and its inhabitants with caution to successfully avoid treating any singular grouping, people, or culture as existing in a vacuum; the need for careful consideration also applies to their associated networks both inter and intra-nationally.

The bridges, linkages, and dialogics that occur between individuals of separately treated ethnicities and groups of people are our means to overcome such false divides and to cope with the limitations imposed through the ongoing employment of these terms. I concur with Lisa Yun that our pressing challenge is to unsettle binaries that have consolidated and glossed a multiplicity of histories and representations (Yun 2007, xxii). Accordingly, the Atlantic and the Pacific are envisaged as discrete entities each governed by their own epistemological geographies. Our challenge is to break from these discrete entities and view the linkages that are present, effectively observing these epistemes as a coherent whole. Stuart Hall writes that representations, a slippery but useful notion, play a constitutive role, not just a reflexive one, wherein culture and ideology are formed and not just informed by representations of subjectivity, identity, and politics (Hall 1994, 224). Hall states that representations about being black or Asian are enunciations, a cultural practice that centers on the subject, from whence he or she speaks (Hall 1989).

We are better able to understand Caribbean identities if we seek these representations as being framed between two axes, one of similarity and continuity and the other of difference and rupture. We can then make sense of the ways in which black and Chinese subjects and their representations have been formed, not only in Cuba, but in

other topographies, also. Insight into formation happens through an observation of continuity with the past and by noting the ruptures explained as being fashioned from a process of “peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonization, migration, of persons that came predominantly from Africa – and when that ended, the supply was temporarily refreshed by indentured labour from the Asian subcontinent” (Hall 1989, 227). It is through the consciousness of these enunciations of black and Chinese representation and the removal of discrete investigations of geographically bounded epistemologies that allows for the paradoxical aphorism of Christopher Columbus’ mistake that you “*can* find ‘Asia’ by sailing west, if you know where to look!” (Hall 1989, 227. Hall’s emphasis, also quoted in Yun 2007, xxii).

Aline Helg argues that Cuba’s particular social construct of race is singular in Latin America and the Caribbean. For more than one hundred years, Cubans have perpetuated the mid-nineteenth century notion of a *raza de color* [race of color] that does not officially differentiate between the widely used black typologies such as *mulatos* [mixed white-black], *morenos* [brown], and *negros* [black] (Helg 1995, 3). A lack of distinction is resonant of a two-tiered racial system common to the United States, and significantly different to the three-tier or multi-tier systems found in many neighboring Latin American countries.

However, Cuba was not the only country in the Caribbean and Pacific basin to receive large numbers of Chinese contracted migrants during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There have been several instances of mass movements of people from Asia in the nineteenth century in particular, to various parts of the Caribbean and Latin America (Wang Sing-Wu 1978, xi). Unlike Cuba, the numerous Chinese coolies that arrived in

Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Guadeloupe, Suriname, Peru, and Jamaica quickly found ways to abandon the cane fields for urban centers where they established themselves in small-scale, commercial ventures (Look Lai 2010). While indentured labor and colonial rule do provide some base for comparison, there are important regional variations with regards to demographics, identity making, and transnational movements of Chinese in the Caribbean and Latin America.

An example of stark regional differences are the migration patterns of Chinese indentured laborers to Jamaica in the nineteenth century. Li Anshan states that the first Chinese that arrived in 1854 came from Panama not China, recruited from the railroad industry there (Anshan 2004, 43), followed by 200 more laborers from British Guyana and Trinidad. Only the third wave of labor migration actually came directly from China. Anshan also explains that these Chinese were from the three counties, Dongguan, Bao-an, and Hui-yang, unlike the Chinese in Cuba who were from the Pearl River Delta (Anshan 2004, 45). Disparities in the flexibility or rigidity of contractual arrangements between islands were a result of the varied practice of different colonial regimes that governed their bodies. Walton Look Lai states that Chinese migrants in British colonies had greater flexibility and ability to break contract than coolies under Spanish rule (Look Lai 2010). In specific sites such as Trinidad and Tobago, there is ample indication that similar interdiasporic cross-fertilizations involving Chinese and African [as well as South Asian] descendants have occurred in producing new religious syncretisms. Keith E. McNeal notes, “a generic set of Chinese Powers [spirits or entities] is not uncommon in orisha circles” (McNeal 2011, 125-126). Kenneth Lum writes that a priest of Oshun in Trinidad equates the orisha Oshun as having a Chinese aspect called Tim Soy (Lum

2000, 115). A further reference to Chinese influence in Trinidadian Orisha worship is given by Frances Henry, whose interlocutor notes the exclusion of previously integrated Chinese spirits in a concerted effort to reclaim the tradition in terms of a racially segregated African diasporic identity (Henry 2003, 103).

Cuba's Balance Sheet

Cuba was one of a number of several countries both within and outside Latin America and the Caribbean that sourced labor from China during the nineteenth century, each country using different indenture schemes and with varying degrees of success. Cuba, the largest island of the Caribbean, imported an inordinate number of Chinese, and sizable movements of people from China were found in labor projects in Peru, Indochina, Sumatra, Java, the Philippines, Hawaii, California, and Australia between 1848 and 1888 (Wang Sing-Wu 1978, xi).

Large scale, specifically Chinese migration to Cuba began in 1847 (Waters 2005) following Britain's imposed Opium War with China. European colonial powers set to dominate China by introducing opiates to the country in mass quantities, creating dependency that would force China to open its ports to international trade. China was defeated in 1842, and ceded Hong Kong to England. British intervention opened five ports of commerce – Canton (today Guangzhou), Amoy (today Xia'men), Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. Over the next two decades, further territorial concessions, such as Macao, were made to European powers. The English realized early on that they could further profit by utilizing a system of contractual Chinese labor in their colonies. The decision to use Chinese contractual labor in the Caribbean was catalyzed by the impact of

the abolishment of the African Slave Trade, ratified by England and Spain in 1817. The Spanish Crown, reluctant at first to comply with the treaty, began to acknowledge that Chinese labor could be a viable alternative to African slaves to develop the already rapidly growing sugar industry in Cuba (Pastrana 1983).

China, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw rapid and far-reaching changes, entering the era from protracted periods of a buoyant and peaceful existence, relatively closed to foreigners by the Qing Dynasty. The Emperor was not just ruler of China, but ‘all under heaven’. In the early part of the nineteenth century, China experienced rapid population growth, doubling from 150 million to 300 million and a further increase to approximately 410 million by 1850 (Fairbank 1978, 109).

Table 1 Demographics from Cuban censuses. From Knight (1970, 22)

Demographics/Year	1774	1827	1841
White	96,440 (56.9%)	311,051 (44.1%)	418,291 (41.6%)
Free Colored	36,301 (20.3%)	106,494 (15.1%)	152,838 (15.1%)
Slave	38,879 (22.8%)	286,942 (40.8%)	436,495 (43.3%)
Total Population	171,620	704,487	1,007,624

The ubiquity of sugar in today’s global milieu belies the extraordinary tale that it took for this commodity to reach consumers’ tables in the last two centuries, and its subsequent distribution around the world. Over a period that spans the better half of the last millennium, sugar has become one of the main compounding factors that generated

and drove industrialization across the hemispheres. The story of the Chinese in Cuba is intrinsically linked to Europe and North America's appetite for the foodstuff. To understand the lives and lived experiences of the coolies requires an understanding of the sugar trade and the power relations contained therein. Manuel Moreno Fraginals' work on the sugar mills in Cuba helps to explain the swift changes that this export crop brought to bear on Cuba in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

These data show the rapid increase in the population of Cuba during the sugar boom. Prior to 1774, Cuba was a main shipping *entrepôt* within the Caribbean, a Spanish port and walled city. At that time, paternalistic, agrarian *trapiches*, and small sugar farm holdings equipped with manually driven cane extracting facilities, were in place yet operated on a very small scale. Following the slave revolt in the French colony of Saint Domingue, Cuba began to rise in prominence with regard to global sugar production, as *criollos* from Hispaniola migrated to the island eventually becoming the world's sugar bowl.

Sugar, Slavery, and Indenture

Cuba's meteoric rise in sugarcane production was made possible through the importation of labor and new industry. The Cuban sugar industry was dubbed an "intellectual adventure" (Moreno Fraginals 1976, 72), as it was a *mélange* of land, slaves, technology and industrial progress captained by a few aristocrats and operated on a massive, multi-national scale. Along with sugar, tobacco at that time rapidly became synonymous with Cuba. Both products were organic and agricultural in their creation, and each maintained distinct and exclusive niches in their making. Working in the

production of sugar was considered a trade and tobacco cultivation a delicate art (Ortiz 1947, 39). To produce sugar, brute strength was required as well as industrial equipment, whilst deft skill was essential to produce a cigar. Techniques in sugar refinement were amplified and reached new heights of quality by advances in innovative steam powered technology, yet it still required physically demanding labor in every step of the process. Conversely, the tobacco leaf required the skill of the ‘complex apparatus of the human body’ and at most, a knife (Ortiz 1947). Manual labor, supplied by both the African Slave Trade and later by Chinese indenture, became the necessary human components of the industrialization of sugar.

Where once the paternal *trapiches* were governed by a single pastoral owner, each with an average of twenty slaves, the early 1800s saw the rise of the *el ingenio*, the sugar mill. Large conglomerate plantation and processing plants owned by an élite clan of Cuban and international entrepreneurs, named the *sugarocracy* soon became the norm. Cuba became the pristine new land needed to satiate the desire for sugar whose demand grew exponentially. Spanish Saint Domingue’s role as the former main sugar producing country provided a ready blueprint for importing African slaves to work the fields. Sydney Mintz notes that during this period, sugar production rose steadily in response to the increase in the number of Westerners consuming sugar and also that each consumer was using it in ever expanding quantities (Mintz 1985, 36). Other crops had been trialed for export but because of Cuba’s fluctuating climate were not as lucrative or as stable as sugar or tobacco. Other exportable commodities such as coffee and beef soon made way for sugar. In 1838, de Goyri, a Havana-based correspondent for London’s Rothschild Bank, who maintained financial control of several plantations predicted:

That the cultivation of coffee may decline; we think extremely probable. The crops in this island are too precarious, the prices too low to encourage a continuance of planting. Already several Estates have been converted to the growth of sugar and such examples are likely to be followed. US customers are so close at hand that much coffee arrives at New Orleans and the neighbouring ports quite green.⁴

The technological capabilities in the field itself remained relatively unchanged, continuing to require manual labor in ever increasing quantities, as increasingly more virgin land was turned over to agriculture. Technological progress in the grinding and refining of the cane, especially in the ability to granulate sugar, was in line with the industrialization processes at play within the larger European and North American arenas behind the boom. Yet, to satisfy the increased demand for sugar, more land required cultivation and more workers needed to cut the cane by hand, in addition to increasing the yield from existing cultivated land. Thus Cuba's population swelled massively to accommodate the demand for sugar. The continued dependency on manual labor in sugar production explains the drastic rise in the number of slave and free colored persons as documented in the 1827 census of Cuba, while in contrast, the white percentage of the island's population did not expand to any comparable degree. Cuba's demographics

⁴ F. De Goyri & Co circular to N.M. Rothschild Bank dated 31st December 1938. Francisco de Goyri y Beazcoechea was the Cuban correspondent for Rothschild's Bank. Source: Rothschild Archives: XI/38/125B. Also contained within this circular are the following figures for coffee and sugar exports from Havana and Matanzas, indicating the fluctuating volumes of coffee because of climatic factors and the stable/gradual increase of sugar production and the varied production of coffee:

Year of Export	Boxes of Sugar	Quintals of Coffee
1833	429,302	537,521
1834	464,817	287,768
1835	494,612	243,782
1836	496,668	271,323
1837	495,222	407,489
1838	587,777	276,483

rapidly swelled with the importation of African slaves, dwarfing the number of new white or European migrants.

In contrast to the figures available on the African Slave Trade, fairly accurate statistics on official Chinese indenture trade to Cuba are available (Table 2) as it was a highly regulated enterprise, where detailed ledgers of sources of customs revenue, and records of indentures progress were maintained. Juan Pérez de la Riva offers the most reliable written accounts of the demographics of Chinese migration to Cuba using data from La Comisión de Colonización, which states that 124,873 Chinese indentures were sold in Cuba from 1847 to 1874. Determined by the per head sales tax collected by Cuban Spanish Customs upon arrival, this is in keeping with an estimated total of 150,000 Chinese who entered Cuba via indenture projects.

Chinese indenture had very few discernible practical differences from African slavery in terms of labor conditions and political economy. One major contrast occurs in the absence of inheritance of status experienced by and through Chinese indenture. Cuban cultural essentialism made no critical or practical distinctions of their Chinese and African subjects, a factor that shaped the socio-cultural conditions for the coexistence of black and Chinese populations and their cultural contact in Cuba. The Chinese were envisaged as a factor of sugar production, an addendum to Moreno Fraginals' (1976, 16) description of the rapid development of Cuba as undergoing an "explosive awakening." The rapacious appetite for plantation industrialization bore witness to the creation of a new élite in Cuba's social strata, an upswing that was coupled with the most impressive and rapid growth of infrastructure, technology and profitability ever witnessed in the colonized Antilles.

Table 2 Indentured Chinese migration associated mortality to Cuba: 1847-1874

Year	Left China	Arrived in Cuba	Died at sea	Percentage deaths
1847	612	571	41	6.7
1853	5,150	4,307	843	16.3
1854	1,750	1,711	39	2.2
1855	3,130	2,985	145	4.6
1856	6,152	4,968	1,084	19.3
1857	10,116	8,547	1,575	15.5
1858	16,414	13,385	3,019	18.4
1859	8,549	7,204	1,345	15.7
1860	7,204	6,193	1,011	14.03
1861	7,252	6,973	279	3.8
1862	356	344	12	3.3
1863	1,045	952	93	8.8
1864	2,664	2,153	511	19.1
1865	6,794	6,400	394	5.7
1866	13,368	12,391	977	7.3
1867	15,616	14,263	1,353	8.6
1868	8,100	7,368	732	9.03
1869	6,720	5,660	1,060	15.7
1870	1,312	1,227	85	6.4
1871	1,577	1,448	89	5.6
1872	8,915	8,160	755	8.4
1873	5,856	5,093	763	13.02
1874	2,863	2,490	373	13.02
Total	141,391	124,813	16,576	11.72

Sources: Adapted from tables in Pérez de la Riva (1967, 6) and Meagher (2007, 207).

The Sweet and the Sour: “Coolienizing” Cuba

In Cuban political and social discourse, the term *culí*⁵ to describe Chinese indentured workers was fairly late to arrive (Yun 2008, xix). The Chinese in Cuba were more widely known simply as *los chinos* [Chinese], *los colonos* [people of the colonies], *asiáticos* [Asians] and *contratados* [contracted laborers]. The word *coolie* is probably

⁵ Coolie in Spanish is *culí* (singular) and *culies* (plural). Used here to refer to Chinese indentured laborers in Cuba. The term coolie has several derivations: Mandarin 苦力 [*kǔlì*] “bitterly hard” use of strength (Pan 1990), and for East Asian indentured or hired laborer: *kuli*, from the original Hindustani.

derived from the name of a Gujarat tribe of India and its meaning was extended to other instances of transient laborer or hireling. Lisa Yun utilizes the term *coolie* strategically, first by acknowledging its use in the corpus of scholarly work that has made possible current studies of nineteenth century Chinese labor; she notes that it is of great relevance to *los culies chinos* where coolie is used in her study with respect to a deep and particular history (Yun 2008). I follow Yun's empathic use of the term coolie, to engage the reader in the lived experience and particular biographies of those Chinese workers and their descendants in Cuba. The term has a history that evokes identity and agency (given the literal translation of the epithet), in detailing the modes of resistance and subordination that ensued from indenture. It is also useful as a term to distinguish these persons from other marginalized people of color documented in Cuba.

Chinese workers arriving in Cuba were part of the "coolie trade" from its inception in 1847, which continued without abatement until its abolishment in 1874. Thereafter, Chinese laborers continued to arrive on the island as "free" immigrants to Cuba, often as family members coming to join previously indentured workers. Pérez de la Riva calculates that of a total of 124,813 Chinese workers "sold" in Havana during the earlier importation period, twentieth century censorial enumerations indicate a total Chinese population of 24,647 for 1931; 15,822 for 1943; and 11,834 for 1953 (Guanche 1996, 97). Baltar Rodríguez states that a similar growth pattern continued for decades, well into the next century with the Chinese population of Cuba swelling further, annually. By the mid-1950s, almost 40,000 Chinese immigrants were documented on the island, many of whom were registered as naturalized Cubans (Scherer 2001). However, even

more significant is the fact that, after a century of interaction, the majority of “mixed” Chinese-Cubans have largely escaped identification in the national censuses.

The early migration patterns of Chinese to Cuba comprised of an overwhelmingly young male population.⁶ Chinese and African peoples made a significant and irrevocable demographic impact on Cuba. The 1841 Cuban census conducted by the Spanish Crown indicated that there were 1,017,000 people in Cuba, of whom 418,000 were classified as white. Similarly, 150,000 people were categorized as free *mestizos* [“mixed” denoting multi-heritage people of color] and 432,000 slaves (Abdala Pupo 2003). As a result, there were substantially more slaves than free men and more women of color than those identified as Caucasian. However, census figures are not sufficient to fully extol the sheer rate and impetus of change in Cuba’s demographics stemming from sugar production.

The Chinese in Cuba is a diaspora that has impacted Cuba on many levels. Economically, the Chinese role in sugar production was of paramount importance in developing trade and amassing wealth for the Spanish Crown and private entrepreneurs. Chinese sugar workers were contracted for periods of eight years to avoid a crisis in the labor supply, following abolition of African slavery. Once the ship docked, coolies were offered for sale as though they were slaves (Scott 1985), however technically it was their contracts that were sold. Although their contracts were for eight years, they were at times obliged to re-contract upon expiration or leave the country at their own expense (de la Riva 2000). Plantation owners used a panoply of means to enforce indenture to the best of their abilities. These tools ensured that contracts were fulfilled through interpretations

⁶ According to the census data that specifies Chinese demographics, in 1861 a total of 34,828 (99.84%) males and 57 (0.16%) females were present in Cuba (source: Rodríguez 1997, 90).

of the law that represented the interests of the master. Yun states that coolie contracts were “patently deceptive” (2008, 30) as deductions were made from the four-peso monthly coolie salary. From this paltry sum, the plantation master made deductions for the cost of passage from China, for food, accommodation, and clothing as well as for lost work time should the worker fall ill. So insidious was the practice that by the close of an eight-year contract, it was very possible that the coolie would be indebted to his master (Yun 2008).

Louis A. Pérez Jr. writes that Chinese mortality and suicide rates were brutally high. Out of an estimated 114,000 coolies that had arrived in Cuba in the 1850s, 53,500 died (Pérez 2005, 55). By far, suicide was most prevalent for the Chinese in Cuba than any other demographic on the island and by 1862 census reported a total of 346 suicides were recorded: 43 by whites, 130 by slaves and 173 by Chinese (Pérez de la Riva 2000, 186) which equates to a rate of 5,000 deaths per 100,000 Chinese (Ortiz 1916 and Pérez 2005). Lisa Yun (2008 84, 149-151) writes that the death rate from Chinese suicides alone resulted in Cuba having the highest rate of suicide in the world at that time. Yun states that some suicides were committed as a group action, which can be read as modes of protest and in the same league as acts of workplace sabotage and resistance that the coolies also engaged as reported in “mysterious” incidents of fires on plantations.

Chinese male workers, some of whom were married and fathered children in China, found in Cuba that they were to be separated from their families and homeland for eight years or more while fulfilling their work contracts. Inevitably, marriage between Chinese immigrants and Cuban born women led to a mixing of cultures both intra- and inter-generationally. Neither the Chinese nor the Afro-Cubans could lay claim to the land

in Cuba, and both were discriminated against in the eyes of the Cuban colonial government. As they shared the same political and socioeconomic space Chinese and African intermarriage and consensual unions become the norm.

The switch from African slavery to Chinese coolies fostered the growth of the sugar industry, and according to Manuel Moreno Fraginals, “the Chinese made possible the first steps in sugar industrialization” (Moreno Fraginals 1976, 112). Cuba trafficked 780,000 humans from Africa until the end of the slave trade in 1867. African slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886. Because of African slavery and Chinese indenture, Cuba produced 42 percent of the global supply of sugar by 1870 (López 2013, 18). Henry B. Auchincloss praises the “intelligent Spanish planters” for realizing the value of the coolie in an otherwise slavery-centered country, “which in time may lead to great results. The Coolie is gradually taking the place of the African negro and his merits as a laborer are recognized even by the prejudiced and ignorant” (Auchincloss 1865, 186). Rooted in the slave trade, using the same bureaus and the same vessels, it is rather disingenuous that Lord Russell, Prime Minister of Britain in 1846–52 convinced the public that coolie labor was far removed from slavery:

By judiciously promoting emigration from China, and at the same time vigorously repressing the infamous traffic in African slaves, the Christian Governments of Europe and America may confer benefits upon a large portion of the human race, the effects of which it would be difficult to exaggerate” (Campbell 1923, 129).

Many Chinese contractual workers were unaware of their final destination in what was called *la trata amarilla*, the yellow trade (Hu-DeHart 1994). Rather than being told they were headed for the Caribbean, most coolies were expecting to land in neighboring Asian countries, a duplicitous act of the Chinese labor intermediaries, called coolie

crimps (Pan 1994, 47) who were employed by ex-slaving companies that had ventured into trading and transporting indentures.

Meeting the economic needs of the sugar planters, Chinese coolies were appropriated to the cane fields where they were regarded as single-mindedly focused on working and intent on making money. We can glean a sense of plantation life from published accounts of travel by American and European visitors to the Caribbean in the late nineteenth century. Several of these travelogues commented on their encounters with coolies who were depicted as being meek and passive people, quietly obeying overseers' demands and alluding to the high propensity of Chinese suicide. A prime example is Julia Louisa M. Woodruff's account of the first few days of her 1869 stay at the Santa Sofia mill in Matanzas Province:

The negros grew, after a time, to signalize my comings and goings with a smile, and were assiduous in doing me small services; but I do not remember that I ever elicited the slightest mark of interest or attention from the Chinese. These men appeared to be in a state of chronic sullenness; they persistently avoided meeting my eye, and emulated the hardiness, inflexibility and soullessness of the implements with which they labored. As they feel the weight and shame of bondage more than the Negros, it is a comfort to think that they can look forward to a day of emancipation; for the coolies are bound for a term of eight years only during which time their servitude is severe enough, but at the end of which they are their own masters. It is also a comfort to know that their propensity to suicide operates as some check upon the worst forms of cruelty (Woodruff 1871, 221-22).

Such accounts offer a richness that is textured with the colonial order and valuable insight into the perception of Cuba by such travel writers and essayists. Several travel writers and novice ethnologists provide a cultural commentary, themselves worthy of further researched for their particular perceptions of the Caribbean as eroticized and Orientalist textual strategies (Paravisini-Gebert 2002, 122). Semi-skilled coolie labor in particular was deemed crucial to the development of mechanization and industrialization

of sugar production, as “all the highly mechanized mills filled their boiler rooms with Chinese” (Moreno Fraginals 1976, 141). Once landed, the Chinese were to find themselves vilified and received a reputation determined squarely by stereotypical identifications (Abdala Pupo 2003). The coolie trade was popularly called the buying and selling of piglets referring to the queues, or Manchu pigtail/tonsure, coolies sported on arrival (Pan 1990, 48).

Anti-Chinese sentiment saw to it that the Chinese were constantly reminded that their presence in Cuba was contingent on a specific economic purpose and for a finite amount of time: to further the sugar production and then leave. The system of eight-year indenture was in place to obligate the Chinese to continue working despite the slave-like conditions, safeguarding the sugar estates from suffering a crisis in labor. Manuel Moreno Fraginals (1976, 141) quotes Feijóo Sotomayor’s proposed list for dealing with the Chinese *contratados*:

1. They should not be allowed off of farms.
2. They should get the same food as black slaves.
3. Wages should not be paid them when they were ill, sickness being a natural accident under the contract.
4. Masters should have jurisdictional power over them.
5. Masters should not be allowed to obtain freedom until the end of the contract, or to leave the farm after the contract if still in debt.
6. Marriage with white women should not be allowed.
7. There should be political equality with the free mulatto.
8. There should be fifteen hours’ work a day.

The contractual system and subsequent laws prevented Chinese the possibility of becoming naturalized as citizens of Cuba whose legal status is discussed below, and emphasized the message to work and return home, which was the desire for both parties. The terms of indenture and its proximity to slavery meant that upon termination of their

contracts, Chinese did not have sufficient funds for their return passage, and rather than returning to their homeland without the funds they had set out to achieve, the majority stayed in Cuba to establish a life and business.

Yun (2008) writes that the Chinese coolie situation in Cuba was desperate. According to Franklin Knight, “Chinese labor in Cuba in the nineteenth century was slavery in every social aspect except the name” (Knight 1970, 109). The historical circumstances that portray similarities between Chinese indenture and African slavery are vividly accounted for in numerous coolie testimonies collected by a Chinese delegation to Cuba that had received numerous reports on the living, working and trafficking conditions of its nationals. In September 1973, the Chinese Court ratified a decision to commence an investigation and sent a three-member party helmed by Chen Lan Pin (Yun 2007, 40) with help from British and French representatives. Chen and his team of interpreters arrived in Cuba, March 17 1873, and collected testimonies in Havana and five other provinces until May 8 1873. During this time, Chen and his team collected a total of 2,841 testimonies.⁷ It is known that overseers were present during testimony collection, and that there were incidents of administrators preventing some from giving testimony and intimidated by being beaten in sight of the commission (Cuba Commission 1970, Question L.) It should also be noted that ‘restricted maneuverings’ or ‘procedures as Lisa Yun defines them (2007, 45), were in place at the official level. The commission

⁷ The 2,841 testimonies were comprised of 1,176 Chinese coolies who gave oral testimonies (depositions) and 1,665 who provided written testimonies (petitions). They were published as a 14-volume set of petitions and depositions entitled, *Guba Huagong Chengci* [Testimonies Given by Chinese Labor in Cuba] and the 4-volume, *Guba Huagong Koubgongce* [Volumes of Testimonies Given by Chinese Labor in Cuba]. These sets were collectively published in 1984 and form part of a larger collection that serves as *Huagong Chuguo Shiliao Huibian* [The Record of Overseas Chinese Labor].

was required to make local travel arrangements by written correspondence ahead of time from Havana, addressed to the sub commissions of colonization.

The most intimate descriptions of the living conditions of the Chinese coolies are recorded by these reports. Li Zhaochun, one such indentured worker, gives the following petition, co-signed by 34 workers:

In every sugar plantation the Chinese laborers get four yuan paper currency for payment, which is worth just one silver. It is not enough for buying clothing or food in the first place. However, inside the plantation, managers own stores, where groceries are low quality and expensive. We have to buy from them and have our salary deducted. If we buy from other places, we would be accused of running away, then our feet would be shackled while working. After the expiration of the eight-year contract, who will have enough travelling money to go back to China? (Excerpt from petition 20, Cuba Commission 1876).

It was the experience of the Chinese indenture in Cuba and the rigid particulars of the sugar plutocracy, in tandem with the existing structures of slavery that brought about the conditions that made possible extensive African and Chinese contact to occur and religious syncretisms to develop. Living and working conditions for the Chinese were exactly the same as for African slaves, who shared the same accommodations, and earned inadequate wages. Prolonged and intimate contact between Chinese and black workers occurred as a result of the highly regulated and tightly managed contractual plantation labor system in Cuba that saw contracts honored to full completion. Effectively, Chinese migrants in Cuba remained almost exclusively in agricultural work on plantations until the late 1880s (Look Lai 2010). The experiences of the Chinese in Cuba differed tremendously from the experiences of Chinese migrants in the British West Indian colonies. Coolies that arrived in Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica quickly found ways to abandon the cane fields, revoking their contracts and headed for urban centers with

relative ease. There, they established themselves in small-scale, commercial ventures and enclaves (Look Lai 2010).

There are other significant Chinese migrations to (and from Cuba) that occurred circuitously with no specific data sources to record such movements. Principally, many Chinese that had established themselves in the United States as a result of the California Gold Rush left following the 1860s stemming from mounting racial tension, discrimination, and exclusionary legislation (Sandmeyer 1973, 12). It is estimated that five thousand “*Californianos*” arrived in Cuba via Mexico and New Orleans between during 1865-1875 (Pérez de la Riva 1967, 4).

Further wholesale importation of Chinese workers was discouraged during the Ten Year’s War of 1868-1878 when coolies and slaves banded in large numbers and joined the ranks of the insurgents on the island. Coolies were thus engendered as a threat to Cuba’s national security and lead to a decree issued in 1871 by the Spanish Government, upon the recommendation of the Captain General of Cuba that forbade the importation of more Chinese contract laborers. Furthermore, the Treaty of Peking, ratified on November 17, 1877 prohibited the transportation of Chinese to Cuba utilizing the scheme of labor contracts. The Peking Treaty, however, provided for the free migration to Cuba of Chinese with or without their families and extended the same rights for Spanish subjects in China (Corbitt 1944). Many coolies had joined the rebel forces during the 1868-78 *Guerra de los Diez Años* [Ten Years’ War] that contributed to the proliferation of anti-Chinese sentiment by landowners and those opposed to the ending of Coolie trafficking. With the end of Chinese contract migration to the island, those who were free from their eight year service contracts ventured into other areas of commerce,

including shop-keeping, laundering, food preparation and artisanry. By 1858, they had formed a large community in Havana's city center from which developed a distinct Chinese quarter or Chinatown (Corbitt 1971, 87).

Chineseness and Cubanness

Resentment of the Chinese was crystallized by the era of confusion that followed the overthrow of the dictator Gerardo Machado in August 1933. In the years that followed, a "Cuba for the Cubans" movement was initiated by the administration of President Ramón Grau San Martín. Introduced legislation made it a requirement that at least fifty percent of employees in any establishment were to be native-born, and was supported by Afro-Cubans. As a result, Chinese owned and operated establishments such as food-stalls and laundries came under swift attack by agitators, as no Cubans were employed there.

Chinese immigration, expulsion and harassment in the 1930s cast the Chinese as outsiders and greatly contributed to their exclusion of the formation of Cuban cultural identity. The relation between the Chinese and *Cubanidad* has varied greatly over the last 166 years. With the culmination of the liberation wars resulting in the founding of the Cuban Republic in 1902, the Chinese were initially, positively adumbrated into the nation's official renderings of what it meant to be Cuban: *la Cubanidad*. The Chinese, who by this time had been released from indenture and were making economic strides in establishing businesses and initiating transnational trade in several economic sectors, were recognized for their contribution to the freedom movement (García Triana and Eng Herrera 2009). The narrow scope of Cuban identity ideologies promulgated in the 1930s by Cuban intellectuals was nationalistic in conception and excluded or relegated to a

minor role *Afro-Chinese*, *Afro-diasporic* and other immigrants and ethnicities in the process. Chinese exclusion allowed for public racist sentiments to go unchallenged, having abandoned racial signification from official discourse and its associated problems and subsequent bigotry had no legal recourse. Evelyn Hu-DeHart presents several documented cases collected during this period detailing the nature and extent of *sinophobia*, *antichinismo* or *chinofobia* (Hu-DeHart 1999, 67) as well as the wholesale elision of the Chinese from national discourses of identification. Racist acts against the Chinese took many forms in action; rebel insurgents sacked Chinese grocery stores in Güines in Havana Province and they become satirized in popular media (Ferrer 1999, 150) and patronizingly comical renderings of Chinese speech can be found even in the writings of Cuban rebel leaders (García Triana and Eng Herrera 2009).

Language became a significant marker and tool of racism, Kathleen López (2004) comments on language as vehicle of racism by noting the tradition in Cuban historiography of attributing a distinctive form of pidgin Spanish to Chinese-Cuban speakers. Language use and difference had the effect of “demonstrating how native Cubans have perceived Chinese immigrants both as an integral part of the Cuban national experience, but also as something exotic” (López 2004, 130). It is necessary to further unpack the valances of language; its uses and bearing on descriptive terminology. López observes that language can at once convey both inclusion and segregation, that it is simultaneously a marker of acceptance and othering, a state of flux with no evident terminus. In a similar vein, Lisa Yun has commented on the relations of power that language ability and representation confers on the agent. Yun argues that the social stations of the diverse Chinese populations captured by the term ‘Chinese diaspora’ were

directly linked to a multilingual ability by the Chinese and their descendants in at least Chinese and Spanish, with some able to speak Chinese, Spanish, and sometimes French (Yun 2008, 201). Refinement in proper *castellano* and skills in English and French were often presented as cultural capital, of special value in a society heavily engaged in transnational trade, commerce and in line with the progress of a “modern” post-slavery culture. Language fluency and proficiency further reinforced Cuban identity making ideals, both inter- and intra-ethnically as in the work of Cuban-Chinese authors such as Antonio Chuffat Latour, wherein the importance of speaking Spanish with “precision” is repeatedly stressed, and that it was looked upon “admirably” to speak perfect Spanish (Chuffat Latour 1927, 214).

The initial temporality associated with Chinese labor migration and racist ideologies as to the Chinese negative impact on the social and cultural fabric of Cuba was later revised along with broader demographic and political shifts allowing for the incorporation of people of Chinese descent as Cuban. Chinese immigration to Cuba rapidly dropped and further dwindled from the midpoint of the twentieth century onwards. Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, only those born in China were recorded in the national census as being Chinese. Race in Cuba has been historically ascertained by perception of the enumerator in all Cuban censuses. Enumerators were guided to appoint categories to those they deemed “unmixed” as “*blancos*,” “*negros*,” and for the Chinese: “*amarillos*” [yellows]. From the 1981 census on, “*amarillos*” was replaced with “*asiáticos*” as a racial category. Racially “mixed” persons were recorded simply as “*mestizos*”. Separate to race was the question of place of birth that identified persons born in China. The descendants of those born in Cuba to Chinese parents may have been

recorded as mixed or as yellow/Asian as decided by the numerator. As a result, there is disagreement on the accurate number of Chinese in Cuba since the Revolution and an ongoing debate as to the problematic encountered in enumerating and classifying Chinese on the island. The Sino-Soviet Split during the Cold War (1960-1989) caused an atmosphere of heightened tension and awareness of Chinese and their place in Cuba, centered around public debate on issues of national loyalty. Soviet supporting Cubans, suspicious of the Chinese immigrants on the island impacted public opinion, opening avenues for xenophobia, as well as exclusionary politics.

Many Chinese-Cubans at this time sought to assert their Cubanness, negating as much as possible their ties to China whereby “Chinese identity became a liability, leading the residents of the barrio Chino to deemphasize their cultural markers” (Kenley 2011, 24). Downplaying Chineseness was a common cultural tactic for many groups in Cuba and a direct response to the larger context of revolutionary Cuban society and the urgent need for a homogenous Cuban identity as the blueprint for a unified nation from a previously fragmented and segregated demography. Many Chinese dropped or Latinized their Cantonese names, and their offspring were baptized with Spanish names and along with Chinese culture and religion, references to these are scant in Cuba’s dominant narratives at the time, understandably so, as they were peripheral to the main discursive goals of Cuban identity making and racial equalization.

Afro-Chinese Cubans

The almost exclusively male in-migration of Chinese workers through indentured labor produced interesting characteristics of Chinese-Cuban relationships, family ties

formation, and heritage. Chinese men came alone, the Spanish colonial government viewed Chinese wives as undesirable, leading to Cuban born Chinese children and family life that would be disruptive elements to the plantation regime (López 2013, 91). To put gender ratio disparity in perspective, José Baltar Rodríguez notes that the number of Chinese-born females recorded in Cuba peaked in 1953 at only 4.09% of the total Chinese-Cuban population (Baltar Rodríguez 1997, 101). As a result, Baltar Rodríguez goes on to explain that mixed Chinese male and black female unions became the norm. In the nineteenth century, following the liberation from their contracts, *los culies* continued to suffer from discrimination in the Spanish colonial regime. It was possible for coolies to legally enter into marriage in Cuba, yet was discouraged when petitions for marriage to white women were made and much more permissive when Chinese mixed with people of color (López 2013, 91). For the Chinese, the only option was to “*formar pareja podía darse solamente con mujeres de igual condición social: negras y mulatas:*” to form relations only with women of equal social status: black and *mulata* women (Rodríguez 1997, 101). Verena Martinez-Alier writes that the importation of Chinese coolies gave rise to fissures in the existing classificatory schemas of race. Their legal tone was a conundrum as many Chinese were in fact of a lighter skin color than most “white Cubans” and proved a majority problem for legal racial taxonomies (Martinez-Alier 1989).

The only occasions civil unions could not be readily contested occurred when Cuban born Chinese baptism certificates classified the person as white, a technical or paper legality that did not translate to actual social acceptance (López 2013, 91). So much was Chinese presence confounding pre-existing classificatory understandings that

following a marriage petition between a Chinese man and a *parda* [a racially-mixed woman] it was decreed, “not possible to establish any general rules for future cases of this nature, for in each one the special circumstances...must be taken into consideration⁸” (Martinez-Alier 1989, 76). Cuban marriage petition practice lies in contrast to marriage and cohabitation patterns in the wider Caribbean area during the same historical moment, where Chinese women formed a larger migration percentage, normalizing sex ratios, and the relatively freer movement of Chinese spouses to migrate saw a greater number of Chinese marriages.

In Cuba, the exclusively Chinese male population in the latter half of the nineteenth century from indenture was characterized by a state of “bachelorhood” a status and living arrangement that is one of the few discernable commonalities to Chinese populations in many, if not all Chinese diasporic communities. Juan Hun Hui (1975) states that the majority of Chinese in Cuba were unmarried, leading to a propensity for indentured workers to form sexual unions with black and mixed race women. Chinese who had earned their freedom by serving the duration of their contracts also bought the freedom of their enslaved partners, a prerequisite to marriage (Osberg 1967, 68).

Modern Identifications and Disidentifications

Throughout the dissertation I use various terms to describe the Chinese in Cuba, their descendants and their mixed-race descendants. I use, when available, the terms employed by my interlocutors, as they are especially helpful in families that are racially mixed both vertically, in different generations, and horizontally, among peers and lateral

⁸ Archivo Nacional de Cuba [ANC], Havana. Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil [FGSC] Leg. 924/32226.

family relations. The diversity of terms speaks of the complexities of configuring race from a contemporary Cuban perspective and has significant implications when discussing the past. I have introduced the concept of *Sinalidad* [Chinese influence in Cuban culture] as counterpoise to the much-touted *Cubanidad*. My neologism highlights the capacity to discern cultural traits and assign them provenance. My use of the root words Sino, Chinese, African, and Cuban are applied with a consciousness of each of their relevant pasts and how they have each been conjured in academic writings on race and academia. Their conjunctions, Afro-Chinese, Afro-Chino, Afro-Sino are ways I bring attention and particular focus to their joining, their spatial proximity and the as yet undetermined and incompleteness that a compound word tends to invoke. I revel in the *hyphen* that simultaneously separates and unites Afro and Sino, which I have found an immensely valuable device in alerting attention to unknown diasporic unions.

Confianza – Intergenerational and Religious Trust

The twentieth century demographic picture in Cuba saw a marked rise in children born of Chinese fathers and black or mixed-race mothers. They were, in turn, encouraged to marry people of native born or mixed Chinese descent. With the rescinding of Cuban-Soviet aid and ties, these mixed marriages also downplayed Chinese customs and cultural performance. The shift in focus away from Chinese cultural practice between generations was eloquently captured by one of my interview participants: Jesús Chang-Delgado (Figure 2.1), who is now 68, born to a Cuban born Chinese father and an Afro-Cuban mother:

My father didn't raise us with any Chinese religion or beliefs. He had it, though...He would go to Chinatown, or sometimes to an association in the

countryside and partake in [Chinese] celebrations with other people of his generation. That was a thing for the old folks. They didn't have trust, *confianza*, in us; they were very, very secretive. He would just go, without any announcement and we would only find out about it when he returned [...] There was a lot of discrimination back then, you see... he didn't want us to go through what he had gone through. He left us to follow our mother, we were baptized and she took us to Church occasionally but her true love was Oshun. She was a santera and was very active in the religion. I received my warriors, my 'hand of Orunla' and growing up *consultas* [divination sessions], *limpiezas* [spiritual cleansings], and *ofrendas* [offerings] were normal for my sisters and me. *Mami* made sure of that! The [divination] shells indicated that I didn't have to be initiated as a santero, but my wife is. She is a daughter of Oyá and has many years of *santo* [initiation]. Our children too, are initiated (interview with Jesús Chang-Delgado 26 June 2012).

Jesús embodies the lived experience of many of his generation of mixed Cuban-Chinese religious upbringing. The concept of trust or *confianza* was a recurring and emotive theme in discussions with my contributors when speaking about their Chinese forebears. Many, like Jesús, spoke of a generational and religious divide between themselves their Chinese born and/or raised parents and their Cuban born, 'creole' children in the capacities of Chinese religious instruction and Afro-Cuban cultural encounter. Chinese parents did not tend to pass on their Chinese religious practices to their Cuban-born offspring, wherein the religious beliefs and practices of the mother – Catholicism, Afro-Cuban religion and Kardecian spiritism became dominant and the template for spiritual action. Thus religion, and its instruction is intimately linked and differentiated along lines of *confianza* between successive generations. *Confianza* can be viewed as important to Afro-Cuban religious practice because the links that it creates and maintains, and there is a perceivable break in *confianza* as Chineseness is severed through Cuban birth and upbringing.

Jesús's story highlights the dynamics of Afro-Cuban religious practice within a family of bi- or multi-racial heritages, wherein each follows their own Afro-Cuban spiritual trajectory and performativity of beliefs, initiations, and related ceremonies. Jesús described his parents in very different ways, and reflected often in our conversations on the importance of his religious inheritance from his mother, and how this element went a long way in defining his relationships with each of his parents in very different ways.

The term *confianza* can also indicate a reciprocal level of intimacy, involving a commitment and investment in trust, openness and sharing that sets these relationships apart from others. In these senses of the word, when dealing with religious knowledge and family, *confianza* moves its definition beyond the English translation of trust. It is routinely invoked in Lukumi religious practice and its religious kinship models, wherein the relationship between initiator and initiate (godparent and godchild) is modeled as a non sanguineous parent/child relationship that commands a high degree of *confianza* forged and tempered through instances of religious expression and initiation.



Figure 2.1 Jesús Chang-Delgado

In these mixed descendants it is possible to discern two broad, distinct categories, the rare children whose parents are both of Chinese heritage, and the more common children of Chinese father and black or mixed Cuban mother. The former scenario, those of Chinese parents were brought up and instructed in the cultural norms and traditions of their Chinese ancestors, participating and accessing Chinese societies on the island, and noted for being bilingual in Chinese and Spanish (Rodríguez 1992, 102). In contrast, the offspring of mixed Chinese-Cuban parentage were not considered to be legitimately ethnically Chinese by their Chinese parent, and were generally restricted in access to Chinese cultural norms, fostering feelings of “uprootedness” (Rodríguez 1992, 102).

CHAPTER III CONCEPTUALIZING DIASPORIC RELIGIOSITY

As much as Chapter III discusses religion in Cuba, and relevant Afro-Chinese contact, processual syncretism and transnational ties, it also is concerned with the assumptions made in existing academic discourses concerning their problematic definitions and academic usage. First, I examine the Afro-Cuban religious world and the inheritance of concepts of ethnogenesis and transculturation implemented in composing that world and its participants. Then, I focus on ways of examining the religious contact made in both past and current works on syncretism and its synonyms and cognates. It is necessary to understand the parameters of inherited concepts, as I redefine the syncretism process as interdiasporic cross-fertilization with regard to Afro-Chinese religiosity throughout the following chapters and concluded in Chapter VIII. Interwoven in these discussions is information on African-derived religion, and Chinese religious practice in China and Cuba. My tenets of methodologically performing an anthropological and religious ethnography are also delineated here, building on the work outlined here and on the Chinese in Cuba in Chapter II.

Much of the literature that focuses on Afro-diasporic religions today, resonate the theoretical rhetoric made popular by early twentieth century Africanists and Caribbeanists. These scholars were working in and through an epistemology governed by models of diffusionism and acculturation, concepts fervently engaged by Melville J. Herskovits (1941) that sought to reinstate, through a strategy of linear contact, history, and culture otherwise denied to people of African descent. In closely examining these legacies, we first have to deal with the anthropological content of such studies, so that I may situate my work in relation to the paradigms set forth in earlier work.

The anthropology of religion in African diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean was nurtured by a cadre of scholars with a very specific, structuralist agenda. Kevin Yelvington (2001) has traced the germination of the structuralist trajectory in the ethnographic work of Melville J. Herskovits (1895-1963) and his wife, whose work, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) was a clarion call for Africanist scholars to emphasize the processes of acculturation in the designated, *New World*, African-American “cultural areas”. It was legitimized and expanded upon by international colleagues including Roger Bastide (1960), Nina Rodríguez (1932), both of whom focused on African “retentions” in Brazil. Fernando Ortiz (1916) and Rómulo Lachatañeré (1943), ethnographers of Afro-Cuban religion in Cuba and Jean Price-Mars (1938) who worked in Haiti.

These protagonists produced the perpetuating framework and theoretical moment that has defined Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Haitian religion and contact culture, whose effects were greatly echoed and felt in successive generations of work. These works sought to connect Africans to a place and presence previously denied to them in recorded history and the portrayal of Africans as being outside culture/identity formation processes. These researchers were collectively termed as an “intellectual social formation” by Kevin Yelvington (2006, 67). It is beyond question that structures of power, racism, and discrimination have historically led to the invisibility and marginalization of Afro-diasporic religious practices. Practitioners of African religions in Cuba were targeted for eradication by colonial policies (Saunders 2009, 171). The demonization continued unabated into 1960s and 1970s, with Afro-Cuban religiosity perceived as belonging specifically to pre-revolutionary cultural norms, and categorized as marginal, criminal, and socially deviant (de la Fuente 2001). Echoes are still being

sensed about Afro-diasporic religions, which are routinely scapegoated in the wider Caribbean, a contemporary example being the 2010 earthquake catastrophe in Haiti, deemed by some as a punishment for practicing Vodou.

Syncretism is a dialogue that brings with it discussions of power, agency, and identity, more specifically the connections between syncretism and power, and the agentive ways of producing and furthering it. There was and continues to be a considerable number of ways in which marginalized religious ritual and practice have defied colonial and hegemonic wills, which have been referred to as preservation, retention of *African* culture outside of the *European* driven colonial gaze. I pay close attention here to what constitutes syncretism, moving beyond the blanket, unhelpful definitions of what is truly a complex term, and teasing out useful components from its previous theoretical strands and incarnations to adequately portray what these current processes are.

The encountering and synthesizing of ritual and material goods predicates levels of action that are contextualized in new ways according to interdiasporic connections. Material objects through syncretism take on new meanings in the new settings that are substantively different from their previous significations. From the initial arrival of the Chinese in Cuba and the development of prolonged and intimate contact with Afro-Cubans, a new and dynamic synthesis of ideas and practices were developed that did not follow either field of knowledge, creating an epistemic shift in what constitutes Afro-Cuban religion. That is not to say that each element or idea was part of a fixed or legitimate origin as such discussions of syncretism are likely to ascribe. Rather, the

syncretic discourse seeks to further academic ground in the way objects, ideas, and beliefs are continually negotiated and by whom.

Afro-Cuban Religions

There is not one, but many Afro-Cuban religions. Perhaps the most academically popularized and influential, as measured by prominence of subject and space in literature, is the conglomeration of orisha worship that originated from what is today southwestern Nigeria. The practices of the ethnic groups that comprise the Yorùbá and their neighbors gave rise to Santería, also known as *la regla de osha* [the rule of *osha*] or Lukumi, which is a religiosity steeped in ritual practice and performativity and includes initiation, singing, dancing, animal sacrifice, divination, and possession. Popularly syncretized with Catholic iconography, the orisha transplanted to Cuba soon became a synecdoche for Afro-Cuban religion. Lydia Cabrera, noted ethnographer, and contemporary of her uncle, Fernando Ortiz, wrote extensively on *la regla de osha* and other Afro-Cuban religions (1954) and she remains a significant source of ethnographic information both for scholars and practitioners of Lukumi and other Afro-Cuban religions. Cabrera compiled a dictionary of the creole Yorùbá language as spoken by their descendants on the island, known as Lukumi (1974). Cabrera also turned her attention to the lesser-known Afro-Cuban religions and organizations, such as Abakuá (1970), which arrived with slaves from the Niger Delta, Arará (1973) related to Dahomean religious practices and Bakongo derived Palo (1977).

Lukumi religion consists of the veneration of ancestors and the worship of orishas. It is henotheistic: with one ruling or supreme God (called Olofin and Olodumare)

deemed too remote for direct petition, and the orishas acting as intermediaries. The orishas are deities worshipped by the Yorùbá and neighboring ethnic groups. Each orisha governs specific domains in nature, animals, foods, and so on. They engender particular divination patterns adapted to each component and expressed in specific colors, numbers and other identifiers. Much of the early work in the religious ethnography of Afro-Cuban religion charted and attributed the various correspondences of each deity. Along with these, a Catholic saint has been assigned to each orisha. For example: Yemayá, the orisha of motherhood and water, associated with the colors blue and crystal, and the number seven, which relates to the divination chapter “*odi*”, which in turn manifests as seven cowrie shells appearing “face up” when the sixteen cowrie shell set named *dilogún*, is thrown.

Yemayá is syncretized with *Nuestra Virgen de Regla*, Our Lady of the Rule. Although a worshipper may venerate a statue of Our Lady of Regla as Yemayá, there is little meaning of Catholic iconography within Afro-Cuban Lukumi worship beyond a symbolic and often public representation of the orisha. Afro-Cuban ritual such as consecration and sacrifice would not be performed to or with any reference to a Catholic statue⁹. There are a variety of ceremonies and initiations that a person may undertake in Lukumi religion. Some are intrinsic to marking life stages, and others are indicated by divination. In practice, no Lukumi ritual of initiation or consecration makes use of Christian imagery or catechism within the chamber called the *igbodu* where the ceremonies are performed.

⁹ See John Mason (1993) for a description of the processes of four Lukumi rituals.

Worshippers may receive a series of initiations, in turn, receiving consecrated orishas that are comprised of sacralized stones and cowrie shells. Stones are gathered, preferably from the seashore, divined to see if an orisha inhabits them and to affirm if they are destined for the worshiper. These asked stones are then consecrated through a private process performed by initiates only that “birth” one orisha from an existing shrine. The initiation as a priest *olorisha* or *santero* requires the initiate to undergo a year and seven days of ceremony and ritual observance. During a five-day period of seclusion¹⁰, the head is prepared by being shaved, painted, and “loaded” with medicine, the orishas are “mounted” or “crowned” on the initiate’s head. The crowning makes use of a metaphor of signature, whereby the orisha becomes responsible for the person through this designated contact space, made possible by community manipulation of *ashé*, often translated as spiritual energy or power. Carole Boyce Davies gives an interesting definition of *ashé* as the power “to be” and by its ability to move “across two large discursive fields: that of spirituality and that of creativity (Boyce Davies 1999, 51). Through the manipulation of *ashé* initiate’s head is creatively and spiritually connected to the orisha, an act that is only undone after death through mortuary rites performed on the body.

For the year immediately following the priesthood initiation ceremony, the person is considered an *iyawó* [junior bride/wife] of the orisha and as reborn by going through a liminal stage. The status of junior wife is not gender differentiated according to the sex of the person, the term is applicable to both male and female initiates (see Matory 1994 for

¹⁰ For an in-depth ethnographic account of an initiation of a priest of Oshun see Mason (2002, 59).

use of gendered tropes in initiation). The iyawó takes certain measures to indicate their elevated status, a time that is considered vulnerable and volatile as the iyawó is learning to live with the newly received “*ashé*” of the orisha in their life. Iyawó are protected from the depletion of *ashé* and also from the pollution coming from the mundane world by wearing white, bathing regularly, keeping their head covered, not frequenting certain places such as cemeteries, jails, where they may be exposed to harmful or volatile energy. The associated divination cult of Ifá has a male-only priesthood, whose initiates are called babalawo and whose tutelary orisha is Orunla.

Babalawo and olorisha share mutually exclusive but overlapping spheres of existence and practice. A babalawo may be initiated as an olorisha prior to his ceremonies of make him a babalawo, yet he will no longer officiate as an olorisha, in terms of himself initiating others to the orisha priesthood. Among other differences, a babalawo uses divination tools that an olorisha does not, and a babalawo will never experience orisha possession.

Serious rivalry and competition (see Brown 2003a), especially with godchildren and the commercial exploitation of religious rituals and ceremonies can and do occur (Palmié 2013). Commercialization and competition in the religion is extremely prevalent in post-Soviet Havana (Holbraad 2004). Claims of stealing godchildren are rife, and poaching or luring a godchild is seen as bad taste. Some babalawo and some olorisha are in long-standing disagreements over who rightfully commands the authority to preside over certain rituals and confer various orishas, yet actual practice disregards these blanket claims. An example is the question of who should consecrate the quadruplet of warrior orishas – Elegba, Ogún, Osun, and Oshosí, to a worshiper – the babalawo or the olorisha?

Disagreements over authority and jurisdiction are relatively minor disruptions however they point to important distinctions concerning religious orthodoxy and lineage claims to practice. Regardless of these debates, both *olorisha* and *babalawo* continue to perform these contested rites, invoking divination texts, and lineal tradition and precedents that were set by deceased elders to back up claims.

Both initiates and non-initiates undergo divination with *olorisha* or *babalawo*, receiving advice and remedies to fix or ameliorate given situations and life circumstances. Like the priesthood initiations, an adherent may also undergo further ceremonies as prescribed through divination, as well as receive the consecrated emblems of further *orisha* not received during the priesthood initiation process. Apart from the *babalawo* – *olorisha* dichotomy concerning governance and territory, practitioners of *Lukumi* may also, simultaneously practice and receive initiations in other Afro-Cuban religions such as *Palo*. Similarly many *Lukumi* identify as Catholic and undergo baptism and visits to Church following *Lukumi* rites. In some *Lukumi* lineages, the spirit mediumship development practices derived from European Kardecian spiritism is also supremely popular among the practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions as well as independently practiced in its own right. It often forms part of the pre-priesthood initiation protocol, used to develop the person's mediumistic skills, deemed a pre-requisite to initiation rites. European spiritism has been popular in many Latin American and Caribbean religious practices, forming part of the multiplicity of practices of diasporic religious experiences.

Cabrera, Ortiz and those from the Herskovitsian school examined Afro-Cuban religion, and *Lukumi* religious practice as hinged between two axes – that which relates

to provenance or African origins, and the other relating to mixing “New World” power laden structures of hybridity. The formerly popular acculturation approach of carry over, foregrounds, and impress retentions and transference of discrete religious variables and products: its reified values, icons and practices to the new, host environment in a relatively unadulterated state of imagined static and homogeneous baseline trait. Such work is unconcerned and unconnected with ongoing religious dynamism and change. The latter approach foregrounds that which occurs in the new environment, and views these religions as being unstable, weak, and easily “corrupted”, in effect, regarding them less as religions and more as fluid constellations of individuated practices. My work here is to sift through the limitations of each direction in discourse, as well as to uncover their assumptions, which allows for the serious discussion of the religious junctures that occur when two diasporas meet, creating spaces of interdiasporic cross-fertilization. With regard to Lukumi religion in Cuba, the syncretism of orishas is classically and resolutely stated in relation to Catholic saints that form the “public face” or the “white mask” of the “private”, and “black” orisha, a subversive attempt to continue unregulated, secretive practices in light of hegemonic power. Discussed in terms of unequal power relations, modes of survival, and resistance to specifically Euro-Catholic dominance (Herskovits 1966, Brandon 1997), the result is a hybrid mix that unifies two religions in a form that effects the preservation of Lukumi practice and renders it invisible to the church. Syncretism in this understanding is a past event, one that has served a purpose and produced a new reified form of worship.

These early ethnographic texts that laid down the enduring foundation of theoretical position, serve to classify the West African orisha as static and absolute,

which permitted the development of comparative charts that list orisha to corresponding Catholic saints. Stephan Palmié posits that this is telling of a cultural moment in which scholarship itself, in conjunction with practitioners that are both the interlocutors and the consumers of said literature. The scholar and practitioner discursive dyad unwittingly embarked on a Lukumi ethnogenesis project, wherein they formed collectively a co-authorship of their Lukumi religious world and origins, relying on a reconstruction of a religious past (Palmié 2013, 35).

The anthropological study of Afro-Cuban religion is not meant to be conveyed here as a biased retelling of historical events, but a recursive fashioning of a consolidated religious *topos* (Palmié 2013, 33). That is, I bring awareness that what we term “Lukumi” is a fairly recent religious identification, itself reliant and invoking the equally modern construction of a homogeneous Yorùbá whose forebears would not have participated in such lumping (Peel 2000). James Lorand Matory, whose work on a Latin American Lukumi cognate, Afro-Brazilian Candomblé offers significant insight into the debate and powerfully argues for a revision of long held assumptions that diasporic populations are reproductions of stable, isomorphic structures that are reminiscent of a “pristine past” (Matory 2005, 2). Palmié and Matory are both calling for a new anthropological strategy to be implemented in the study of Afro-Atlantic religion, one that serves to restore the “subject or agent to the narrative” (Matory 2005, 7). Such a concept moves away from trying to understand the African diaspora in terms of continuity and change from its “putatively original African traditions, as earlier scholars had assumed they could” (Holbraad 2012, 11).

Money, Travel and Afro-Cuban Religion

A contemporary example of how Lukumi and associated religious practices and rituals are carried out is in its relation to national religious commodification and transnational political economies. The cost to perform Lukumi religious ceremonies both in Cuba and in the diaspora can be relatively high. To “make *osha*”, to be initiated as an orisha priest in Cuba can range from USD\$300-500¹¹ for Cubans living in Cuba, and \$4,000-\$8,000 for foreigners. The cost for initiations in Cuba can be compared to the range of \$7,000 to \$17,000 for the same initiations carried out in Miami, New York, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere in the U.S. Transnational Cubans who migrate to Europe or North America and return for ceremonies, tend to be pay foreigner prices, also. To be initiated as a *babalawo* in Cuba it costs approximately \$1,000 – \$3,000 for a Cuban living on the island, and \$5,000 for a foreigner, compared with \$20,000-\$30,000 for the initiation to be carried out in North America.

As a result of the differentials, many Cubans in diaspora and non-Cubans in America and Europe travel to Cuba for their initiations. Foreigners may forge relationships with *santeros* and *babalawos* on the island, especially if they are fluent in Spanish. Some *olorisha* living in North America and Europe choose to take their godchildren to Cuba for their initiations and other related ceremonies, it proves to be less expensive when factoring in airfare and accommodation the rituals are less expensive to perform in Cuba.

¹¹ These figures are my estimations from data gathered through interviews. Kevin Delgado (2009, 58) gives similar estimates verging even higher. Practitioners both in Cuba and its diaspora tend to shy away from discussing money and costs involved in Lukumi religious ceremonies and are never discussed openly. Prices fluctuate according to means, and costs may not be indicative of other exchanges of labor and resources for ceremonies that take place in the absence of money.

The growth of Afro-Cuban religion in other Latin American and Caribbean countries including Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia result in their nationals also travelling to Cuba for religious purposes, forming “global orisha movements” (Beliso-De Jesús 2013, 707). Some also choose to go to Cuba for medical treatment and elective surgeries, combining their trips for dual religious and medical purposes. Sufficient data have yet to be gathered to adequately quantify this informal sector of the political economies of religious travel, however, I believe it is rather significant and, tellingly, forms part of the ongoing production of syncretisms and agentive claims to Chinese and African religious activity in contemporary Cuba – a theme examined in greater detail in the following chapters. Ceremonies are paid for in cash – Cuban convertible pesos [CUC], euros, pounds and dollars, ritually presented to the orishas of the godparents and then used to pay for both the materials needed for the ceremonies – animals, garments, implements, herbs, food and so on, as well as given to participants for their time and *ashé*.

Money and goods circulate within the Cuban religious economy, which often provides a source of much needed income and funds to many, especially Afro-Cubans that do not otherwise have access to hard currency and foreigners through the more visible industries related to tourism, music and dance. Cuban olorisha that have many years of initiation and have accumulated religious capital in various forms (many godchildren, ceremonial knowledge, musical prowess) are sought out by foreigners that forge religious relationships and become initiated. Christine Ayorinde has recorded concerns from diasporic Cubans that an influx of mainly white, opportunistic and materialistic foreigners are likely to travel to Cuba for “ceremonies and initiations, in the

belief that this bestows a greater authenticity on Afro-Cuban religiosity (Ayorinde 2004a, 16). The author has also noted that diasporic patterns of commercialism and consumption are also filtering into Afro-Cuban attitudes towards their religion, driving up the cost of initiations, making them unaffordable for less affluent Afro-Cubans.

Katrin Hansing writes that Afro-Cuban religions, especially “Santería,” “have been turned into one of the most lucrative businesses in contemporary Cuba [...] the growing informal but booming Afro-Cuban religious tourism, which is already widely referred to as ‘*santurismo*,’ has also led to these religions’ global spread (Hansing 2006, 56).

Those that travel from abroad for their ceremonies bring with them to Cuba the majority of material goods and scarce consumables from botánicas, supermarkets, craft and cloth stores that they will need for their rites. Often laden with suitcases full of religious goods. Ironically, the materials that are deemed essential for Afro-Cuban rituals and ceremonies are scarce to completely unavailable in Cuba. Prior to the 1990s, when difficulties in acquiring ritual commodities was even more acute, practitioners showed demonstrated their flair for resourcefulness, *ser ingenioso*: such as sourcing olive oil from the Cathedral for use in Babalu Aye rituals and dyeing white dove feathers scarlet by using mercurochrome when the red tail feathers of the African gray parrot were not available. Any extra or superfluous items brought from abroad for ceremonies are crucial, these materials stay in Cuba and are cycled within the religious sphere, safeguarded for future use in pending initiations for native Cubans and or traded for other needed religious goods and services. Indeed, anthropologists have their part to play in this informal economy too, as witnessed in the following passage by Martin Holbraad who

reflects on meeting the babalawo, Javier, and his concerns with meeting *bona fide* practitioners:

“Everyone who knew him – acquaintances of mine to whom Javier “attended” in religious matters, as diviners say, spoke of the “old man” with a tenderness of almost filial intensity. They spoke of his great expertise as a babalawo, a priest of Ifá, the prestigious male diviner-cult I had come to Cuba to study (Holbraad 2012, 76).

Ifá and Santería are two modern and important factors in Cuba’s informal economies and as religions in their own right, they are becoming ever more accepted and mainstream. Cuba’s official intolerance of any and all forms of religion ceased in the 1980s, a relaxation that was spurred by a pressing need to re-evaluate a slew of cultural issues, including religion, in the midst of looming economic crisis (Hansing 2006, 55).

Those difficult times saw more Cubans turning to religion for answers, and as a result, many became initiated in Lukumi religion as a means of garnering spiritual assistance in their daily lives. More and more Cubans are training to be babalawo, oriate, and olorisha, as well as taking up related professions (such as seamstress/tailor, cook, musician) and making a living from working, and earning a living, within a religious capacity. Both Cubans abroad and an ever-growing number of foreigners visit Cuba expressly for personal purposes of Afro-Cuban religion. Religious travel to Cuba, however, has gained considerable momentum from the close of the Special Period, from which emerged a new sense of the potential profitability of religious practices. Growth in the numbers of foreigners travelling to Cuba for initiations has been aided in the growing public acceptance, awareness of Afro-Cuban religions globally, and easier travel to the island from related tourist infrastructure. As such, there has been heightened promotion and normalizing, of Afro-Cuban religion as folklore in Cuba. The Cuban government,

through the auspices of the *Oficina de Atención a los Asuntos Religiosos* [The Office of Attention for Religious Affairs] oversees contact between Afro-Cuban religious practitioners and tourists through carefully mediated introductions to approved Afro-Cuban houses of worship. In addition to statewide governance of Christian and other organized religious group activity on the island, the Office also has a hand in the more informal Afro-Cuban and santurismo religious fields in its purview, whose projects include constructing public folkloric performances that are inspired from religious rites. The folklorization and the intervention of state approved houses of worship for foreigners, has resulted in tightly controlled and “sanitized” (Hansing 2006, 57) access to Afro-Cuban priesthood. Tourists interested in gaining further, personal entrance to the religion are guided towards State approved olorisha and babalawos, colloquially dubbed “*diplosanteros*” and “*diplobabalawos*” who receive state (Cuban peso) salaries and not the dollars or euros paid by the foreigners (Ayorinde 2004a, 162).

There are two annual divinations made for Cuba that are performed by collectives of babalawo on the first of January of each year. These “readings of the year” determines a governing *odu* for Cuba’s nationals, and worldwide Lukumi practitioners, forecasting what to expect over the course of the next twelve months, the governing orisha(s) for the year and the *ebó* or prescriptive offerings needed to mitigate the bad and accentuate the positive. One divination committee is government affiliated, called the Yorùbá Cultural Association [*Asociación Yorùbá de Cuba*] and the other is independent, called *La Comisión Organizadora de la Letra del Año Miguel Febles Padrón* [The Commission for the Organization for the reading of the year, Miguel Febles Padrón], the latter organization (Figure 3.1) often considered more accurate and without state affiliation.

These intensely popular predictions make nationally and international news and the divination pronouncements are probably the largest and most popular instances of serious Afro-Cuban religious action in Cuba's mainstream, and public arenas.



Figure 3.1 Divination notice outside the headquarters of La Comisión Organizadora de la Letra del Año Miguel Febles Padrón

Chinese and Afro-Cuban Religiosity

My fieldwork data exploring both the material and immaterial aspects of Chineseness or *Sinalidad* at play in the making of interdiasporic cross-fertilization can be somewhat divided into four distinct categories. I suggest the following categories and refer to each of them as identifying labels that are used in this dissertation to minimize confusion on a practical level. These distinctions also offer greater consistency and transparency of the multiple layers of cross-pollination, which would otherwise be blurred, as well as offering ways of thinking through the particular relationships of these various tenets of *Sinalidad* within the Cuban imaginary across time. The factors are:

1. The Chinese as a group of racialized subjects,
2. Chinese religions.
3. The practices of Chinese people,
4. Chinese objects.

The category of the Chinese as a group of racialized subjects implicates their homogeneous identifications. While Cuban-Chinese as a category really cannot be defined as a singular racialization because of the broad multi-racial and poly-cultural terrains it implicates, the native Chinese population from indenture and successive twentieth century mass migrations to Cuba bore some semblances of sharing cultural, linguistic and regional homogeneity. The main Chinese ethnic groups that came to Cuba as indentured workers were the Hakka, the Hoklo/Hokkien and the Punti from southern China (Martín, 1939). The Hakka constitute the majority of Caribbean and Latin American Cantonese diasporas, outnumbering both the Punti and Hoklo, by far.

With regard to the aforementioned category of “Chinese religion” there is a vast plurality of religiosities historically and contemporarily at play within mainland China, with many Chinese experiencing and navigating more than one distinct set of religious beliefs and practices simultaneously. The historical background of the Chinese religions that have direct bearing on my research starts with the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It is comprised of the “Three Teachings” referring to the three main religions practiced by Chinese: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism (Meulenbeld 2012, 125). These Teachings can inform practice in a number of different ways, a person may adhere to just one of these religions, or combine one, some or all of them as well as or instead practicing what have been called “local” or “popular” religion versions, blending these three teachings with local or family specific worship of gods and immortals (Meulenbeld 2012, 125).

Confucianism is a relatively recent label, not in use before 1687, and its Chinese equivalent is *Ru jia*, where *Ru* stands for religious scholars (earlier to priests or shamans)

who were ritual experts and skilled in summoning good spirits, exorcising evil spirits and bringing rain and other blessings (Nadeau 2012, 5-7). The status of Confucianism as a religion is routinely debated.

Its practice encompasses a value system, temples and worship halls in China and the diaspora, centered on ritual formats dating from the Han Dynasty (221 BCE – 220 BCE). The rituals are dedicated to Confucian masters and to furthering the Confucian code of ethics and behavior, focused on filial piety, ritual propriety, honesty, integrity, loyalty and social cohesion (Meulenbeld 2012). With the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 BCE) and an increased contact with the outside world, the import of Buddhism, saw to it that Buddhist practices have also been established in China. Over the course of three centuries Central Asian Buddhism became increasingly “Sinicized” [made Chinese] (Meulenbeld 2012), additionally, Nadeau writes that syncretism became increasingly popular during the Qing Dynasty, when subjects became indentured laborers in Cuba. Philip Clart notes that there is a double problematic in trying to examine Chinese religious practice as a singular religious tradition: “Confucianism,” “Daoism,” and “Buddhism” each have their own conceptual frames, including that they are in effect, etically ethnically assigned labels with no clear or precise Chinese language transliterations. Using the term, “Chinese popular religion” and its synonym “local religion” compounds this problem further, as both are used indiscriminately and interchangeably, resulting in their veracity and discursive ability to be hotly debated and deemed to be imported, Western definitions that further trouble religious definition through Orientalist imposition (Clart 2012, 219).

The ritual ontology and historicity of Daoism is even more complex than Confucianism, and Nadeau (2012) states that it has historically been adapted from the *Daode jing*, and three philosophical thinkers that confronted and rebelled against Confucian ascribed rule and social mores. These thinkers are: The Jade Pure One (玉清), The Supreme Pure One (上清), and The Grand Pure One (太清). Combining the worship and appeasement of a host of deities categorized according to their abodes – such as Heaven and Earth – and includes a multitude of religious and canonical texts. Daoism is a conglomeration of diverse spiritual beliefs and practices with a relatively horizontal clerical structure, that is porous to new ideas and hospitable to the extrinsic deities and rites it encounters. Prior to the Zhou Dynasty (770-476 BCE) when many of its ceremonial elements became popular, it was denigrated to folk custom and superstition ignoring the rich and elaborate ceremonies and structure. Today, Daoism is a religious tradition “of immense color and complexity, replete with a complex institutional history, ritual traditions, architectural and artistic genres, a priesthood, and a monastic tradition” (Nadeau 2012, 9).

The impetus for the proposed research rests, in part, on a few textual clues that indicate the possibility of Afro-Chinese religious syncretism. An example is Baltar Rodríguez’s analysis of orisha shrines in Havana, where he detects the possibility of religious contact between Afro-Cuban orishas and Chinese deities. The author states that some orisha worshippers also venerate the Chinese Daoist deity, Sanfancón, alongside their Afro-Cuban practices, “some practitioners set aside an area for his image within their ritual cabinet (the furniture normally used to store emblems of the orisha)”. The author continues, “however, the existence of a particular cult to San Fan Con in Santería

has not been confirmed¹²” (Baltar Rodríguez 1997, 183). Rodríguez’s tantalizing statement is a rare inference of the possibility of Afro-Chinese culture contact in existing literature and was my ethnographic starting point.

Timothy Light (2005, 332) offers a comprehensive schema of Chinese religion, delineating the major categories and charting their hierarchies and sociocultural contexts:

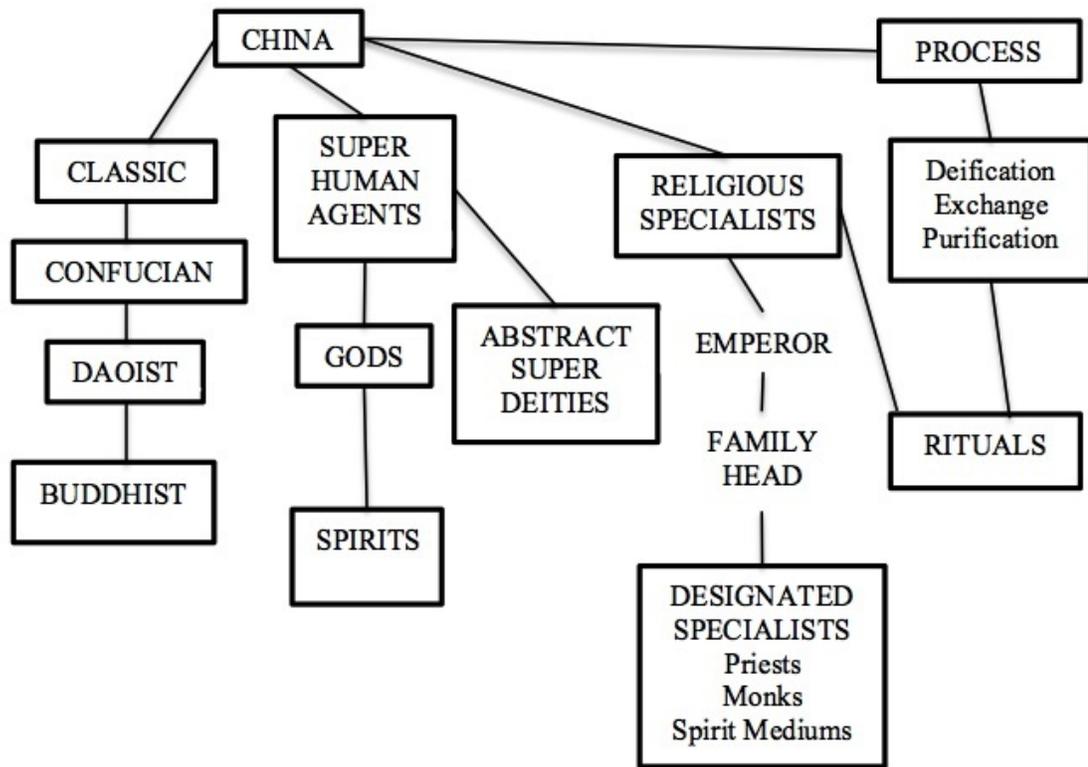


Figure 3.2 Schema of Chinese religious practices. Adapted from Light (2005, 331)

Indeed, Sanfancón, is by far the most widely known syncretized Chinese deity in Cuba and therefore it is in connection to this deity, rather than a more obscure one that any syncretistic mention in existing literature has been offered. Meulenbeld states that the most popular god for the Chinese during the Qing Dynasty was Guan Yu, a famous deity

¹² My translation of the Spanish text, “para el cual algunos practicantes reservan un espacio dentro de su mobiliario” and “sin embargo no se ha comprobado la existencia de un culto particular de a San Fan Con dentro de la Santería” (Rodríguez 1997, 183).

from the era of the “Three Kingdoms” (Meulenbeld 2012, 126) whose apotheosis is depicted in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a 14th century novel. The deity known as Guan Gong [Lord Guan], or, Guan Gong [King Guan] is the Chinese deity that became known as Sanfancón in Cuba. Existing literary and academic treatment equate this apotheosized warlord with Shangó, arguably the most popular and prominent orisha of the entire Lukumi pantheon, and hence the most widely known and easily identifiable by Cubans. I explore Sanfancón and his syncretisms in Chapter VI where ongoing contestation over which Afro-Cuban orisha he is syncretized with is a major example of interdiasporic cross-fertilization.

We can infer from Christine Ayorinde’s research in Matanzas that there is indeed space within Cuba’s religious landscape for the processes of encounter and exchange. Again, focusing on the Chinese deity, Sanfancón and his Yorùbá counterpart, Shangó, Ayorinde (2004a) theorizes that mythologies and sacred narratives called “*pataki(n)es*” [Yorùbá for “important”] are tools by which the biographies of the orishas can be renegotiated to account for diasporic change and development.

In the context of narratives, deities are constructed to link more closely to the Cuban environment and the lived experience; hence new biographies of the orisha are created alongside African-derived representations. As an example of adaptation and ongoing religious change Ogún, is not just an ironworker but also becomes a cane cutter a *majordomo*, and associated with the railway in Cuba.

Ayorinde notes that the deity Shangó, third Alafin of Òyó, has a “Chinese” *camino* [path, or avatar] called Shangó Sanfancón. A recorded myth tells how the inveterate traveller visited a land where the people were “small and yellow with slanting

eyes” and was transformed into a “*chino*” [Chinese]. When Shangó returned to his homeland, only Orunla, the deity of wisdom and divination recognized him in the guise of Sanfancón and returned him to his original avatar (Ayorinde 2004b, 212). Narratives that seek to explain Shangó’s encounters with the Chinese occur specifically in the Lukumi divination corpus and encourage reflection on the developing relationships between the orishas and locating them in a Cuban setting composed of both African and Chinese contexts.

Such narratives note that diverse traditions from different parts of the African continent are overlooked in examination of religious syncretism in the diaspora, where disparate African religious practices separated by ethnic and geographical differences become homogenized as a singular diasporic identity in the host country. By focusing on the particular experiences and histories of the Cantonese (and mainly Hakka) migration to Cuba and their impact on Lukumi religiosity (at times including other Afro-Cuban religions as necessary) I avoid the pitfalls of African homogenization and Chinese/Asian ambiguity, a marked departure from existing work in this area. Current literature awards only cursory, tantalizing remarks of these phenomena and leaves unclear and open-ended the extent to which Chinese elements and ideas have become entrained into African religious beliefs beyond the stated fieldwork example given above. In addition to these sparse academic glimpses offered by the authors noted above, references to Afro-Chinese fusion, mixed religious practices and *sino-brujos* abound in contemporary Cuban literature. Ignacio López-Calvo devotes a chapter to Chinese religious syncretism and amply demonstrates the instances of fusion and religious pluralism of the Chinese in poetry and modern Cuban fiction (2009, 93).

Transculturation and Yellow Blindness

The work of Don Fernando Ortiz Fernández legitimated the study of African presences in Cuba. Ortiz's work must be situated within the specific environment of social theory that sought to address the racism and oppression encountered in explaining the ahistorical nature of Africans brought to the "New World" via slavery. Ortiz's model was greatly influenced by Melville and Jean Herskovits's work on Cultural Relativism that paved the way for the serious study of African Americans in the midst of white racism in the United States of the 1920s.

An archaeology of Herskovits's oeuvre reveals multiple discourses on Africa at work in Latin America and the Caribbean. One such discourse, (Yelvington 2006) was to be found in the manifestations of popular consciousness, in religious idiomatics such as Brazilian Candomblé, Haitian Vodou, Cuban Santería and Obeah in Jamaica. Yelvington explains that, in Cuba, Ortiz became co-opted by *afrocubanismo*, a literary and artistic movement popular in the 1920s in which he was a central and legitimizing source for the movement because of his status as white lawyer *cum politico*. Overcoming and revising his early accounts which had racist undertones and motivations of criminalizing African practice in Cuba, Ortiz became a dominant international figure in emerging social science fields of studies that brought attention to black culture and religion in the 'New World.'

Being staunchly nationalist, Ortiz sought to emphasize culture as opposed to "race" in a Cuba that had begun to see a swelling of pride in its politically active black constitution. Ortiz promoted an ethnological theory that emphasized culture over nature. It is a treatise of hybridity and *mestizaje* that rallied against popular contemporary notions of purity and culture hierarchy. In response to the heightened, politicized atmosphere,

Ortiz imagined and discursively produced a Cuba that was *mestizo*, culturally and racially mixed and culturally homogeneous nation: a result of a process of what he termed *transculturación* (Figure 3.3). Transculturation refers to the interplay of culture that occurs between two or more groups of people. This theory was first published in 1940 in *Contrapunteo Cubano* [*Cuban Counterpoint*] and became popular at a time when biological determination of race was the prevailing paradigm between 1920 and 1940 (Scherer 2001). Previously, the dominant paradigm dictated that culture complexes fit along a temporal and evolutionary continuum according to their geographical location, causing a shift and acculturation, akin to osmosis, flowing from areas of high cultural concentration (Europe) to those areas where culture was deemed absent (Africa), to places and people that were deemed lacking and requiring it.

Occupying the apex of this imagined structure were the Northern European and American Enlightened intellectuals, and occupying lower rungs of the ladder were other cultures to a greater or lesser degree, united in that they were viewed and imagined as possessing less sophisticated cultural processes and social structures.

With the onset and exposure to superior cultures, the less developed intellectual frameworks would be examined in contrast and comparison to the ethnographer's own intellectual developments and notions of culture, a process by which all other cultures were deemed inferior and porous to the superior knowledge and capabilities of the more hegemonic, Western influences.

Ortiz argued passionately and convincingly against these acculturating conceptualizations. He iterated the depth and breadth of cultural diversity of the Spanish but most importantly the contributions and legacies of the Africans that came to Cuba,

and proposed a model that described Cuban culture and identity in terms of an “*ajiaco*”, the cultural equivalent of the national dish comprised of European, indigenous Caribbean and African ingredients. It was years later that Ortiz (1947) expounded on his initial transculturative model by including an Asian component thus utilizing four essential elements: European, African, Indigenous Caribbean and Asian influences. These, in turn fashion a hybrid “Cubanized” identity, where identity is built from a celebrated selection of these individual components in a seemingly endless number of configurations, all of which reinforce collectively what it means to be Cuban.

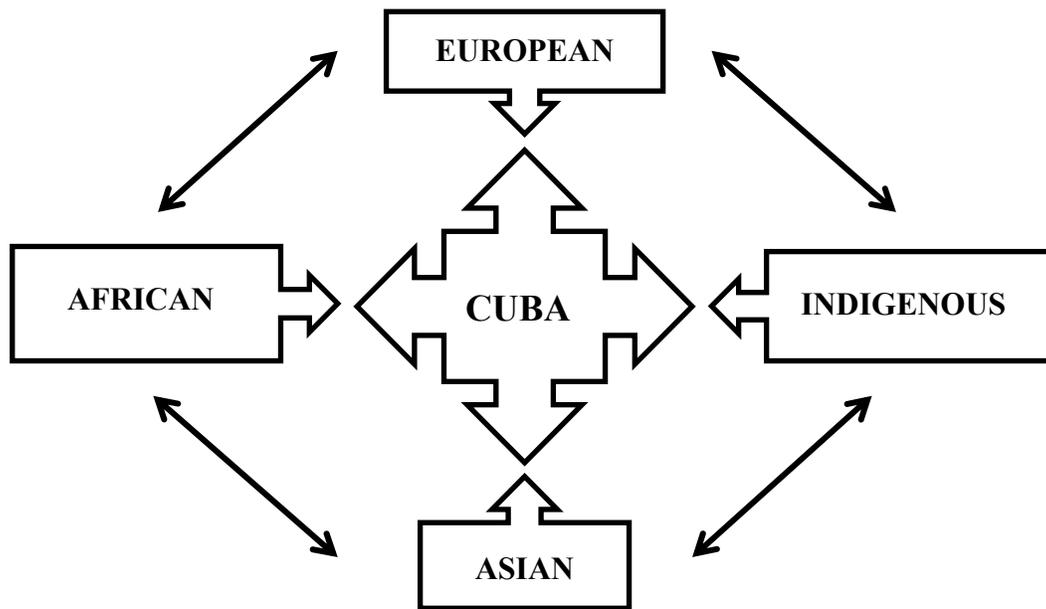


Figure 3.3 Fernando Ortiz's conceptualization of transculturation

Social scientists, through highly detailed ethnographic lenses produced descriptions that are “*models of*” sociocultural phenomena, a term loaned from the natural sciences that delineates value and subjectification-free premises of empirical objects which are often mobilized within the sociocultural field as blueprints or causal “*models*”

for” action (Stewart 2011, 49). Fernando Ortiz’s transculturative *ajiaco* is a case in point where an explanatory “model of” is quickly adopted and assimilated as the implementable “model for” underlying national impulses of identity and rationale. Ortiz did officially recognize that people from Asia contributed to the transculturating processes in Cuba as the foundation for a distinct nationalist homogeneity. However, his analysis was heavily weighted towards and favored European and black instances, influences, and examples in the Cubanizing processes of identification, and whose model firmly asserts the importance of these latter influences over Asian and native Caribbean participation in the racial mixture.

Frank Scherer has analyzed Fernando Ortiz’s entire oeuvre in depth, and has discovered that very little was written by the author on the role of the Chinese or their inclusion in the transculturation processes that made Fernando Ortiz. Ortiz renders just 10 lines to the “Chinese influence” on the island, and the influence of the Chinese on the development of Cubanity. He posits in his cursory reflection that the Chinese influence was first diluted, then marginalized and finally erased in the cohesive culture of Cuba (Scherer 2001,6):

The Asiatics, entering by the thousands since the past century, penetrated less in[to] Cubanity; but, although recent, their imprint is not of no account. The passion of gambling is attributed to them, but that was a mark of Cubanity before the Chinese would enter [the country]. Perhaps, they propagated some exotic custom, but scarcely. More than once has been noted as extraordinary, in these past decades, a certain tendency towards trifle and fineness of detail and the coldness of execution in several exalted politicians, professionals of knowledge and laureate poets, characterized, moreover, by some yellow ascendancy. In any case, the Asiatic influence is not noticeable outside of the individual case (Ortiz 1911, 19).

Ortiz posits that the Chinese contribution amounts to being “slight, peculiar and unoriginal”, aspects that have little significance or bearing to an over-arching Cuban identity formation processes. Ortiz began his professional career furthering legal detection and prosecution of black *brujería* [wizardry], following his Lombrosian training in criminology and anthropology (Bronfman 2004). His early career saw to the vilification of black religious practice, later turning this fully on its head in lauding non-western tenets of Cuban culture, specifically championing Afro-Cuban culture and becoming perhaps its most influential and vociferous ambassador. Ortiz’s early work was steeped in scientific racism, labeling the Chinese “yellow Mongoloids” (Ortiz 1947).

These early descriptions are commonplace, in line with racist, anti-black overtones and with scant appearance or reference to Chinese. Such Cuban discourse is rooted in terminology dominated and entranced by Iberian and Eurocentric essentialist interpretations of culture and with little space for the positive conception of religious practices outside of Christianity. The lack of recorded Chinese presence in Cuban literature is wholly at odds with informal quotidian observations of Cuba’s population: “anybody on the island would assure the visitor new to this part of the world that the Cuban people, and by implication their Cubanity, are made of three components, that is, Spanish, African and Chinese” (Scherer 2001, 4). The absence of an Asian influence in Ortiz’s *Counterpoint* is disconcerting when viewed in terms of other cultural and social accounts of Cuba of this time. The tripartite racial *mestizaje* is reflected in Cuban music and popular culture and the lack of Asian influence in the theorizing of nationalist identity in Cuba is compelling. The Chinese absence can be understood in terms of wider anti-Chinese sentiment and politics operating at this time. The Chinese were subject of

the United States exclusion act and remain the sole ethnicity to be the subject of anti-immigration laws. Official Chinese exclusion by the US (1882-1943) sought to curb the circuitous routes and hemispheric courses of labor migration the Chinese made. The state response to “Yellow Peril” (López 2013) was premised on conceived threats of racial mixing and invasion by Chinese who were deemed unsuitable for integration into mainstream society.

The muted or buried presence of the Chinese in Cuba was not restricted to Ortiz’s work alone. José Antonio Saco, notable nineteenth century Cuban figure and political leader, champion for the abolition of slavery, wrote that the Chinese would fail to fully integrate into Cuban society as a result of insurmountable cultural differences (Saco 1881). In the minds and writings of many prominent scholars of this period, the Chinese were described as poor candidates for naturalization, wholly unable to assimilate into a perceived Cuban way of life. They were thus treated as temporary and marginal, therefore within a different discursive category to other forced or free ethnic additions to Cuba’s population, or ignored altogether.

Scherer writes that there is no mention of Chinese presence in Cuba within the “complete” works of José Martí (1853-1895), one of Cuba’s most treasured and talented intellectuals. It is difficult to fathom how such a prolific writer, an author of twenty-four thick volumes relating to Cuba, never mentions once the Chinese presence on the island. Such erasure of Cuba’s Chinese population in the imagination of Cuba may indicate repression of the Chinese “other” as a different racial or ethnic identity and diaspora outside of European and African demographics and culture making enterprises. The *othering* and the wholesale omission of the Chinese from being written as citizens and

participants in Cuba's nation-building rhetoric and discussion I have termed "yellow blindness". Their absence in the writings of the potentates that are envisaged as documenters and commentators of the social and cultural history of Cuba are factors that helped reinforce the idea of the Chinese as located outside the realm of the island's imagined nationhood. Grounded on racist premises, the absence of the Chinese can be thought of as a symbiosis between an intellectual pogrom of *ethnopolitics* that elides actions of the state with racial schemas that do not equalize or lateralize them, as promised, but rather surreptitiously reorganizes them in a different hierarchical and top-heavy formation.

Ortiz's lauded formulation of *mestizaje* unites all Cubans in a production that removes both class and race from state ideations of its citizens and its socio-cultural complexes. Through his exploration of *Cubanidad* through an *ajiaco* almost exclusively dominated by European intellectualism and African derived religiosity and folklore, the *mestizaje* that was favored and foregrounded was that of the *Afro-Cuban*. The hybrid term quickly took root in its cultural setting, a hothouse for the Mendeleev-like construction of a suitable paradigm for the acceptable hybrid face of Cuba's non-white citizens. Afro-Cuba became the nonpareil synonym for the culmination of the transculturation process and the production of a uniquely Cuban that was exalted to a position not parallel, but at least complimentary and comparable to white Cuba. "Cuba" could not be parted from its "Afro", and clearly, there is no Cuba without Afro. The implication of separation and distinction inherent in the use of "Afro-Cuban" has formed the basis of harsh criticism that situates such dialogue well within the ideological and propagandist configurations imposed by the state, and within the confines of political that

does not adequately express the dynamics, agency, factions and discord that occurs in Cuba as in every other country.

The work of these early researchers collectively termed an “intellectual social formation” by Kevin Yelvington (2006, 67), have since been thoroughly interrogated and critiqued in terms of what such texts convey as well as the important cultural and racial factors that they omit, and thus, many lacunae in their collective findings have been exposed. They have, in part, been marred by their imprecision and failure to show substantively how cultural traits on both sides of the Atlantic changed and became increasingly complex over time (Falola and Childs 2004, 2). Ira Lowenthal was among the first to challenge the essentialist conceptions of human culture and agency in African-diasporic religions. The author critiques earlier presumptions made by Herskovits *et al.*, that the diasporic culture is a “collection of traits, each of which ‘looks’ either more or less African or European” in its composure (Lowenthal 1978, 397). Following Ortiz, the nationalizing discourse that makes use of transculturation for the formation of *Cubanidad* is a theme into the window of Cuban local racial politics and identity, and the rise and consequent dilemma of Afro-Chinese identities. Within the figurations of *Cubanidad* there is little space for the discussion of Chinese-Cuban identity in its own right, as well as the identity of mixed Chinese and Afro-Cuban descendants and even less so for Afro-Chinese religiosity.

Conceptualizing the Cuban Religious Diaspora

Critical inquiry on the part of modern anthropology seeks to recognize and give direct attention to the effects of colonialism on diasporic formation and experience.

Rather than being relegated to an innocuous frame as mentioned above, in which diaspora and religion meet, the colonial subject is being recast as having a crucial and direct hand in fashioning the dynamic societies that form the basis of diasporic paradigms. Engaging the notion of diaspora and its definition is an exciting ongoing intellectual process. The work of Percy C. Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier (2010ix) are prime examples of the strides being made towards an understanding of diaspora as prime metaphor in discussions of social realities, a way of seeing and structuring the social world people experience. Writing with reference to “blackness”, the authors note that the trope of diaspora opens a platform for self-recognition, examination and analysis. Using such concepts as *revelation* in relation to black consciousness, a nuanced understanding of diaspora “renders visible the ‘space’ of collective self-recognition and self-consciousness that may exist at subliminal levels of black consciousness and may have rendered invisible, by distortion, misrecognition and miscognition” (Hintzen and Rahier 2010, xi). Such employment of tropes within the meaning of diaspora is one step forward in providing analytical power to a rather unyielding and ideologically laden term.

Taking a broader Afro-diasporic perspective – to include the religions of Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and elsewhere – there has been a seismic shift in theoretical orientation over the decades, paving the way for a new “ontology” of the diaspora (Clarke 2010). No longer are these religious traditions, systems and life ways considered “primitive” or “folk customs,” nor are they treated as having their foundations enshrined within a pristine and static past. Within the last two decades these discussions of diasporic Afro-Atlantic religions have increasingly become situated within the context of complex and dynamic politics, scales of economies, and international networks of communication and

movement, which serve to disrupt nation-state boundaries and the assumed lived realities of immobile, religious complexes. The forces of global trade and information exchange have caused a de-emphasis of regarding the African diaspora as being comprised of neat, geographically bounded units of culture to be studied in isolation, but rather, centers its discussion on individuals actively engaging in modes of *translocalism* (Yelvington 2006, 67).

An apt example of this novel approach is the method of illustration utilized by J. Lorand Matory in his research on transnational dialogues that have informed the meanings and motives of adherents to Candomblé in Brazil. These dialogues involve and link European and American slave traders, European imperialists, post-colonial Latin American and African nationalists alongside West African, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban priests in the making of the Candomblé religious diaspora. Matory calls these “transatlantic nations” where today’s transnationalism is the modern equivalent of Christian, Islamic and other religious movement globally by “individual pathways of priests and supplicants, all of which simultaneously channeled the flow of commerce, texts, and technology” (Matory 2009, 233). By taking a comparative, trans-Atlantic theoretical position, Matory and others, consider the perspectives of contemporary Africans and their indigenous philosophies as necessary participants to the dialogic, countering the colonial project of erasing African history and presence. Furthermore, Matory argues that trans-Atlantic dialogues apparent in Afro-diasporic religions such as Lukumi are not a new phenomenon; they have been ongoing for centuries with global and transnational participants in communities of African descent.

These dialogues have been recorded in the Yorùbá-Atlantic world that encompasses the Republic of Benin, Nigeria and their counterparts in Brazil and Cuba (Matory 2005). While not all religious communities may have formed such in-depth and complex networks, or that such networks are not known, however there is still a propensity to move towards comparison and connection. Ivor Miller (2009) states that historically, the Cross-River diaspora of the Ékpè of the Calabar and its Afro-Cuban counterpart the Abakuá, have existed with little to no Trans-Atlantic contact maintained after their initial separation through slavery at the turn of the twentieth century. Miller writes that the present moment of history is witnessing the reconnection of these two ends of a vast “diasporal arc” (Miller 2009, 33). Concentrating on the connections of contemporary diaspora to historical homeland, in turn, serves to confirm Cuba’s West African origins as legitimized in terms of inherited and verified customs, legacies and cultural artifacts coupled with detailed observation of the impact of such encounters on the local communities of participants of the newly reunited Ékpè-Abakuá network.

Historicity is thus invoked for its concepts of faithfulness and legitimacy according to its past or pre-diasporic phase. Stefania Capone, writing on the ideas of power and tradition in Afro-Brazilian religions states that the tireless search for Africanisms in Candomblé is a means to different ends. For Nina Rodríguez, surviving African elements confirmed the primitive and inferior character of Brazilian blacks, despite an internal distinction between more, or less inferior blacks. Roger Bastide provides a contrasting example, whereby the ability to remain true to an African past and to cultivate those Africanisms in the diaspora became a positive sign of social and cultural cohesion (Capone 2010, 13). “Black memory” becomes a sign of faithfulness to

one's origins and ritual purity, while moving away from these origins is a sign of betrayal, caused by a loss of collective memory (Capone 2010, 13). Thus the idea and invocation of tradition becomes an interesting epistemological problem, one that requires further consideration. *Tradition*, which involves history, its production, reproduction and the assertion of origins, is part of a complex tautology of understanding and cultural practice. Tradition acts as a model for social interaction, and to classify systems of ideas, concepts and models of social interaction. Much of the work dealing with tradition by researchers of diaspora utilize the concept of collective memory, which Maurice Halbwachs (1925) associates specifically with the construction of a symbolic space that is situated within a material space. As discussed later, the way collective memory relates to diasporic religious formation remains to be observed.

The early propensity to study something such as an expression of diasporic religion in isolation severs the contacts between both the diaspora and the 'homeland' but also across cognate diasporas. For Capone, while writing on Afro-Brazilian diasporic religiosity, one can observe circuits between the different African-American religions through the lens of the individual, through the practitioners' circulation from one cult to another (from Umbanda, to Omolocô and Candomblé in Brazil; from Spiritism to Santería and Orisha-Voodoo in the United States). Such routes demonstrate how these cults are really rather unbounded realities and viewed as elements of a religious continuum. Each cult is connected to other practices, considered more or less traditional or orthodox, according to the religious actors' political agenda (Capone 2010, 259). The author notes that such an idea of a continuum has not gained much theoretical ground given the difficulty in considering and theorizing "mixed cults", however religions do

and continue to encounter each other and such metaphorical waters should be charted with care, starting with an agentive, ethnographic framework.

Defining Mixture

Broadly, the title of the present section relates to the various synonyms for cultural and religious synthesis that include creolization, hybridity, and syncretism itself. Some are more powerful and fashionable than others in modern or postmodern anthropology and they arise out of particular and actual moments of social usage. Current academic adoption of these terms is now divested of their early nineteenth century pejorative implications. Syncretism, especially, has been mindfully reclaimed from its previous innocuous and negative connotations to its current favored or tolerated state in anthropological usage (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 2).

Nevertheless, syncretism and similar terms still retain elements of controversy in their deployment, partly arising from the problematic of cross discipline studies, and muddled ontology, coupled with their widespread, facile usage and difficulty in semantically defining their boundaries. The use of these terms has straddled the traditional discursive divides of emic and etic, leading to an even greater exhaustion of its theoretical integrity.

These myriad terms employed for mixing and unification of two disparate religious, cultural or diasporic entities that may create as much confusion as they offer theoretical insight. I offer a concise and precise examination of these terms and their pertinence here, unpacking them to indicate their substance, as well as reveal their chimeric and blurred boundaries. I wish to show how their use has informed dialogues on

religion and culture that have privileged certain elements over others. One of the biggest criticisms of syncretism, which has been a dominant term in Afro-Cuban religiosity in particular, is the absence of any sign of interaction or contact with other diasporic groups and elements, favoring instead an observation and historicization of Christian and Eurocentric elements versus subaltern and marginalized survivals. Conjurations of diaspora more often than not rely on and invoke an isomorphic notion of one specific and delineated community as situated in a “host country”. Conceptualizations of a given diasporic community are premised on them being fairly stable, fixed and homogeneous in character. My work, here, moves away from this static positioning, focusing on two interacting diasporas that are in dynamic cultural contact, resulting in a diasporic experience and cultural and religious production that is quite unique and outside of previous, all-consuming, Euro-Christian discussions of hegemony.

Table 3 Different concepts of mixing employed in the social sciences

<i>Mixture</i>	A neutral and generic description of the combining of two or more elements in any capacity.
<i>Hybridity</i>	Rooted in theories of race, identity, identifications, and familiar to scientific/genetic approaches. Its meaning has developed beyond the empirical to the metaphorical. Hybridity has become synonymous with mixture.
<i>Syncretism</i>	Originally applied to religious systems and cultural contact, indicating not one but a plethora of activity and concepts. Syncretism is also a trop for the fusion and production of new relations between sign and symbol in the realms of philosophy, ideology, ritual practices, and science.
<i>Creolization</i>	The process by which “Creoles” are produced. Creoles indicated a fixed and pre-determined origins of a person, flora or faunae. Indicating a transformative process and new articulations of identification. It can refer to indigenization. Linguistically, creole refers to vernacular idioms and pidgin language learned as a mother tongue in first and successive generations.

(Adapted from Stewart 2011, 51)

Charles Stewart (2011) warns us that we are dealing with tangled vocabularies that cause confusion for even the most seasoned anthropologist. He thoughtfully asks what does ‘hybridity’ mean that ‘syncretism’ does not? (Stewart 2011, 48). Academics have used these words interchangeably and for different purposes in diverse schools of thought. It is folly to expect to fix these terms indefinitely when their significations are constantly changing. Borrowing from Stewart, we can ascribe and differentiate these terms in the following ways:

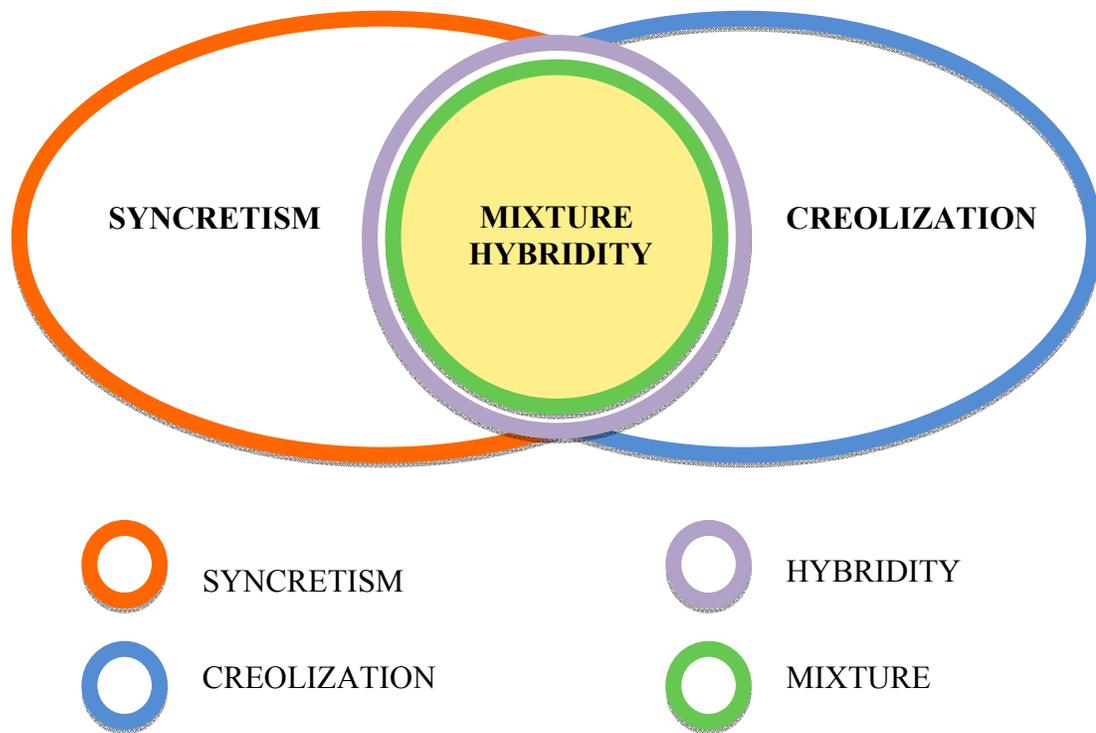


Figure 3.4 How different forms of religious mixings relate to each other (Adapted from Stewart nd, 3)

Clearly defining syncretism and other terms helps in unpacking the nuances inherent in each word, however, it is impossible to control or fix these terms in their

employment across the disciplines¹³. The domains of creolization and syncretism are far from mutually exclusive and share ideas of both hybridity and mixture in their applied senses.

The traditional products of syncretism, for example: the mixing of Catholic saints and West African deities, is related as a fact, a fixed, historically situated element, and offers little in the way of relevancy to contemporary religious practices and beliefs. Syncretism in terms of Catholic and West African religious admixture acts as certification of cultural or religious contact without discursive commentary on how these mixtures are continuing to be experienced, and is not adequately explained by ascribing provenance or parenthood to these phenomena (Rey and Richman 2010, 378).

The above tabled terms are together categorized and treated analytically differently from *bricolage*, which does not have a prior history of being used both emically and etically as the others. Bricolage refers to the process of building new forms, be they cultural or religious from the materials at hand, the debris of old cultural formations (Werbner 1994, 215).

Syncretism, hybridity and creolization in diaspora originally depicted unbalanced, subjective and negative connotations according to their prior embeddedness in discourses of racial and religious purity and power structures. To be syncretic was to be at a disadvantage: a diasporic community in the host country was envisioned as being isolated from its 'old world' not just spatially, but also culturally and ideologically, having to

¹³ Often these terms are used interchangeably and with different assigned meanings. In addition to those stated above, we can encounter an unending supply of homonyms in literature on syncretism: amalgam consolidation, merging, mosaic, mingling, and interchange to name but a few (Baron 1994 volume 2, 424) and Bastide (1978, 19).

undergo the rigors of culture and identity preservation whilst simultaneously being required to restructure, morph and acclimatize to their new locale. A religion that appropriated, incorporated or mixed objects ideas and symbols from another (usually more dominant) theology was regarded as sacrilegious (according to the dominant ideology) and moving away from religion, barbaric, non modern and folksy. These syntheses were thus conceived as weaker, less 'pure', and thus illegitimate; it was not a good thing to be called a creole or a hybrid (Stewart 2011, 51). Dominant religious discourses, such as Christianity, sought to transmit religious tenets free from local interpretation and integration of foreign host elements. However, such a state of purity was incredibly hard to achieve and eventually spawned distinct regional and cultural variations of religiosity that were embraced and eventually used to claim independence from European centers of power, such as Spanish colonial rule. Homi Bhabha notes that hybridity and areas of syncretism, especially in postcolonial encounters, offer a third space, wherein hybrid and syncretism laden culture and religion gain autonomy and independence outside of the normalizing strictures and homogenizing projections from both or either parental power (Bhabha 1990, 208).

Apropos of the idea of syncretism, there is the notion of friction. Anna Tsing (2005) adroitly gives credence to the notion that in the global arena that produces movement and change, action and effect, there is often the presence and reality of challenges and conflicts when two cultures, entities or concepts meet. These forces of syncretism, agency and friction shape the resulting symbolic and social landscape. A particular strong point of Tsing's work is not only the theoretical orientation but also the portfolio of methods she enlists in her own ethnographic work to understand how these

creative cultural differences contend with the encountered social interactions on the global and local scales.

Stephan Palmié, puts forth powerful arguments against syncretism, arguing that its very notion thrives on epistemological ethnocentrism and points to the dangerous suppositions that religions, as discrete forms of cultural materials can ever be taxonomized (Palmié 2013, 268). Palmié engages Afro-Cuban discourse with a sophisticated analysis of the ability of religious groups to perceive syncretism as a viable means of converting objectifications of African cultural forms into cultural capital (Palmié 1995, 93).

I do not share the author's aversion of using syncretism as an analytical instrument. I present here a different use and understanding of the term in relation to unbounded maneuverings of diasporic groups that produce a field of being and becoming that allows for the full exploration of the discursive abilities and its limits that require a new understanding of prevailing epistemologies of Afro-Cuban religion making in this instance. However, Palmié's work forms a perfect critical checkpoint by which current anthropological development of Afro-Cuban religion is being defined. Furthermore, his understanding of syncretism as dynamic and requiring us to think through the term as intellectual currency is important to this study, especially in discerning the ways religious practices fit within the wider framework in which they operate in Cuba.

I argue through my work that syncretism retains a descriptive and ethnographic power that allows for the conceptualization of the history of religious and cross-diasporic synthesis in a meaningful and insightful way, beyond its pejorative semantic load. I am

particularly interested in exploring new dimensions of syncretism that speak of the cross-diasporic contact outlaid here.

CHAPTER IV AFRO-SINO MATERIAL AND ORAL CULTURE

When [the Chinese man] first arrived in Cuba, a miserable stranger in an inhospitable land, bound besides to a term of slavery, his pigtail was cut off, and he was called by a new name, after some one of the saints, as José, or Crispin, or Diego. After some manner he was made to renounce his paganism [...] Yet, if you enter the back room of his store, you will find there enthroned in a red shrine the deity he still believes in, with every appurtenance of his peculiar worship. It is all wrong, and the height of unconverted and unregenerate paganism in a country devoted to the true church. Yet where, either in our land or Cuba, can you find another man who keeps his God so near his business, and is religious enough to make his shop a temple?

Cuban Sketches, James William Steele (1881, 97)

Altaring Chinese-Cuban Material Culture

In Chapter IV, I explore the meaningful ways by which practitioners of Lukumi religion construct their altars that reflect Afro-Chinese cross-fertilization. These syncretisms and configurations show that Cubans draw upon Chinese, African and some European religious traditions, a substantive change from the belief that religions maintain strict confines, are mutually exclusive, and separate. The material presented here highlights the significant ways that the four main areas of Chinese as racialized subjects, Chinese religions, practices originating with Chinese migration, and Chinese objects have impacted diasporic religious practice in such core ways that to describe these Afro-Cuban religions as premised solely upon African and European derived practices is wholly erroneous. The data show, too, that Afro-Chinese material culture, their circulations and conspicuous import in recent years, can be deemed a challenge to the socialist project which seeks to tightly account, regulate, and control the ways in which its subjects accumulate goods and wealth. The prominence and privilege of Afro-Sino materials now

deployed in Lukumi worship speak of the Afro-Sino solidarities that may have resulted from their shared past and rooted in their proximity within the Cuban social-racial hierarchy.

My initial forays into Afro-Cuban religion which consisted of attending private celebrations of *cumpleaños de santo*, and visiting *ilé orisha* and even botánicas— left me completely puzzled by the prominence given over to Chinese images of various deities, I observed an impressive porcelain army of *chinoiserie* of wizened and bearded water carriers and fishermen in numerous Afro-Cuban shrines. The worship of orisha seemed to revolve, figuratively and physically around sizeable and impressive collections of all things Chinese. Aside from the presence of godly statues, ceremonies and altars are decked out with Chinese porcelain, textiles, fans, brushes, incense, food and even chopsticks. When I made discreet, initial enquiries as to why Chinese and not African or even European-inspired items took pride of place, lengthy stories were offered that interwove aspects of lived experience, oral narratives and the invocation of memories and ancestors that gave rise to the implementation of these material treasures and their incorporation into Afro-Cuban religious assemblages. Adherents of Lukumi religion seem to be in rapture of Chinese images and aesthetics and here I document some of the material culture that circulates in the Afro-Chinese world and some of the reasons for it.

Rather than being born out of mere whim, these Chinese and hybrid Sino-African objects are desirous for their interesting histories and explanations as to their inclusion and dissemination in the Lukumi religious setting. Each “Chinese” object that were included in orisha altars were purposefully chosen, and their explanations for their selection was explained in terms of the importance of the Chinese and their mixed race

descendants within the religion. The relevance of Chinese objects was described as being related to the generations of Afro-Chinese priests and practitioners that were responsible for architecting Lukumi religious practice. As discussed below, objects such as statues and other figures are both aesthetically pleasing but also contain hidden and coded meanings according to divination practices. The panoply of materials documented in the shrines of the orisha, paradoxically explained to me as being resolutely African, privileges and celebrates the Chinese presence. The culture contact and syncretism theory that were discussed in the previous two chapters surface here in tangible and processual forms, celebrating the union of two otherwise disparate diasporas. An anthropological investigation and analysis must therefore contain methodologies that allow space for the discussion of culture materials, associated narratives and associated religious culture making experiences.

Afro-Cuban Lukumi religion has many faces: one can be deemed public, and offered as folklore, especially when interfacing or being co-opted by the state for ultimately non-religious purposes: the three drum *batá* ensemble that announces and accompanies intricate songs and dancers in dazzling vestments that portray the different aspects of the orishas, are often attendant in such guises. You can go to *Sabádo de Rumba* and marvel at a sextet of Shangó dancers in their fiery red and white costumes, wielding axes and performing choreographed dance routines that incorporate the more flamboyant and acrobatic gestures that the thunder god makes at the onset of possession, described in the metaphoric terms of mounting and riding his ‘horse’. These kings are usually followed by a quintet of gorgeous *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba* trained artistes that sensually and rhythmically undulate, preen and float in dresses of yellow, gold and

orange in celebration of Oshun, the youngest and arguably the most profound and dangerous of the orisha pantheon. Within the subtext of her coquettish moves, lie barbs and hard lessons learned, for in sweetness there is a tinge of bitterness and Oshun's honeyed movements refer to both joy and suffering. Her dance is a visual and mimetic feast for the many Cubans that petition her and the other orishas in private and silent daily prayers petitioning for blessings and to ameliorate their own lots in life.

Another face of the religion is evidenced in the private shrines in people's homes (Figure 4.1) and rarer still, those maintained in mutual associations. The Lukumi religion is known for its sumptuousness, the richness and complexity of its materiality and the physical and tangible nature by which the orisha are consecrated, venerated and made visible. These feats are achieved in a country where economic hardship and privation of free commerce has severely limited the quality and quality of goods available for purchase – even for those with access to foreign currency.



Figure 4.1 Shrine for Obatalá (in white porcelain tureen) with ivory chopsticks

Shrines, altars and assemblages of the orisha are figuratively called “*oju orisha*,” faces of the gods (Thompson 1993) indicating an interface of two-way communication: the adherent looking and speaking and divining with the deity/ies present, the deity, in turn, gazing at the propitiator, and communicating through the means of various tools of divination.

At the heart of these altars are covered vessels that house the consecrated emblems of the orisha, anthropomorphized as a living embodiment, the *aché*, or vital force of the orishas reside in smooth stones consecrated and animated through a lengthy process of ritual chanting, washing with herbal-charged waters, and “fed” with the blood of animal sacrifices. These intimate, sacred elements, like a beating heart, are protected and covered, firstly by the receptacle they reside in, and then flattered and adorned with riches, in keeping with the trope of orisha as royalty. The vessels are given highly decorated cloth canopies; large ropes of intricate beads as well as crowns and metal and wooden implements or tools “*herramientas*” that relate to the function and ritual jurisdiction of each deity are “worked” to better the lives of their adherents¹⁴. A priest may have an accumulation of these materials made for their deity, constituting a wardrobe that can be accessed for special occasions and celebrations. Each item incorporates materials that are deeply symbolic to each orisha: copper for Oyé, brass for Oshun, silver for Obatalá, and so on, their choice purposefully reflecting narratives and divination verses of the lives and experiences of the orisha. These assemblages are called “thrones” which are coded using particular, favored color and number combinations

¹⁴ See Guanche (2000) for a technical and aesthetic analysis of these implements used in Lukumi worship.

established through divination correspondences and each orisha is equipped and decorated with a plethora of symbolic “tools” that convey work and action on behalf of the initiate.

A Plethora of Sacred Material Culture

In Chapter IV, I discuss the many tangible ways in which Chinese culture through the contact made by Chinese male and African female unions have been imported and incorporated into Afro-Cuban religious practice. I explore the very material culture, especially the Chinese objects, that form the basis of this work to orient the proceeding discussion. Much of my time in fieldwork entailed visiting the shrines of priests, attending celebrations such as the middle day of new olorisha [priests of orisha] wherein the wider community comes to witness the making of a new priest in a semi-public ceremonial presentation. Both religious and secular friends and family gather at the *ilé* to pay their respects to the newly ordained priest. The “public” presentation day falls immediately after the complex and rigorous consecration ceremonies and preceding the day of divination when the *dilogún*, cowrie shells consecrated for each orisha, are manipulated to give *itá*, the in-depth oracular reading that will form the blueprint for the new priest’s conduct.

I “made” *osha* (initiated as a priest) in 2001, following five years of affiliation and learning with a Cuban *ilé orisha* primarily located in Miami. My status as priest allowed me to enter into ritual spaces otherwise inaccessible to the uninitiated. I was able to witness more ethnographic details from a privileged role that straddles the emic/etic binary. There was no end to the number of celebrations, rituals and anniversaries both for

new and established priests and adherents that I could have attended while in Cuba. Held in people's homes or held in relatives or godparents *ilés*, orishas, and their implements were taken from their usual domiciles, such as purpose built shelves or lockable cabinets, and enthroned in a corner shrouded in cloth. The celebrations ranged from the ultra glamorous, incorporating spot lighting, water features, mounds of cooked food, fruit, statuary, and fine cloth, to the more austere, of a white sheet and offerings of rounds of Cuban bread.

These ritual celebrations were an excellent means of documenting the material culture that made it into the throne. I would often arrive early on the day of an event, offering to help with the construction of the throne, which was often welcomed because of the Lukumi tradition of requiring the throne to be made by a different person than those who would dismantle it a week or however many days later. In both instances, it was preferable that someone other than for whom the shrine is being installed, as it was deemed inauspicious for the shrine owner to perform these actions, carries out the assembling and disassembling tasks. These moments of movement were rare instances of being able to examine and hold objects first hand. Lukumi ritual etiquette entails that shrines are appeased, prayed at and given offerings as and when directed by divination, however their ritual constellations are not moved or handled unless expressly required, such as during consecrations and celebrations. In addition to accessing the main shrines of priests in this way, I was also privy to seeing what was kept inside the shrines, normally hidden from view and have a chance to discuss these objects with the owner.

The contents of the orisha receptacles, are more than iconic of the orishas, they are considered the physical embodiment of the deities that are not to be seen in a state of

“undress” by non-initiates. They are literally and figuratively *los secretos*, the secrets of the religion, information that is hidden from others. Through my analysis of Chinese-Cubans and my understanding of Afro-Cuban religiosity, I uncover layers of meaning and symbolism, from the outer, public face that can be viewed and approached by both initiates and non-initiates, to the inner, hidden, or private materials that also comprised these shrines, and are known to only the few that have undergone initiation. I present here, with the permission of the shrine owners, material from both layers. In so doing, I also contextualize the materials documented, their historicity and meanings to their owners. Afro-Cuban altars are cumulative, growing, changing and being revised, added to or edited according to the priest and to the orisha through ongoing divination. The recursive response to altar and shrine making is a visual form of communication, each piece coming with its own set of tropes, mimeses and legacy. The relationship is a reciprocal one, in which the practitioner gives to the orishas in a variety of forms that are hoped to activate *aché* in the person’s life, allowing for the orisha to bestow prosperity, health and protection to their devotees.

I observed Afro-Chinese synthesis in religious material culture different settings: Within home shrines, in *cabildos de nación* and other societies and places of worship. Further, there were instances of this Chinese material culture in both orisha and Ifá religious practices. I access and incorporate material culture analysis in fieldwork by engaging the work of Vinck who adopts an open methodology, “a methodology that allows for various interpretations in order to support inductive conceptualization” (Vinck 2012, 90).

The ways in which African and Chinese elements interact to form cross diasporic syncretism is depicted in Figure 4.2, showing an overlap or mutual meeting space of the two diasporas. From the documented cases of syncretism in material culture, I also recorded interesting ways in which European and Catholic/Christian imagery and iconography are used in the Afro-Sino religious context. Rather than being a simplistic triad of “Euro-Chinese-Afro” syncretisms, the Euro-Christian elements, were used and adopted more so in the capacity of Chinese-Christian syncretisms. While these instances were far fewer in occurrence than Chinese-African synthesis, they are an important distinction within the nexus of what can be called syncretism processes. As a result, I have included Euro and Christian/Catholic influence in the diagram as well. An example is also given in this chapter to illustrate its context, however, the majority of work concentrates on Afro-Chinese examples. I present here examples to indicate the variety and plurality of instances of symbolic material culture, correspondences and narratives, in the personal and home settings, that are the building blocks for the case for Afro-Chinese religiosity.

A Lukumi priest’s home, by virtue of the presence of their orishas that also occupy the space, becomes a shrine, and both the physical structure and the kinship of religious family is referred to as a house of orisha, or “*ilé orisha*”. Every worshipper belongs to or aligns with an *ilé orisha*, a house or *casa* with whom he or she performs divination with, receives guidance, and undergoes initiation and other rites. These observations of material culture occur in the home, the same non-public environment where Lukumi and Ifá is practiced. The normal home space is temporarily given over and cleared/reassembled when practitioners come together to perform initiations,

reconfiguring the space for the purpose of ritual. If a godparent's house is unavailable or not suited to function in such a capacity, then a house may be rented that is equipped and used by members of the community for the days needed to finish the ceremony.

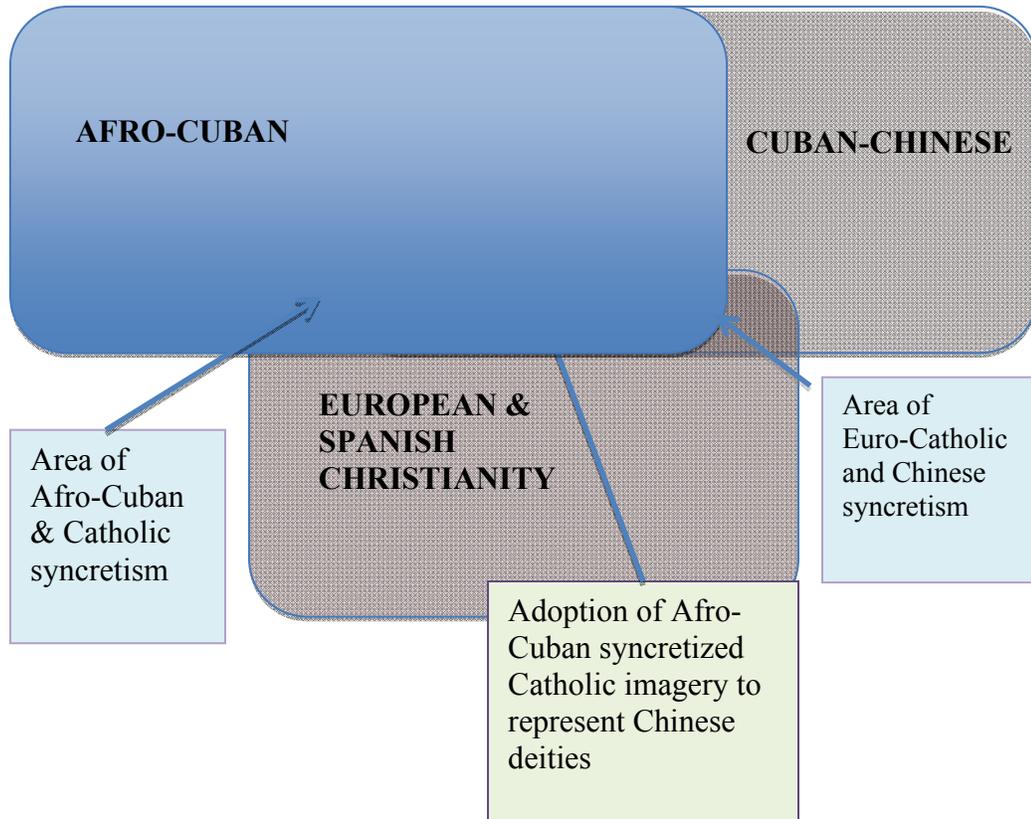


Figure 4.2 Interdiasporic religious syncretisms in Cuba

Each *casa/ilé* is autonomous, presided over by a godparent, sometimes in conjunction with the godparent's partner. Each *ilé* in turn, works with others, calling in other community members for help with complex ceremonies, to serve as ritual specialists and to witness that the rite has actually taken place. The requirement of Lukumi witnesses is a safeguard to maintaining legitimacy in ritual practice, as the religion is practiced in the home, behind white sheets, where the larger public cannot

guarantee that events have actually taken place, selected third party members of the community, by their presence and participation act as guarantors.

Cross-Fertilization: Afro-Chinese Deification

Within my surveys, I encountered approximately 60 home shrines, and discussing their ritual beliefs and practices, the following correspondences were found between the orisha and Chinese deities:

Table 4 Lukumi orisha and Chinese deity correspondences in Cuba

Lukumi Orisha	Chinese Deity
Yemayá	Tin Hau 天后 / Tian Fei 天妃 / Mazu 媽祖
Oshun	Guanyin 观音菩萨
Babalu Aye	Li Xuan 李玄
Shangó	Sanfancón / Guan Gong / Guan Di 关羽
Orunla	Sanfancón / Guan Gong / Guan Di 关羽

Each olorisha is ordained to a particular deity, whose shrine may be the most elaborate of the constellation of orishas received, as discussed in Chapter III. The orisha of motherhood, water and fertility, Yemayá, is represented by the Daoist deity Tin Hau, a deity popular for the Hakka and other Cantonese people that made up the indentured demographics in Cuba. Tin Hau’s worship was especially important to overseas Chinese, as she is petitioned for safe voyages by sea. Josefina, a priestess of Yemayá whose mother was Chinese-Cuban and father Afro-Cuban explains the reason for the large statue of Tin Hau that graces her altar, positioned directly beneath her consecrated vessel for the orisha,

The Chinese in Cuba prayed to Tin Hau for protection for their children, and to get pregnant. She is seen as regal and supreme, very majestic. These are also the qualities of Yemayá. If you want to get pregnant then you can petition Yemayá

and even Tin Hau, they will help in such matters. [...] I think that Tin Hau represents what a mother should be, someone to be looked up to, to be thanked for life and to remember that without her, we would not be here. I inherited this statue from my mother, it has been in that side of the family for generations and she continues to protect us, I could not be initiated to Tin Hau, such a thing does not exist. But I think being initiated to Yemayá is very close, they are the same energy, and I honor that by uniting them both as you see here (interview with Josefina O., 22 September 2012.)

For Josefina, Tin Hau belongs on Yemayá's shrine as a means of personal expression and appeasement for both deities. Tin Hau, or Tian Fei [celestial consort] as she is known specifically in Cuba, shares many correspondences and jurisdictions with Yemayá, not least their dual roles as matriarchs and protectors of sea voyages, which has a deep resonance with historical realities of Chinese indenture arrival to Cuba. Another orisha, a priest of Oshosí in Matanzas related Tin Hau's worship to a lesser known orisha, Yembo, related to both Yemayá and Obatalá, "Yembo is an ancient and primordial orisha, one that is said to be the breath of Olofin, that animated the human forms made of Obatalá's clay and Yemayá's water. My great grandmother in *osha*, who was known as La China had Yembo, and inside, she had a small bisque porcelain Chinese doll. She said the doll was Yembo's Chinese representation, called Massu" (interview with Oscar J. April 22, 2012). Oscar is referring to Mazu, an alternative, pan diasporic name for Tin-Hau, which is translated to "mother ancestor".

The worship of Oshun is connected to the worship of Guanyin [觀音], known locally as Guan Min, and derived from Daoist and Buddhist worship and a deity also known as Avalokitésvara in Tibet, and Kannon [觀音] in Japan. Oshun's Catholic syncretism is Our Virgin of Charity and Copper, and being the patron saint of Cuba, both the saint and the orisha are venerated widely, often in conjunction. Mauro García Triana

and Pedro Eng Herrera write “Images of Guan Yin, in wood and porcelain, can be found in some Chinese and Chinese-Cuban homes, including those of Catholics. In some cases, it represents a belief, or the memory of an ancestral belief, and in others as no more than a beautiful ornament (Triana and Herrera 2009, 129). I would add to my observation of dozens of Guanyin statues adorning orisha shrines throughout the island. Within the panoply of household shrines I documented over the course of my fieldwork, there were more occurrences of Chinese statues for Guanyin on altars for Oshun, compared to those for Our Virgin of Charity and Copper. Many homes did maintain a separate niche or alcove for an image or lithograph of the Virgin, and they were resolutely not incorporated within the thrones or shrines of Oshun. In the specifically Afro-Chinese households visited, Guanyin worship often took the form of composite Afro-Cuban shrines with altars to the Lukumi deity Oshun and statues, if within the worshippers means to acquire them, of Guanyin. Outside of Afro-Chinese orisha worship, the image of Guanyin has itself been popular in Cuba and the diaspora, especially *blanc de chine* or bisque statuettes that feature a detachable hand. Many in Cuba, with or without connections to Chinese or Afro-Cuban religion, make petitions to the goddess for something desired using the statue, where the hand removed until the promise is fulfilled¹⁵.

Babalu Aye is a deity that goes by many different names. Praised as *Sònpònnò* among the Yorùbá, and *Azoani* among the Fon speaking people of Dahomey/Benin he is the fiery Dahomean king who governs infectious diseases, traditionally smallpox and

¹⁵ An especially popular performance is for Cuban mothers to purchase a statue when their daughters come of age. The hand is removed to facilitate the finding of a suitable husband, a stable marriage and to help conceive children. This practice stems from the belief that Guanyin will not rest until she recovers her missing appendage (Boucher 1999, 88).

yaws, now he is associated with the current HIV/AIDS pandemic. A deity of healing, he also conjures moralistic justice as he takes offence to social discrimination, injustice and violence against vulnerable society members. Worshipers guard against incurring his wrath by ritually feeding the poor, and mimetically taking on the persona of Babalu Aye in ritual acts of begging in the streets in the name of the deity. Raymond Buckley notes that in conversation, his worshippers were reluctant to use his names in case they inadvertently caused offence; instead they employed epithets that placated and flattered the deity by indicating his generosity and beneficence (Buckley 1985, 89). Indeed “Babalu Aye” is one such praise name [literally, Father of all the towns of this world] and his worship is centered among the Fon descendants, the Arará, in Matanzas Province, Cuba. “Arará” is an ethnonym for religious members that claim descent from enslaved Fon, Mahi, Adja, Evhe, and other groups of Fongbe speakers of the former Kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin), and present day Togo (Brown 2003a, 74). Also present in Havana, but in smaller numbers, Arará religious practices are a close cognate of Lukumi religion, and was formed by a network of *cabildos de nación* and *casas de santo*, whose institutions and members have continuously interacted with Lukumi priests and cabildos, often forming dual ritual lines of descent. The syncretism between Babalu Aye and the Daoist god, Li Xuan, one of the eight Chinese Immortals is particularly evident in Matanzas as well as Cienfuegos and Havana. Ángel Hernández Torres, a priest of the orisha Obatalá from Arroyo Naranjo, explains the relationship between the two deities,

“The Chinese in Cuba are known for their healing, you ask anyone, if you give them a choice when they are ill, they would prefer a Chinese doctor. There was one famous doctor called Cham Bom Biam, a *mambí*, who administered to the rich, to the poor equally, it didn’t matter if you had one penny, he would give medicine no matter what. Babalu Aye is the orisha of health...he heals, the

Chinese would prepare medicines under the auspices of Li Xuan and their descendants in Matanzas were knowledgeable in the art of healing and the art of harming by making people sick. They knew the secret of inoculation and infection – preventing and causing it; they used it to punish overseers on plantations.

[...] I have only ever seen one Chinese image of Li Xuan and it is very similar to San Lázaro, they are both held up by crutches or canes and wear rags. Both Li Xuan and Babalu Aye can transform themselves into a beggar so we must be careful when we are approached for alms, it might be a saint in disguise. They both carry gourds of medicine that can heal you or harm you. He is a double-edged sword and very just. I was raised in a Chinese-Cuban family, and we had a huge statue of San Lázaro, but we called it Li Xuan. I've seen many San Lázaro statues in Chinese homes in Havana. When I was very young, my parents would take us to a Chinese association in Placetas where they worshipped Li Xuan – Babalu Aye, and they had a statue of him, or them, and it was in the form of the Catholic San Lázaro (Figure 4.3)” (interview with Ángel Hernández-Torres, December 18, 2012).

The Placetas Chinese Association is no longer functioning, however we can find several other mentions of Li Xuan, who was a popular deity among the Chinese in Cuba in the early twentieth century. In Cienfuegos, the Provincial archive holds records for the Casino Asiático de Cruces, a mutual aid society for Chinese born Cubans. Among the files that hold data on the historical presence of the Chinese in the region is a flier detailing the organization's annual event calendar for members, which includes a feast for Li Xuan held 19-22 May 1911, when people would render homage to this titular deity of the organization (interview with Mitzi Espinosa-Luís, December 22, 2012).

The most popular and well-known syncretism that exists between Chinese and African diasporas is that of Shangó and Sanfancón. In Havana's Chinatown, there are images of Sanfancón, which are venerated as both a Chinese and Lukumi deity (See Chapter VI). As a badge of office, Sanfancón holds a halberd, or “*guan dao*” [偃月刀]. In recent years, a wooden version of Sanfancón's *guan dao* is added to the Lukumi instruments received by initiates of Shangó, especially those that operate and live in

Chinatown and are affiliated with the capital's shrines to this deity (interview with Mercedes Crespo 22 June, 2012).



Figure 4.3 A Saint Lazarus statue in a Chinese-Cuban home

Participant Interpretations of Material Culture

Much of my field observations link physical objects to memories of the past, collected, retained and recursively performed along with the objects that become religious foci. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) introduced the idea of collective memory to academe, wherein geography, landscape, ornaments and monuments are imbued with memories that are fostered and cultivated by groups bounded by common causes, beliefs, sense of origin and by other means. Moreover, Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) argues that there is an intriguing relationship between religion and collective memory: religion is described as a “chain of memory” that links past, present and future. Collective memory functions as a regulator and that religious memory is not beholden to history but

transcends it (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 134), affirming and manifesting through religious acts that recall the past and give meaning to the present and future. These religious objects, in conjunction with collective memory recall disjointed and disparate events of the past and unify them within a present coherent whole. Chinese statuettes and implements can thus hold meaning within the complex of objects both inside the orisha vessel, giving meaning to the orisha and the priest, and also for display externally, amplifying meaning through presence and “regulated” when memory is activated through its performance.

Additionally, Yael Zerubavel (1995) notes that collective memory has the ability to restructure the past, creating its own version of historical time (and periodization) as it “elaborates, condenses, omits or conflates historical events” (Zerubavel 1995, 61). The borrowing and synthesis of Chinese and African materials and religious practice is an elaboration of their particular histories of culture contact, condensing scores of experiences into singular cherished objects. The consumption of these items and their circulation with narratives and memories has the effect of restructuring two distinct diasporas as being seemingly conjoined. Zerubavel has developed the concept of “master commemorative narratives” which are described as “deep structures” that can serve to underscore and define a particular account in a particular setting [diaspora], and indicate turning points and highlight important developments; a tool especially valid to research that seeks to understand the dialectic of religious continuity and change.

When questioned on the matter of Catholic saints being syncretized with orishas, my participants gave explanations that hinged on a personal affiliation to that particular saint. Several acknowledged that it was common practice to acquire a Catholic statue syncretized with the orisha as an act of devotion and foci for prayer, especially if the

person was not initiated as a Lukumi priest. Many acceded that although they believed in the power of the saints, especially those that were syncretized with the orisha, or expressed a devotion to one saint in particular, they did not regularly attend Church nor were engaged in Catholicism through organized channels. Paradoxically, Cuban olorishas are critical of Catholic saints rendering them as representations of white and European influences in orisha worship, yet they display and perform devotion to the saints outside of their correspondences to Afro-Cuban deities. The intersectional approach to worship and iconography is indicated in the following description of practices by Mercedes, a 58-year-old initiate of Oshun who lives in central Havana:

Every year I go to the shrine of San Lázaro. I make a pilgrimage, you might ask why I do that when I have Babalu Aye at home (the shrine for the orisha syncretized with Saint Lazarus) but Babalu Aye has different aspects to him, one being the Saint who performs miracles for whomever petitions him. San Lázaro is a part of our culture of being Cuban; it isn't African or European because they don't worship him in any place else like we do here. The same goes for La Caridad, she is *ours* (interview with Mercedes Montas de Oca, March 7, 2011).

Mercedes reminds us of the pluralistic approach to religious beliefs and asserts a homogenous *Cubanidad* that is entirely distinct from its antecedents. They are important examples of how lived practices do not readily conform to cultural and social religious ideals. We are made to confront and understand the complexity of these religious landscapes and agentive persons by foregrounding the very persons that navigate and create these terrains. These are historically situated agents that continue to manage their identities and practice, often under intense pressure from powerful state forces and socioeconomic limitations, a consequence of their current circumstances and the impact of the recent past political changes and economic turns. Participants can embody all or any of these elements of praxis at the same time. Lukumi religion is porous and open to

the influences of the cultures and diasporas that it meets and making these connections visible through its iconographies. Mercedes takes an intersectional approach to her religious practices; she does not view them as mutually exclusive and neither should the ethnographer. Lukumi practitioners such as Mercedes, when appropriate, draw upon multiple religious traditions that directly challenge the model of religion as bounded, discrete and mutually exclusive. The data here show that Lukumi religion is unevenly receptive to all religious and ethnic practices it encounters. The inordinate and significant quantity and distinction given especially to Chinese objects, people, religious practices and beliefs underscore the importance of *Sinalidad* within the processual workings of Afro-Cuban religiosity. To concentrate on one particular aspect of religious experience and effectively eradicate lived elements and ignore broader impactful sociocultural factors, is to further a research agenda that is not ethnographically accurate. The unification of disparate diasporic practices is the promulgation of interdiasporic syncretisms, which is evident in the material cultural and accompanying narratives that serve to back up and/or refute claims of association.

Through my fieldwork with Lukumi in Cuba, I participated in and observed funereal and atonement ceremonies, upon the passing of initiated Lukumi priests. The *itutu*, the post-mortem ritual performed on the deceased's body and to disperse the orishas and associated implements accrued during the priest's life lays bare and effectively unwinds, including the actual initiation of the departed, as a way of severing ties of the soul of the departed with the physical world. The *honras* [honors] ceremony is performed after the funeral ceremony for noted and active olorishas, it is a remembrance and celebratory rite of the priest that involves a formal meal, an elaborate and temporary

shrine for “*egun*” the departed, and ancestors, as well as ritual musical playing of the Anya drums. A crucial element in the ancestor shrine is the presence of an *ajiaco*, in the “*plaza*,” a place or area designated for *egun*. The *ajiaco* itself can be read as a reference to the collective and transculturative nature of olorisha ethnicity and Cubanity that constitute the ancestors venerated at the shrine. Further, the large cauldron of the Cuban stew takes pride of place within the multitude of cooked dishes. Mercedes and other olorisha stressed that for an *ajiaco* to be considered complete, and indeed for the shrine for such an important occasion to be acceptable it should contain *leri eledé* – a pig’s head, Ángel explained:

The pig’s head is an essential ingredient. The *ajiaco* is there because the dead eat everything that the living eats, except it does not contain salt. We also place different foods, ones we know that the ancestors liked to eat while they were alive. The *ajiaco* is made for all *egun*, and the pig’s head we are told is a Chinese custom and that is placed for everyone. It represents the reincarnation of the deceased in *orun* [heaven]. This is not an Afro-Cuban or Lukumi custom. [...] I am not sure when or how this custom came about however my elders taught me it was Chinese, and that was some forty years ago.

We find references to the importance and use of pig heads in funereal rites in late imperial China (see Watson and Rawski 1990, 97). While Ángel did not know the provenance of why pig’s heads played a significant part in Lukumi ancestral rites, nor was he sure of when it became entrained in practice, he had been taught by his elders that this was the way to propitiate the deceased explained that it was of Chinese origin. It is a prime example of Afro-Cuban ephemeral worship practices that are not as easily captured or explored given that they arise not because of calendared activities, but as a result of uncharted events such as the death of high-ranking initiates.

Chinese Charades and Divination

La charada china, the Chinese charade, or *chiffá*, is a numerological dream interpretation system of Chinese origin used for gambling in Cuba's informal economy and popular throughout Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁶. It relies on a pictographic model of a Chinese man with various symbols and numbers imposed on the figure (see Rodríguez 1995) which originally consisted of one to thirty six numbers, each corresponding to a different image (see Appendix V) the number range was later extended, when opened to non Chinese players from 00 to 99. While there are well known and agreed upon number associations, such as “horse” with the number 1, “butterfly” represents number 2, and 3 is a “sailor”, Martin Holbraad notes that there are significant embellishments and differences of number associations according to individual players (Holbraad 2010, 73). As both my participants and Holbraad corroborate, there are layered meanings of numerological significance according to Afro-Cuban religions. Lydia Cabrera lists the charade according to their Lukumi and Efik significances: number 9 is associated with Oyá, “*entierro, la marca de Oyá, la dueña del cementerio*”¹⁷.

¹⁶ There are several variations of Chinese *chiffá* found in the Caribbean and Latin America. In Jamaica, it is called *drop Pan*; as *chéfa* in Guyana; as *lampa* in Suriname and *borlette* in Haiti. In Panama, Nicaragua, Belize, Costa Rica, and Guatemala it is called *duqui*. In Trinidad, it is known as *whe whe* (numbers 1-36) where, “*Play Whe*,” a computer-operated, legal version was approved and adopted by the National Lotteries Board in 1991 (see Johnson 2006, 126). The Venezuelan *charada china* has links to María Lionza practices (see Rivero 1967).

¹⁷ Oyá – internment/burial, the mark of Oyá, the owner of the cemetery. Others in this sequence include number 10: Yemayá - “queen, ruler, governess, president” and number 16: Shangó: “the bull and the orisha that all men fear.” From “Charada” by Lydia Cabrera, collection number 0339, Series III, box 17, Folder 2. Unpublished manuscript: Typescript, nd.

Also known as *chiffá* In his biographical and historical analysis of Matanzas, Miguel Bretos notes that the importance of his place of birth with regard to the presence of the Chinese can be demonstrated by the fact that Matanzas was the only Cuban city to have its own *charada* (Bretos 2010, 5) which was comprised of numbers one to sixty.

The *charada china* has an active and important role in orisha practices, especially divination. Many orisha worshipers that I interacted with paid close attention to the drawing of the weekly numbers. Priests often speculated what numbers should be played in la *charada* following an Ifá or dilogún consultation. Numbers, derived from the *odu* marked, as well as the imagery and symbolism invoked would determine which numbers would be played, thinking that they are lucky or hold some significance. In one lengthy divination I had attended, the initiation of a young Chinese-Cuban priest to the orisha Oyá, the Obá Oriate who conducted the *itá* determined through the shells that the iyawó's blessing or luck [*iré*] that came with the *odu* he “threw” in Shangó was *iré ewé*, literally meaning the “blessing of leaves”. *Iré ewé* figuratively referred to the blessing of winning the lottery, as the Obá explained, that the “leaves” were green bank notes, the way that Lukumi in Cuba would have combined existing Yorùbá words to describe the lottery and financial gain through betting. The iyawó was advised to play the *charada* and to pick numbers that were significant to Shangó to maximize and realize the potential of this blessing.

Competing Claims: Sanfancón, Shangó and Orunla

Shangó and Orunla represent two of the most important deities of Afro-Cuban Lukumi worship and each occupies privileged spaces within Afro-Cuban religiosity.

Their priesthoods are also mutually exclusive. Orunla or Orunmila is the patron deity of divination, whose priests are called *babalawo* and open only to men in Cuba. Shangó is one of a multitude of *orishas* whose priests are called *olorisha* or *santeros* and whose priesthood is comprised of both men and women¹⁸. Shangó is one of the most popular and widespread *orisha* cults and is believed to have been the fourth *Alafin* of Òyó (Schiltz 2009, 78) his worship is couched in terms of royalty, governance and statehood. As the god of thunder he is said to mete out justice by striking houses and persons as punishment for malfeasance, and one of his primary symbols is the double head axe [*oshé*]. The Òyó royal court of Shangó possession priests according to Biobaku, enjoyed the same level of force of the later Roman Empire (Biobaku 1957, 8). The *Alafin* strategically employed Shangó possession priests as governors, called *ajélè* along the Atlantic trade route (Schiltz 2009, 78) to ensure their cooperation and protection.

Similarly, Shangó holds a special and unique place within the Lukumi Religious framework. My *olorisha* interlocutors described Shangó as “king” of the religion and recent work has forcefully debated the ontology of Afro-Cuban religious praxis as modeled after or highly influenced by distinctly Òyó, as opposed to pan-Yorùbá-centric *orisha* worship (Brown 2003a, Matory 1994, 2005) a hegemonizing action compared to

¹⁸ While this basic division holds true in practice in Cuba, there are important caveats as can be expected in any dynamic religious terrain. Prior to a person being initiated as a *babalawo*, he can and often is initiated as an *orisha* priest, including as a priest of Shangó. While he does not cease worshipping the *orishas*, the *babalawo* no longer functions as an *olorisha* in religious practice, he will not divine using the divination systems of the *olorisha* and neither will he initiate others to the *orisha* priesthood. Similarly, an *olorisha* will not use the *babalawo*'s chief divination instruments and neither will he partake or be able to initiate *babalawos*. While the *babalawo* priesthood is open to men, equivalent initiations that are available to women, called “*iyanífá*” as practiced among the Yorùbá of southwest Nigeria is gradually becoming popular in Cuba. See <http://translatingcuba.com/babalawos-women%E2%80%99s-meeting-in-holguin-dimas-castellanos/> for a description of the meeting of Cuban *iyanífá* in Holguin.

the highly stylistically variable and geographically diverse orisha initiations found in West Africa. Amanda Vincent (2006) comments that it is perhaps more useful to regard Òyó as a significant portion of the Lukumi (Vincent 2006, 31). Several ritual examples are offered by olorisha to confirm Shangó's privileged status in Lukumi ritual: the use of his wooden mortar as ritual seat for initiations, his prominent positioning in the ritual sequence of orishas enacted through initiation. Also, the necessity to sacrifice to Shangó when consecrating esoteric deities such as Oduduwá, Babalu Aye and Osain and the presentation to the Anya drums that also belong to him. Both Shangó and Orunla are syncretized with Sanfancón / Guan Gong in Ifá and Lukumi religious practices, with babalawo and olorisha forming the two distinct sides of the syncretism split. The Sanfancón contestation in Lukumi syncretism, and the discourse it produces greatly illustrates the process of interdiasporic cross-fertilization. In debating who can lay claim to the correct or overarching syncretism, each party has in his or her arsenal symbolic and material capital, as well as textual and oral narratives. The debate is informed by both Afro-Cuban and Chinese-Cuban representations in its elaboration, engaging divination, diasporic collective memory, and disparate diasporic cultural and religious elements. I routinely encountered this debate in my fieldwork and documented a variety of its instances. Olorishas and babalawo that I interviewed were each adamant as to whom Sanfancón was rightly syncretized with, indicating the importance and value that Sanfancón and other syncretized deities as constitutionally "Chinese", were being made relevant and integral to and within Afro-Cuban religion. Efraim, a Chinese-Cuban Babalawo, whose paternal grandfather came from Guangdong Province as a trader in the early 1900s, recalls his father's involvement in the religion:

My father was a staunch businessman, that was his real religion, he didn't have time for Church or any of that, and unusually for a Chinese, he didn't gamble, he adored Sanfancón though. For him, his life was his business and his family and she said that it was because of Sanfancón he had success. He married my mother whose family was a mix of black and Chinese, her grandfather was Carabalí, that's why you see my skin is quite dark and I have Chinese eyes. My father was very devoted to Sanfancón, and like all Chinese a bit superstitious and he had a shrine for him in his business, he said with Sanfancón you need to be honest, you can't cheat people as he will punish you. You can make money, yes, but you can't swindle, Sanfancón doesn't tolerate *come mierdas* [literally "shit eaters"]. We would go to Chinatown for the Sanfancón celebrations when I was a child, there used to be three of them throughout the year, it was wonderful as a kid, as we got little red envelopes with money in them. We felt so special. Well, my father later made Ifá (became a Babalawo) as some of his business partners and clients were in the religion, his godfather lived in Guanabacoa, himself with some Chinese in his family. My father didn't practice [for others as a babalawo] but he saw it as a way of getting closer to Sanfancón, paying tribute to him. We would cook foods for Sanfancón and Orunla on their feast days at home. My father would have small cards printed to give out on these days through his business; they had Chinese writing on them (interview with Ephraim 2 May 2012).

Ephraim's father was introduced to Ifá worship through a perceived connection with Sanfancón, a deity that was simultaneously identified as Cuban, and ethnically Chinese, just like Ephraim and his father. For Ephraim, his approach to Lukumi religion was slightly different:

I understand that Sanfancón can be seen as Shangó or Orunla, and for me he is Orunla, Sanfancón is a prophet, he aids his men through knowledge, and as a Babalawo we are entrusted with people's destinies by divining with Orunla. Orunla has the power of death, to keep *ikú* [death] at bay, he protects his followers wherever he goes and that is why people wear the green and yellow beaded bracelet for Orunla on their wrist, it is a sign that this person is protected by Orunla. Orunla is very protective [...] Sanfancón is a protector; he was killed for his loyalty as he stood by his beliefs. When a person prays to Sanfancón he is praying for protection, you pray for your business to be protected and your family. He has the power and the weapons to make sure that nothing bad happens (interview with Ephraim 2 May 2012).

I asked how Sanfancón fit into his practice as a Babalawo:

Yes, in many ways. A lot of people are casting *brujería* [witchcraft/sorcery] here, they see that you have something they don't and they get jealous, they go to

fulano [someone] to bring you down, throw powders, put your name to bind you and your progress. I use Sanfancón to undo that. I call Sanfancón and make a *resguardo* like I would do for any orisha. I pray it on the *tablero* (the Yorùbá *òpòn Ifá* or Ifá divination tray) and that is very powerful. A lot of people come to me for that, you can put it in your pocket or put it by your front door, it is a little red packet this big [indicates a 2 inch width with his fingers]. It is made using things from both Orunla and Sanfancón, from what I have seen by both Chinese and Babalawos. All I can say is that it works [laughs] (interview with Ephraim 2 May 2012).

Rather than keeping practices and veneration of Sanfancón and Orunla as separate, Efraim sees a synergistic value to them when attending to clients and calls on both Orunla and Sanfancón for their abilities to intercede on behalf of the worshipper. Efraim's collaborative understanding evokes the intricacies of interdiasporic cross-fertilization, and further echoes the introductory vignette in Chapter I, and Jorge's hyperawareness of his positionality in trading Chinese bones. Efraim makes a concerted effort to synthesize cultural and religious aspects of both Chinese and Afro-Cuban practices, much like his own cultural and ethnic composition, something that helped rather than hindered his amulet making business, as he is routinely sought out for such products. I ask him to tell me about his clientele which include a number of foreigners that visit the island, from Europe, America and especially China:

I have never been to China but now we are seeing more and more Chinese [visiting Cuba] and some of them hear that I am a Babalawo and want to know more, some have readings with me and a couple are preparing for initiations. They have told me that in China, that it is normal to be open to new religions. They recognize some things and they said that there is *brujería* there too; people use dolls, poisons, anything to get ahead and to make money and successful. I speak some Chinese but now I am taking classes to learn more. I think Ifá will spread to China pretty easily (interview with Ephraim 2 May 2012).

The opening up of trade and cultural encounters between Cuba and China is producing spaces for the development of Afro-Chinese religious links and practices. By

making use of language and training, Efraim is becoming increasingly involved in a multi-sited network of priests and practitioners, catering to Chinese who visit Cuba on business, and young Chinese students who take up temporary residence in Cuba. These and more are quietly making their way to Efraim and other Babalawos for divination and encountering both familiar (Sanfancón) iconography interpreted in new ways.

Yanery Morales, Obadele (Figure 4.4) is a priestess of Shangó who lives in Pogolotti in the Marianao municipality of Havana. Her heritage is African, whose parents told her she was of Gangá and Congo descent has a particular affinity with Sanfancón, a deity she resolutely contends is Shangó:

The *odu* tells us that Shangó went all over Asia when he was a living king. That appears in Obara Meji and first the Chinese captured him but then they set him free after realizing who he was and begun to worship him. Sanfancón is a fearless warrior, just like Shangó and was a great and generous ruler. For me, Sanfancón and Shangó are the same (interview with Yanery Morales 18 May 2012).



Figure 4.4 Yanery Morales with her shrine for Shangó and Sanfancón

Elena has constructed her Shangó altar with a large, red-faced statue of Sanfancón, stationed next to the bowl containing Shangó's consecrated emblems she received during her priesthood initiation (Figure 4.4). The Sanfancón statue was acquired in early 2004, a gift from a Cuban godson that had brought it back from a visit to San Francisco. The statue replaced a small lithograph Elena had which was acquired in Havana in the early 1970s which bore the image of the Daoist deity on the front and a short prayer to him on the reverse, in Spanish.

We can trace versions of the *odu* narrative dating to the example collected in the field by Lydia Cabrera, between 1930-1948 when Cabrera completed the majority of her ethnographic work (coincidentally much of it conducted with Lukumi participants in Pogolotti) in Cuba prior to her permanent departure to the US (Rodríguez-Mangual 2004, 10). Cabrera collected the following narrative from her informant Lukumi Silvino Baró:

Changó¹⁹ travelled all across Africa. He even went to China. There he did his things. The Chinese captured him and placed him in a chapel to kill him. When they went to look for him to execute him, he had disappeared. But the Chinese had sketched a portrait of him when they captured him and this is the dark skinned man you see in the prints of so many Chinese homes. From China he returned to Africa. [...] He was very brave and daring. So feared and respected was Changó that he never closed the doors of his house, sure that no one would ever dare to enter and steal anything.²⁰

I have included another narrative in Appendix IV, which collectively show that the syncretisms being made between Shangó and Sanfancón help to pre-date, by a wide margin, recent State interests in fostering links between Cuba and China. These written accounts from Afro-Cuban practitioners demonstrate that interdiasporic cross-fertilization

¹⁹ “Changó” is a popular etymological rendering for Shangó in Cuba. Derived from the Yorùbá, *Şàngó*.

²⁰ Unpublished and undated narrative from the field, source: Lydia Cabrera Papers CHC0339 Box 24 of 75. See Appendix IV for Spanish original.

was occurring in Havana Lukumi religious settings. I return to the Sanfancón – Orunla – Shangó in Chapter VI, where I further discuss Chinese babalawo production of knowledge in Havana’s Chinatown.

Fine China: Configuring the Chinese in Afro-Cuban Altars



Figure 4.5 Household orisha shrine

Rodolfo in Havana is a prime example of the current intermixing of African and Chinese religious iconography. An active orisha priest for more than forty years, Rodolfo is a Cuban of Spanish heritage; his grandparents migrated from the Canary Islands in the early 1900s. He is one of a number of *olorisha* located in Havana who preside over a large and international constellation of godchildren. “I have many *ahijados* [godchildren] in Spain, America, Canada, and Italy. They come to me for *santo*, [priesthood initiation] *pinaldo* [a status-confirming ceremony for priests], *oshas* they need from

itá...everything” (interview, Rodolfo, Havana 2012). By his estimation he has more than one hundred godchildren and has personally initiated eighty-seven persons to orisha priesthood.

Walking into Rodolfo’s house for the first time I am immediately overwhelmed by the opulence; almost every inch of the small single floor dwelling in Havana is replete with orisha objects, giving the impression that the house is a small museum or living exhibition. On the far wall of the living room, are three built-in shelves, each holding approximately 20 to 30 orishas. Each orisha vessel is draped in beaded accoutrements: large multi-stranded necklaces, called *collares de mazo*, canes, horsetail flywhisks all painstakingly handcrafted, and other tools or implements symbolic and particular to each deity. Some orisha assemblages also have wooden dolls that have been “charged” and consecrated, as well as a host of figurines and *objets d’art* associated with narratives and totemic iconography. I notice that virtually every “*sopera*, *tinaja* and *potiche*” (types of vessels used to house the consecrated emblems of the orishas) are purposefully chosen and have been carefully accumulated in the four and a half decades he has been initiated.

The majority of the porcelain plates that decorated the shrines had Chinese characters and the figurines depicted Asian faces. There were also many gifts given to Rodolfo by orisha practitioners in gratitude for officiating as Obá Oriate, or master of ceremonies, and all of these furthered the Chinese aesthetic, including bone knives, bamboo sculptures of animals associated with Chinese mythology, ivory and tortoiseshell carvings that have been added to the ever growing shrines. To one corner, Rodolfo’s Yemayá, his patron orisha, is a towering, complex universe of all of Chinese porcelain elements. She is housed in a blue and white tureen, adorned with ceramic vases and the

walls are studded with plates with Chinese characters and motifs. On the floor, resting on pedestals is a coterie of “*adimu orisha*” satellite orisha that are said to accompany the larger or fundamental deity. Rodolfo’s altar to Yemayá is an impressive conglomeration of blue and white Chinese porcelain, swathes of beads, fans and larger than life nautical implements, commanding and drawing attention to Yemayá (Figure 4.6), whom Rodolfo defers to as the owner of the house. “Our orishas are royalty, they are kings and queens, that is why you see them wearing crowns, and dressed in beads.



Figure 4.6 Shrine for the orisha Yemayá with Chinese inspired porcelain

On the 9th June 2013 I had the following conversation with Rodolfo:

Martin M): Your orishas are beautiful; two things that immediately strike me are the beadwork and Chinese porcelain.

Rodolfo (R): For our African ancestors, beads were reserved for elders, royalty and others with status. Our royalty are the orishas, they are the kings and queens, and when we are initiated we also receive our crowns. A sign of our royalty are our *elekes* [beaded necklaces consecrated for the orishas]. The more elaborate the beadwork, the higher in status you are. The Lukumi that came as slaves preserved the bead patterns and decorated their saints with beads. I made everything myself and I have been doing it for [puffs cheeks and exhales] many years! My godchildren bring me the things I need from outside [abroad]. What you see here is the culmination of decades of work, patience, finding the beads and saving them until I have enough to make what you see here. [...]

(M): So this has happened way before the Special Period!

(R): Absolutely! I would say it happened with slavery and colonialism. The Chinese porcelain was a status symbol, it would be a treasure and it could also help disguise the orishas, as you don't know what is inside a tureen! That helps when there is persecution. Stones in a *jicara* (gourd) as the orishas used to be, I think is more difficult to explain than a tureen.

(M): Why do you think Chinese porcelain is used instead of say Spanish styles of vessels?

(R): For the Chinese, of which there are many here in Cuba, the porcelain represents wealth and prosperity. These vessels used to hold water and food, you know, like grain and rice. I will ask you this: what do we eat from? Plates. Plates are very important in our religion, they represent the orisha giving us food, so they are like a prayer, so they remember to give us what we need. When we die, we don't need food anymore and the plates are smashed, to sever ties between the priest and this world. The orishas traditionally lived in *guiros* [hollowed and dried calabashes], again connected with food, sustenance, and life. However, they are so fragile the elders started putting them in terracotta, which is a material we have here in Cuba. The terracotta is still available; they are the type that the orishas are birthed in.

(M): Chinese porcelain in particular became popular or all types?

(R): I think Chinese porcelain represents the very best we can give to the orishas, they look beautiful and you used to see amazing pieces in many grand houses in Cuba. Many of those families left, but I remember seeing these things and the stores that sold them. Yemayá has given me so much, she brings me people so I

am never alone, I work the religion a lot, and I have things my godchildren bring from abroad. I am very fortunate when I know many people suffer here.

(M): Are these Chinese objects recently required? Do you have any idea when they started to be used in conjunction with orisha worship?

(R): They are not recent. Well, it depends on what you call recent. But ever since I can remember, and I have grown up in the religion, I have always seen Chinese things being used for the orishas. Before the Revolution there were many stores that sold fine china to wealthy Cubans and many Spanish families here had huge collections of Chinese porcelain: dinner sets, tureens, figurines. Those types of things. I think that the Chinese way of doing things was seen as the best, as the height of sophistication. The old generation, I mean those that were old when I was a kid! They had the most beautiful Chinese *soperas* (tureens) for their orishas. They would be simple, without beads, and all the other stuff that we add today, but my God they were incredible.

(M): Can we discuss the statues that I see you have with your orishas?

(R): Yes... you see I have many up there [points to the highest shelf where the orisha Obatalá is surrounded by many related deities] they are all Chinese, some are ivory, some are bone from eighteenth century. I have found that many of these statues relate very well the *patakines* of our *odu* (divination narratives). Those are the ones you see there, they each have meaning according to the dilogún. Sometimes Chinese families, especially the younger generations, sell what they don't want, and they don't know that these statues aren't just decoration, they mean something. Take this one for example [Rodolfo removes a statue for me to examine – it is of a seated woman with a man standing behind her, his hand on her shoulder]...you see her? She is blind. This represents the story of a young blind woman that would sing and the man is her guide and caretaker. It represents for me, the *odu Ogundamasa*, whose refrain is “in unity there is strength.” It is there next to Obatalá because that is my *odu* in Obatalá. People will probably look at that and think I have it there simply because it is white and made of ivory [a material and color associated with Obatalá], but it has extra meaning. Chinese culture is very similar to what we believe in *osha*, and as for as long as I can remember, there have been Chinese people in this religion, and they are probably the first to realize just how close our two traditions are.

For Rodolfo, the Chinese porcelain is a visual reminder of the role that Yemayá and the other orishas play in his life – furthering sustenance and prosperity. We can glean from his explanation that the use of Chinese inspired porcelain lies in memories of

opulent houses of Pre-Revolutionary Cuba. Priests such as Rodolfo, re-enact this grandeur to the best of their abilities, in furthering the trope of orisha as royalty.



Figure 4.7 Chinese ivory figures

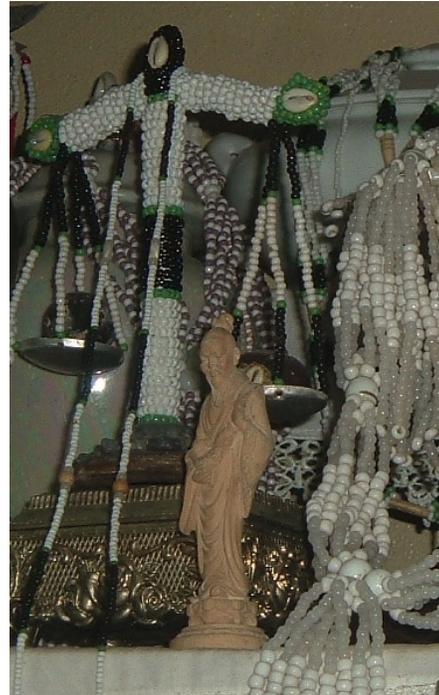


Figure 4.8 Chinese statue with orishas

Although Rodolfo's orishas may be compared to those olorisha that do not enjoy the connections to foreign godchildren, Asian inspired porcelain was present on every altar I examined during my fieldwork. David Brown (2003a) cogently examines the introduction of foreign-made porcelain and traces its entrance through the channels of Cuban aristocracy, who kept armoires full of original Chinoiserie popular in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the availability of more affordable reproductions, which is one possible route by which Chinese porcelain became widely entrained in Afro-Cuban religion.

The richness with which Rodolfo adorns his orishas is related to an exchange relationship between Rodolfo and his orishas. His fame and success, as demonstrated by having foreign godchildren and receiving money and gifts, is reflected in the gifts and attention Rodolfo expends on his personal shrines. As Rodolfo continues to gain wealth and commodities by way of his orisha work and international godchildren, he adds materials to his shrines so that they become more expansive and elaborate in their articulation. He does this in recognition of the role the orishas play in bringing godchildren, commodities, and wealth to his life through his religious services. Rodolfo asserts that Chinese iconography is not merely an aesthetic choice, but a carefully thought and religiously appropriate one. The inclusion of Chinese material culture represents the epitome of luxury and suitability in shrine construction given, in Rodolfo's eyes, their similar philosophies and cultural ties that lend themselves very easily to produce a harmonious and efficacious shrine.

Several priests that I visited, such as Rodolfo had among their orisha shrines, Chinese objects that had been inherited from Afro-Chinese and Chinese-Cuban olorisha. These items, which included plates, silver "tools"; elephant ivory chopsticks; cue balls and mahjong tiles all became subsequently added to the inheritor's orisha shrines and these items in particular, were highlighted by the priests I interviewed. They were described as being tangible links to the deceased, and his or her orisha. They were especially coveted because of their symbolic value and their previous use within the orisha shrine, affirming the special ways in which certain belongings convey meaning.

Pedro the Babalawo and Oyiya Oba

I had been conducting fieldwork with several olorishas in Havana in early 2012, and in February, I started working closely with babalawos, the carefully aligned but separate Ifá cult of male priests, gathering texts and divination narratives that spoke about the Chinese. These texts in themselves I class as important intangible religious culture, especially with regard to ongoing debates of the processes of syncretism. An object may be accompanied by a plethora of understandings given in oral literature devices. Lukumi and Ifá make use of *patakines*, narratives of the orisha that are found in divination verses called *odu*. Although, they are by no means material, they are inherently linked. I introduce Pedro here through the following observation of a divination session Pedro performed for a client:

Kaferefun Osabara [praise the *odu* Osa Obara], Ifá is talking about a Chinese spirit [*un egun Filani*]. Are you aware of him? [client indicates that she is not] It is a spirit that is walking with you, not of your blood but of your spiritual court [*tu cuadro espiritual*] that is identifying himself as the one that is bringing you good fortune (*iré*). It is a spirit that works very hard...you know the sort, the one that just gets on and does the work, sweats all day and asks for nothing in return. Have a *misa* [spiritist séance] said for this spirit and put an *asistencia* to him. If he doesn't identify himself, he is probably too busy working to take time off! But he is there. Put a ball of rice and *palitos* [chopsticks] as an offering to him (Pedro to client, 4 March 2012).

I had been shadowing several of Pedro's consultations with the permission of the client. At the beginning of each reading, Pedro would assert that his only friends were Elegua and Orunla, the deities that efficated divination and effective communication. It was given as a forewarning, preparing the client in advance that whatever Pedro may touch upon he was delivering to the best of his abilities the words and advice of the orishas, and not coloring the language or altering the advice to make it more palatable to

the receiver. In light of this and with the relatively few instances that Pedro spoke of or highlighted instances of Chinese influence, I believe my presence within the readings did not alter their content to unduly bring forth information that I was there to hear.

Following the above quoted reading, Pedro explains to me later the nature of having an ethnically identified spirit, “my son has a Filani *egun* too, and look at him, he looks half Chinese [Pedro pulls at the outer corner of his right eye]. Pedro’s son, Mayito was initiated to the Ifá priesthood at age 11. Mayito’s *odu* in Ifá is the same as divined in the consultation I witnessed, *Osabara*. It is commonly referred to as the *odu* of *la tierra filani*, [China, the country] and *los espíritus filani* [to Chinese spirits or guides] that may accompany the person.

Filani, most probably a loan word from the Yorùbá “Fulani²¹” that described the Muslim Hausa of northern Nigeria, is the most common Lukumí expression for the Chinese. *Filani* exclusively describes the Chinese in Cuba. Other Afro-Cuban religions also have specific ethnonyms for the Chinese. According to Ramon Torres Zayas, member of an Abakuá *juego* [lodge/chapter] in Havana, there were many important Chinese elders that are remembered in his *juego*. The Abakuá refer to the Chinese as “Eulofia” (interview with Abakuá Ramón Zayas 8 June 2012) and written accounts of Abakuá instruction mention “*Erofia*”²².

²¹ From the Yorùbá words Fúlàní or Filàní, defined as referring to the Fulbe people (Abrahams 1958, 214).

²² Martín (1943) states: “*Erofia Chino, Fia es en yaondé color Amarillo, como en abacuá. En algunos palabreros se ha escrito, eulofa, ulofia, y urofia. Lo llamaron también maribá. Erofia es erié-ofia, o extranjero Amarillo. [Erofia Chinese, Fia in Yaondé is the color yellow, like in Abakuá. In other dictionaries it is written as, eulofa, ulofia, and urofia. They are also called Maribá. Erofia is erié-ofia, or yellow stranger.]*”

Pedro became instrumental in furthering my analysis of Chinese influence in Ifá worship, something which very nearly did not happen if I had not visited his house and observed his personal Ifá shrine. I had observed many divination sessions and discussed the Chinese in *odu* over the course of many meetings held at a house in central Havana used for elaborate ceremonies and initiations. Pedro was stationed there for many weeks presiding over initiations for several godchildren that had travelled from Europe. His own house, where his orishas were kept is situated in a rural area in the outskirts of Havana. I accompanied Pedro to his house on July 10, 2012, to fetch some specialist ingredients for a complex *ebó* he was to perform later that day, and I was excited to see what appeared to be a Buddha statue prominently displayed next to Obatalá in his house.

Martin (M): Pedro, what is that?

Pedro (P): Ah, that's Oiyi Oba, *coño* [damn!], I should have mentioned him!

M: Yes, yes, tell me about him.

P: That is Oiyi Oba, a Chinese wise man, he is a power [*un poder*] of Orunla. His name means "The King's Shadow" he represents the wisdom of Orunla, for divination. This statue is charged, you see? [Pedro indicates the spot on the top of the statue that had been bored open and then cemented shut]. He (Oiyi Oba) is Orunla's advisor, he holds access to all the wisdom of the *odu*. He is born in [the *odu*] *Eyeunle meji*.

M: Very interesting. So, it is Chinese?

P: Yes, In *eyeunle meyi*, Orunla travelled all over the world, and he taught certain people how to divine, in China he encountered Oiyi Oba and so impressed was Orunla with him that they became inseparable, Oiyi Oba advises Orunla and the appropriate advice to give, that is where wisdom comes in. He is the personification of wisdom. Babalawos receive Oiyi Oba to become better diviners, to have this deity on your side helps you to access *odu*, to mark correct *ebó*, he is very important for babalawos.

M: I can imagine. Why didn't you tell me about him before? We have been talking about Chinese things in the religion for ages!

P: I know, I know. It's true. But I don't really consider him Chinese, I consider him more, hmm, of us. He is very Cuban in a way [laughs]. He is represented by a Buddha, yes, but when I think of Oyiya Oba, I think more about Orunla and their relationship and how Orunmila travelled all over the world and his worship has all colors and ethnicities in it, black white, chinese...everything. Just like here [Cuba]. That is how it was taught to me by my Ifá *padrino*, it is knowledge that is passed down to initiates, one you have a good working knowledge of *odu* and can learn the finer points. If we would have been discussing the process of divination and what makes a good diviner, I would have mentioned him straightaway. I'm sorry, it just didn't occur to me.



Figure 4.9 Babalawo Pedro



Figure 4.10 Oyiya Oba

Oyiya Oba is a deity that is consecrated for babalawo, and according to Pedro theoretically can be conferred to olorishas that require it as indicated by divination – something he has not witnessed occurring. It is, however, only to be prepared and consecrated by babalawos. Oyiya Oba can take the generic figure of a Chinese sage, an immortal or Buddha, the examples observed in Cuba were made in Cuba by artisans that cater to the Afro-Cuban religious community, making other wooden implements and sold

in botánicas. Oyiya Oba holds a special place within the schema of Afro-Chinese religiosity and can actually signal an internalized understanding of Cuban identity. Pedro's explanation of where Oyiya Oba is located in relation to the orisha Orunla indicates that it does not directly correspond or link with an orisha, instead it is seen as a consecrated power that forms part of the coterie of disciples attendant to Orunla.

Pedro explained that our lengthy conversation was the first time he had to critically articulate his thoughts about the provenance of the consecrated Oyiya Oba. Crucially, Pedro had effectively delinked the *Sinalidad* or Chineseness of Oyiya Oba, expressing that it was more Cuban than belonging to any one ethnicity. As "Cuban", Oyiya Oba effectively calls on the standing premise of Cubanity, which holds within its conceptualization, a totalizing understanding of Chinese, as a component within a larger transculturating framework, one that is always in attendant to African, European and native identifications.

El Invento: The Invention in Lukumi Religion

Oyiya Oba condenses into one object both religious continuity and change. As a deity, Holbraad writes, a fundamental principal of Ifá ceremonials and divination contested, an invention or creation [*un invento*] that has made it surreptitiously into the coterie of divinities now propitiated and offered by babalawo. The subject of inventions, be it new deities whose provenance are from mythopoetic stories, *patakines*, in *odu*, or [re]creations of obscure "satellite" orishas gleaned from the sizable body of anthropological and ethnographic literature on old and current orisha practices in Nigeria, Brazil and elsewhere that has been circulating in Cuba and its diaspora, probably since

the first works were printed. My respondents and orisha friends in Cuba lamented to me, as others have to Stephan Palmié (2013, 202-11), of the recent proliferation of new and exotic consecrated deities that have started to appear. Treated with disdain by many, and accepted and embraced by others, “opinions differ as to what extent these beings or forces “really are real”” (Palmié 2013, 202).



Figure 4.11 Oiyi Oba



Figure 4.12 Oiyi Oba and other wooden statuettes waiting to be purchased and "charged"

Oiyi Oba’s ability to be anything other than a statue or symbolic altarpiece lies in its activation through ritual consecration. Such consecrations “crucially involve “charging” or “loading [*cargar*] each of the paraphernalia...with *achéses*” (Holbraad 2012, 155). *Achéses*, the Hispanicized plural of *aché* or *ashé* here refer to secret powders and other materials that are placed within the object (Figure 4.13). The notion of the secret or concealed knowledge is intrinsic to the practice of Afro-diasporic religion (Johnson 2002). Secrets have a social function; they can be strategies of contending with police and intellectual intrusion (Johnson 2002, 25). Charging has a double meaning here,

as explained by Holbraad: “although these matters are strictly secret, it is clear that the sense of “loading” consecrated items with *aché* [power] is also literal, since token quantities of the powder are in many cases stuffed inside small cavities created for that purpose in the various items that are being consecrated” (Holbraad 2012 155). It is also within ritual charges such as these that my informants explain may very well contain human bones, perhaps sourced from Jorge’s whose story opened Chapter I. In this instance, I was not privy to knowing if specifically Chinese-derived bone was used to charge Oyiya Oba.

Figure 4.13 Arial view of Oyiya Oba, the head has been "charged" with “secret” ingredients



Lukumi religious practice is adept at communicating secrecy, which is now being used to convey secretive Afro-Chinese mediations. In the case of Oyiya Oba, the fact that it appears to be charged and imbued with invisible *ashé* furthers the trajectory of secret powders and powers contained within, elevating it above a classification of inanimate wooden object. The wooden image of a Chinese Buddha thus becomes entrained into Ifá worship through modes of Afro-Cuban ritual consecration, communicating this by the

ceremonial procedure of loading, a visually apparent operation to the statue, and undergoing consecration according to existing praxis.

Inspired and influenced by images of the Buddha, the Oiyiyi Oba statue moves out of the realm of adornment and synthesis through representation of an orisha, as can be argued is the case for many orisha-Daoist syncretisms explored above. Oiyiyi Oba instead is designated as deity or religious entity in its own right. We see a shift in this example from adornment to that of full entrainment as agent in religious practice. How this relates to the “santero” practice of deity/orisha representation remains unclear, as does the question of what came first: Babalawo loading and consecration of Chinese statues or olorisha syncretism and representation of the orishas through Chinese means? According to the interviews I conducted with babalawo, Oiyiyi Oba has made an appearance and becomes established in Ifá vocabulary only fairly recently, especially over the last two decades, signifying the tremendous impact that the shift in the political and economic environment that occurred in the early 1990s had on Afro-Cuban religious practice.

This observation is in line with the growth of the practice of babalawos consecrating Ifá versions of orishas that are normally the domain of olorisha, a highly debated and contested practice that is part of the ongoing “santero *versus* babalawo” division touched on in Chapter III. Using similar techniques to the way that Oiyiyi Oba is prepared and charged, some babalawo also prepare Olokun, Erinle, Ibeji, Ode/Oshosí, and others for their clients and godchildren. As well as these babalawo versions of santero orishas, babalawo additionally prepare further entities [*poderes*] in the same schema of Oiyiyi Oba, which are rather more restricted in circulation between Ifá priests than the orisha iterations being offered to the wider orisha community.



Figure 4.14 Ifá prepared and consecrated and cemented orishas

A Material World

Babalawos and olorisha add items to their altars for adornment, because of its availability, being aesthetically aligned and adding value by furthering the orisha's domain. These additions may be made through an affiliation and awareness of Chinese culture, and some add because of distinct, specific and “deep” linkages, syncretisms and purposes. I am highlighting plurality, and how it mirrors the larger discourse of Afro-Cuban religion – that these observable examples are a conglomeration of different, changing, evolving practices. These material things are part of that wider discourse. They speak of the choice of object, what it can signify about identity and individual religious practices. It can show affiliation, indicate a level of knowledge or power that the person

is at pains to show. It shows material possibility, wealth and status. Possibly more so now because of renewed links with and assistance from China.

At first glance, the accumulation of material objects on any given shrine may appear to be a magpie-like assemblage of matter, however beneath this veneer, they are historically constituted texts that detail their distinctively ritual and religious hybridization. In practice or without due regard to context, insight and reigning epistemes, syncretism is a little more distinctive than bricolage, and conversely, the bricoleur's eye may be advantageous for the discernment of the correct or most appropriate religious materials in force. These inform, in an exciting and celebratory way the character and accomplishment of the role Chinese diasporic elements play in constituting the Afro-Cuban religious world. It should be clear but not beyond stating again, that these observations are ways of challenging unrefined conceptualizations of syncretism that do not consider the relevance of interdiasporic participation in its making. Rather than being a structuralist amalgam of whatever is at hand, which is bricolage, these altars are built at great expense and personal sacrifice with specific conceptualizations in place. The purposive and processual manner by which altars are made is true for the level of the person and the home as explored in the present chapter, and the institutional field will be covered further on.

There are several layers to both meaning and use associated with these objects. The materials themselves are limited to what is available or in economic reach. Some objects are coded references to Chinese and African thought, meaning is disseminated through initiation. Mimesis also ensures the continuation and possibly, the pluralizing of meaning as new narratives are invented and appended to the given ones. In recent years,

the academic focus on material culture has gained traction, resulting in nuanced examinations and reconfigurations of the interactions and boundaries between persons and their objects (Cerulo 2009). Such discourse invariably invokes relations of power, how cultural settings and human interactions invite discussions about the containment, location and deployment of power and action (McDonnell 2010). As witnessed in the examples presented here, we can apply material culture discourse to examine specific instances of culture contact and materiality. The study of cross-diasporic materiality conveys the broader themes of processual and agentive understandings of meaning at the juncture of the subject and the object, and the relation between the living and their (religious) environment.

The multiplicity and growth of Chinese images and icons in Afro-Cuban religion is occurring at a tremendous pace and concurrent with a trend towards increasing self reflection on the place of European and Christian inspired syncretism within the religion. Roger Sansi notes that the presence of Catholic and figurative images in the orisha worshipping *terreiros* in Brazil are being questioned, with “purification” movements resulting in some of these Candomblé shrines to “fight syncretism, separating Catholicism from African religion” (Sansi 2011, 375). While there are definite wellsprings of neo-Yorùbá, Africanizing and re-Africanization movements especially in Havana, aligning closely with contemporary west African Ifá practices (see Palmié, 178 and Brown 2003a, 161-162). Interestingly, while the vision of such identification purges Catholic images and associated lexicons from Ifá and orisha worship in Cuba, the visibility and materiality of Chinese provenance is accepted and very much on the rise and treated as a different and distinct discursive category.

Arjun Appadurai posits that things or commodities are extremely valuable to anthropology; they are important interlocutors in several branches and theoretical bents (Appadurai 1986). Much contemporary work has been concerned with the once ambiguous relationship of culture to commodities, and investigating the role of materiality in forming and informing subjectivity. Roger Sansi notes that the relationship between the image as visual text that can be read and decoded for meaning is often conflated with a separate role that these objects take on, that of having a “sheer presence” (Sansi 2011, 376). The ability to discern between image as text and its presence can be an acute problem when dealing with objects, images and texts that straddle different cultures, diasporas and frames of reference. The former, image as text has been the standard investigative and methodological lens used to investigate images. The discernibly dual purpose inherent in images and icons, called “double consciousness” by W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) who applies Du Bois’ concept and investigations that react to this idea by imbuing these objects with power that exists outside of their attachment to humanizing concepts (Latour 2002, Meyer 2008, Vinck 2012, and Griswold et. al 2013). Murphy calls the assemblage of objects found in Washington D.C. *botánicas*, which cater to various Cuban and African diasporic religions as speaking a “creole language” implying “coherency, performance and efficacy” (Murphy 2010, 105). Murphy’s contribution directly builds on the growing idea that objects have a life and agentive powers of their own, they have been termed actors in their own right (Law 1999) and form part of a heterogeneous complex of symbolically invested actants. According to John Law, by focusing on how these objects act and interact within a conceptual field of relational materiality we are able to understand relations of power in a useful way. These

small, local, heterogeneous relationships of materiality as invested with power bypasses the preoccupation of the dichotomous relationship of ‘agency versus structure’ as conduits of instruction and action as such relational networks concentrate on the micro rather than the macro level. How images, texts, objects, statues, persons and so on, interact are phenomenon that are to be conceived as nuclear in size, in some cases becoming more substantive and processual, built upon and their core can be reinforced and stabilized, growing in size and semiotic power and relevancy, a template that has guided my research. In poststructuralist terms, these are, “precarious relations, the making of bits and pieces in those relations, a logic of translation, a concern with materials of different kinds, with how it is that everything hangs together if it does” (Law 2009, 145).

By thinking through materials and the relations to people and collective memory, these nodes can be envisaged as nestling within other, substantively different networks. Igor Kopytoff notes that materials have a biography or life history, which inherently consists of a commoditized state, by which it is circulated. If we are to examine objects, whatever they may be, we must be aware of the relationship between materiality and society that is forged through the biography of commodification that enabled its interaction with society and the to understand their changes in terms of status, and variability (Vinck 2012, 90).

These images speak of this ongoing dialogue, with different and distinct voices to be heard. We cannot reduce these data to one, “true” Afro-Chinese form of syncretism, instead strive to examine their occurrences, their linkages and diversity and, as occurring through a multitude of avenues and for different reasons. These data thoroughly

challenge the assumptions that Chinese are not part of this religious dialogue and associated processes, nor are they relegated to an amorphous and academically unyielding transculturative mass. Chinese materials and narratives by their inclusion and exertion through agentive powers break with the idea of the Chinese as invisible and inert redolent of traditional Cubanizing identifications. Tenets of the Chinese diaspora not only have a reinstated place within nuanced religious conceptualization, they are guiding Afro-Cuban religious expressions. The express intention of the state in fostering close cultural and economic ties with China is having considerable influence on Afro-Cuban religions. The materiality and orality of Afro-Cuban religious practice expresses in a tangible form, the geopolitical linkages being fostered at a broader level, namely the rise of Cuban-Chinese relations becoming implicated in local religious ideology and practice.

CHAPTER V *PAISANOS Y SANTEROS ACHINADOS*: IDENTITY, RACE AND WIZARDRY IN AFRO-CHINESE RELIGION

La intelectualidad adquirida por los chinos, es el factor principal que ha superado a otras razas en todo el orden social. El chino se considera blanco y basta. La superioridad de inteligencia; el desarrollo de las facultades mentales; el conocimiento, es el gran enemigo de la ignorancia.

The intellect acquired by the Chinese, is the main factor why they have surpassed all other races in the social order. The Chinese considers himself white and that's enough. The superiority of intelligence, the development of mental faculties, knowledge, is the great enemy of ignorance.

Afro-Chinese Cuban author, Antonio Chuffat Latour 1927,¹⁶

Following the unwinding of indenture, the first generation of Afro-Chinese descendants began carving a life for themselves separate from the past instances of chattel slavery and contract work their parents knew. One such person was Antonio Chuffat Latour, born in 1860, who was a second generation Afro-Chinese. Chuffat Latour authored *Apunte Histórico de los Chinos en Cuba*, affording valuable insight into the emergence of the Chinese as well educated, socially and politically engaged and effectively writing them into Cuba's socio-cultural fabric. Writing the book in his sixties, he and his generation witnessed "the rise of Chinese presence in Cuba, the insurrectionary wars for Cuban independence, the abolition of slavery, and American occupation" (Yun 2008, 183). His work speaks of a pivotal moment in Cuban history that indicates a deep troubling of racial categories and the careful negotiation of identity for mixed Cubans, like Chuffat Latour, whose experiences did not readily fit existing official criteria and categorization. His work is a rare attempt at fashioning a positive, inclusive place for Chinese in Cuba's racial historicity. Implicit in his quote above is a turn to Chinese superiority, where his *Sinalidad* is given prominent and "superior" position within his mixed heritage.

The importance of that time in Cuba's history as a turning point or celebration of Afro-Chinese presence is complemented by the work of Wifredo Óscar de la Concepción Lam y Castilla, or Wilfredo Lam (1902-1982). Lam, like Chuffat Latour was Afro-Chinese, an artist heralded for his contributions that explored, in particular, Afro-Cuban religious themes, which brought his subject matter to an enduring global audience and ensured him great international acclaim. As opposed to his *Sinalidad*, it is Lam's Afro-Cuban and transculturated Cuban identifications that appear to eclipse his Chineseness. These different negotiations of identity underlie the experiences of the children and grandchildren of Chinese immigrants and their neglected hybridities through intellectual, artistic, and spiritual means. Through his work and that of Chuffat, we can see that the Afro-Chinese, from an early point have a direct hand in the shaping of socio-cultural conceptualizations of themselves in Cuban textual, artistic, and religious productions.



Figure 5.1 Antonio Chuffat Latour



Figure 5.2 Wilfredo Lam

Within his well-documented social history published in 1927, Chuffat Latour depicts the lives and social biographies of Chinese-Cuban and Afro-Chinese, spanning approximately from 1840 to 1920; he divided his work between coolie and post-coolie narratives, that help to bridge the lacunae evident in scholarship that has tended to only focus on one or the other. A major theme of Chuffat Latour's work is devoted to the legacies of indentured coolies and their impact on the island. One of his prime motivations was to frame the dissolution of African slavery and Spanish colonial governance as intimately linked and indebted to the actions of Chinese and African presence

The previous chapter centered on the 'biography' and circulation of objects; these provided a firm context of materiality and, together with examples of religious syncretism, formed the backdrop to my field research. Having provided the setting and the shape of the interfaces of culture contacts and diasporas, in this current chapter I take as my inspiration the way Afro-Chinese and Chinese-Cubans, like Lam and Chuffat Latour have given voice to the shape and manifestations of their constitutive worlds and the making of Afro-Chinese religious identities. I investigate how interdiasporic cross-fertilization as evidenced through Chinese-Cuban priests, disassembles understandings of hybridity that involve the coming together of physical, genetic material, i.e., through human reproduction and the production and assertion of these interdiasporic identities. In turn, I link the narratives of these Chinese-Lukumi olorishas with challenges to the broader official discourse of identity making in Cuba, *la Cubanidad*, and the challenges produced in discerning and analyzing cross-diasporic complexities of exchange and religious cross-fertilizations.

The Cuban cross-diasporic world and its operating religious vocabularies fall outside the purview of established and current analytical frameworks with regard to prevailing ideas of transculturation, and also with regard to Afro-Cuban religion. The themes that Chuffat Latour's oeuvre pre-empted, and Lam's work celebrated, in their own ways offer alternative counter-hegemonic viewpoints. The construction of a case for contemporary Chinese-African hybrid religiosity, I claim, is robust and coherent enough to be studied in its own right following in the footsteps of the twentieth century *Afrochino* pioneers discussed here. The examination of identification can only commence by carefully dismantling the existing conceptual frameworks, and unpacking the presumptions of engineered race, ethnicity and identity that have, historically, ignored the special and different places, persons and processes inhabited and experienced by Chinese-Cubans and Afro-Cubans.

There has been a persistent preoccupation in a number of Cuban State-led efforts to officially de-emphasize the unique socio-historical experiences and religious pollinations that have occurred between these groups. Such culture contact and the processual synthesis of religiosity have been carried out following the collapse of both indenture and the gradual breakdown of the apparatus of slavery at the end of the nineteenth century. I argue that the accretion of Afro-Chinese materiality and religiosity in Lukumi practices informs wider discussions of Cuban identity making with regard to African and Chinese racialized identities. Lukumi belief, with ritual rather than biologically determined relations of kinship challenges assumptions about identity and ideology that are otherwise firmly rooted in secular racial ideology. Lukumi Priests are "born" from their godparents; they create family within religious households organized

according to hierarchic initiatory connections. These godfamilies link and override otherwise disparate ethnic and racial identities into coherent ritual ancestries. Through the religious lens, Lukumi lineage, the line of priests that initiated one generation from the other comprises African, Chinese, European and other heritages that override individual biologically racialized subjectivities.

Second and third generations of mixed Afro-Chinese Cubans are an overlooked segment of the Lukumi religious population, giving rise to religious cross-fertilizations that are recorded here. We can see, through the development of Afro-Chinese Lukumi syncretisms the development of the relationship between “the Chinese” and “the African”. The religious constructs may be responses to the making of Afro-Chinese identities themselves, and how the emerging Afro-Chinese population internalized, represented, and challenged Cuba’s racial hierarchies over time. Both Africaness and Chineseness become engaged in a battle of assertions, whereby one may be eclipsed by the other both within the dynamics that occur between diasporas through the religious lens; there, both *Sinalidad* and Afro-Cubanity converge and compete within Lukumi material and narrative cosmology. The opposite is also true. Chineseness occurs gradually, in tandem, and as a result of a growing presence of racialized Afro-Chinese.

It is these details that are captured through the ethnography of the priests interviewed in this chapter. Collectively they have 110 years of initiation between them, and are deeply rooted in their religious communities. Their insights and personal, familial histories have direct bearing on the subject at hand. Their experience is respected, and their longstanding status as active participants in Afro-Cuban religion is valuable for illuminating first hand, the Afro-Chinese religious world in Cuba.

A central tenet of the larger, state led process mentioned above, was the promotion of a rigidly enforced, classed, and racialized Cuban social order. Many critiques have been advanced regarding the steadfastly theoretical models of race contact and cultural integration that sought to remove ethnic factions and divides in favor of an overarching Cuban citizenship, which was inclusive, and whose models, looked more to the west than to the east for its ideologies. After colonization and a hard won independence, the search and construction of an independent Cuban identity was built against a fear of being subsumed, once again, by external hegemonic powers, leading to the formation of an inclusive, raceless, and unified construction of its citizenry. The preoccupation with unification was to prevent factions forming along racialized lines and the ability to overthrow the fledgling government. Distance from previous legislation that allowed for slavery and indenture was purposefully inscribed in the formation of *la Cubanidad*. No longer were Chinese and African persons deemed devoid of history and culture, or blank slates waiting to be acculturated. Instead they were contributing members of a dialogue that gave value to their knowledge and active participation in the culture making process. Such a status was achieved in various ways but especially through the auspices of Ortiz's model of transculturation discussed in the last chapter. However, being an ideologically led model and apparatus for institutionalizing "Cubanness", there are limitations to its explanatory and explorative powers within the jurisdiction of cross-diasporic relationships.

The formation of the first Cuban Republic following the relinquishing of Spanish sovereignty in 1899 was won on the back of three separate wars and a coalition of Cubans of all colors and social origins that shared the same nationalist liberationist

ideology. Alejandro de la Fuente states that Cuba and Cubanness were represented in vastly different and challenging ways at the turn of the century and that, “despite their differences, all these definitions had a common element: the shared belief that “race was at the very core of the nation” (de la Fuente 2001, 23-4). A dominant official theme from the inception of a free Cuba was racial inclusion, and the necessity to build a republic “with all and for all” as Martí had called for. Fuente shows that social control was carefully engineered during these formative years to repress Afro-Cubans, and was achieved through carefully constructed ideologies that fostered a notion of a holistic Cuban fraternity where dialogues of race were invisibilized. The Chinese and Chinese-Cubans were effectively invisibilized by being subsumed within the general category of “people of color”, which was routinely thought of and discussed as predominantly related to being black. Rather than equalizing and mobilizing Afro-Cubans to every function and inclusion in national politics and key socioeconomic areas as employment and education, transculturation had the effect of sustaining racism and thus furthered the divide. These underlying prejudicial yet illusory foundations of the Cuban constitution, which filtered from the level of the government to every day society, was a most effective instrument in opposing Afro-Cuban formations such as the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC), the aim of which was to rebalance such structural inequalities.

Several historical moments highlight the tension between white supremacy and the racial inclusion that was evident throughout the nation-building project. Alejandra Bronfman discusses how the burgeoning republic in the first half of the twentieth century had to come to grips with its racial makeup and document its citizens through a system of measurements derived from scientific racism. Bodily measurements, eugenics,

homiculture, puericulture and the encroachment of the state on bodily hexis (Bourdieu 1977) became the institutionalized measures of racial identification (Bronfman 2004, 121).

The history of *Cubanidad* has been marked as a fight against racism and the autonomous production of a raceless nation. The concept of the raceless nation took root in the Cuban republic emerging from the wars of liberation. It was used in defense against the Spanish colonial argument that the size of Cuba's black population ruled out the idea of nationhood (Helg 1995, 84). With the U.S. intervention in Cuba in 1898 came new racist ideologies and practices that reinforced pre-existing racist attitudes, and following the U.S. example, Cuban political leaders adopted *blanqueamiento* [whitening] as their strategic goal. García Triana and Eng Herrera report that blacks retained their electoral power, especially under the Machado Presidency of 1925-1933 and when "whitening" was deemed a failure, Cuban intellectuals began to call for a rethinking of the meaning of *Cubanidad* (García Triana and Eng Herrera 2009, xiii). However the scope of Cuban identity invented in the 1930s by Cuban intellectuals was nationalist in conception and excluded or relegated to a minor role Afro-Chinese, Afro-diasporic, and other immigrants. As a result, Anti-Chinese racism was virulent. Evelyn Hu-DeHart presents several cases detailing the nature and extent of sinophobia, known locally as *antichinismo* or *chinofobia* (Hu-DeHart 1999, 67), and their excision from national discourses of identification. Racist acts against the Chinese took many forms; in 1896 rebel insurgents sacked Chinese grocery stores in Güines in Havana Province (Ferrer 1999, 150). Language became a marker of racism. Kathleen López connects language with a weapon of racism by noting the tradition in Cuban historiography of attributing a

distinctive form of pidgin Spanish to Chinese-Cuban speakers: “demonstrating how native Cubans have perceived Chinese immigrants both as an integral part of the Cuban national experience, but also as something exotic” (López 2004, 130).

It is necessary to further unpack the valances of language, its use, and its bearing on descriptive terminology. López observes that language can at once convey inclusion and segregation, and in a similar vein Lisa Yun has commented on the relations of power that language ability can represent. Yun argues that the social stations of the diverse Chinese populations captured by the term “Chinese diaspora”, were directly linked to a multilingual ability in at least Chinese and Spanish, with some able to speak Chinese, Spanish and sometimes French (Yun 2008, 201). Refinement in proper *castellano* and skills in English and French were often presented as cultural capital in a society of transnational trade, and commerce, and were in line with the progress of a “modern” post-slavery culture. The importance given to Iberian culture and language is echoed in the work of Chinese-Cuban authors such as Antonio Chuffat Latour’s wherein the necessity of speaking Spanish with “precision” is repeatedly stressed; it was looked upon “admirably” to speak perfect Spanish (Chuffat Latour 1927, 214). Yun notes that pidgin Spanish was deployed when advantageous or convenient for business, and there appeared to be an empowerment resulting from the ability to purposely manipulate representations. An anecdote is recounted in Moon Ho Jung (2006) concerning Chinese coal workers who used the Spanish language to assist Cuban rebels yet they switched to pidgin to stonewall Spanish authorities. Forty-six rebels had approached Chinese laborers who offered enough food and refused payment. Soon thereafter, one hundred Spanish troops arrived in the area and interrogated the same Chinese about the presence of rebels. The Chinese

feigned ignorance with exaggerated pidgin Spanish and denied knowledge of rebel presence (Jung 2006, 101). Exemplified here is the enactment of pidgin as a racial veil through social mimesis, described as the “motley tongue”, which stands in stark juxtaposition to the official language of empire (Yun 2008, 203).

The limitations of Fernando Ortiz’s model of transculturation sit squarely on its inability to discuss the hybridity that occurs between discrete diasporas. Different from the amorphous understanding of transculturation inherent in the *ajiaco* analogy, the case of the Chinese and their special relationship with specifically African people in Cuba is missing. Ortiz’s model was special because it was not simply a “model of” but became a “model for” (Stewart 2011, 50), whereby it was not merely used to describe a possibility or pathway of observable and causal data, but became the *blueprint* for the process of achieving *la Cubanidad*. Transculturation offered a plan by which Cuban official history and discourse could spark an interaction of broad categories of race and ethnicity putatively described in many different works as *los chinos*, *los indios*, *los negros*, and *los blancos* that do not really constitute the island’s demographics. Rather, these reified categories became instilled as the model for integration and culture exchange, promoted and enforced by a select cadre of Cuba’s sociocultural and socioeconomic elite.

The politically motivated understanding of racial fraternity in Cuba foregrounded the effects, culture, and contributions of white, European elements, simultaneously announcing the importance, centrality and inclusiveness of black culture. This dominant cultural narrative of Cuban identity from its black, white and indigenous components is a testament to Fernando Ortiz’s cultural and political capital and the overarching adoption of transculturation as the model for *Cubanidad*. Contingent on this was the identification

and celebration of *afrocubanismo*, an artistic and literary movement, to which Wilfredo Lam directly contributed, that occurred as much in Europe as it did in Cuba, forming a dialectic of self referencing and legitimizing intellectual pursuits that could focus on the African presence in Cuba. To a much lesser extent, the Chinese, were late to be included in the Cubanizing process, and inhabited the borderlands of the transculturation process. The Chinese and their cultural contact with Africans did not fit into these plans in any meaningful way. Little reference was ever made to the linkages of people of African and Chinese descent in Ortiz's work, and no explicit connections were made within the larger schema of their particular contributions. With the gradual change of official status from indentured outsider to integrated, transculturated Cuban, the Chinese-Cuban did not escape being "othered" by racist and orientalist imaginaries and their power and place kept in check and invoked in interesting ways. These are experiences in the iterations of popular sayings explored below, which situate the Chinese as agents of cause and effect, isolating and marginalizing them from Cuba's transculturated, integrated citizenry.

Tener un Chino Atrás/ To have a Chinese on your Back

The work of Chuffat Latour presents a rare insight into the changing nature of Chinese identity in Cuba from a uniquely Afro-Chinese or racially mixed perspective. It is more nuanced than the images that transculturation offers and constitutes an exceptional voicing of these cultures from an emic viewpoint. Chuffat Latour can be thought of as an unsung progenitor for later works that seek to examine the implications of Chinese and African fighters in Cuba's search for independence. Aside from the problems of racial identification and composition, the Chinese were present in most

insurgent battalions from 1868 to 1898, alongside both black and white rebels (Ferrer 1999, 48).

The mix of self assertion, the potted histories of the Chinese and the ambivalence and disintegration of racial categories from the twin influences of transculturation and the rise of an unwarranted and unpredicted Afro-Chinese intellectual movement saw a greater presence of the Chinese in Cuba’s social and cultural landscapes. One of the ways Chinese presence can be evidenced is in the variety and quanta of aphorisms on the Chinese that exist and persist to this day in Cuban vernacular. Three of these examples are:

Table 5 Cuban aphorisms featuring the Chinese

Saying	Translation	Meaning
<i>Ni un chino muerto</i>	Not even a dead Chinese	Negative. No. By no means.
<i>No lo salva, ni el médico chino</i>	Nothing can save him, not even a Chinese doctor	Grave situation, one that is unchangeable.
<i>Tener un chino atrás</i>	To have a Chinese on your back.	Portent of bad luck, unlucky.

(Adapted from Varela, 1980. English translation mine.)

Like no other identifiable racial group, aphorisms constructed around ideas of *los chinos* are employed for emphasizing experience and emotion. The predominance of Chinese sayings is an exceptional case of a populist, directed imaginary that is widespread throughout the provinces; it lends credence to the formation of some form of special and different place that the Chinese and their experiences are located in Cuba’s history. The above phrases pit the Chinese as having supernatural influence against non-Chinese, thereby marginalizing their presence as Cuban nationals. Living and dead, the Chinese by their bodily praxis indicate a level of power, and its negation relates to

cultural experience. If a Chinese doctor cannot save you, through his almost supernatural intercession, then you have exhausted all of your options. In the latter, a person's source of bad luck and circumstance can be attributed to the presence and hindrance of a Chinese person, whether mundane or spiritual, who is exerting this unfortunate power.

The lack of interest and understanding of the Chinese element in this framework inaugurated a *chinophobia*, through an acute awareness of their excluded and "othered" status from official transculturation measures. Sino exclusion is the weakest part of Ortiz's model, relegating the Chinese to one component and rendering all components as being homogeneous. As I have discussed in Chapter III, the process of interdiasporic cross-fertilization of Chinese cultural elements has been one of adaption and adoption in Afro-Cuban religiosity and has occurred through the intimate and prolonged exposure of both complexes of belief systems through unifications of gendered African and Chinese persons. Interdiasporic cross-fertilizations are products of an ongoing dialogic between once separate belief systems and enter into terrains that do not just condone but are dominated by the propensity for additions, changes, and innovations in light of the racialized and socio-politically charged climate both diasporas experience. The transculturative and popular imaginative production of the Chinese has allowed ample space for the adoption of the Chinese within different schemas such as Afro-Cuban religiosity.

Without the inclusion and understanding of the Chinese and Afro-Chinese in in transculturation in any real way, resulted in the Chinese being unduly feared and exoticized as *brujos*, (imprecisely translated as witches or wizards), persons that use *brujería* often for malefic and socially divisive purposes. Their difference, especially to

the Afro-Cubans, led the popular imagination to attach the Chinese to the notion of fear, as evidenced in many published accounts of fiction and ethnography as well as texts that combine the two.

A subtle positioning of Afro-Cuban as *Cuban*, and Chinese as *foreign* is evidenced in ethnography of Lukumi practices. Lydia Cabrera, who conducted the bulk of her fieldwork in the first half of the nineteenth century recorded interviews with Afro-Cuban priests who can be deemed as giving expert testimony to the power of the Chinese. The first passage below contrasts the Chinese and their practices with Palo Mayombe, a Bakongo-derived religiosity present in Cuba:

El mundo tenebroso de la brujería es de una actividad abrumadora. Pero, por suerte, todo kindambazo, todo ayé, tiene remedio. "Clavo saca clavo" y "Mayombe tira y Mayombe contesta". Esto es: lo que hace un brujo, otro lo deshace: "bastón que mata perro blanco, mata perro negro", a menos que el "daño" lo haya lanzado un brujo chino, pues la magia de los chinos se reputa como la peor y la más fuerte de todas, y al decir de nuestros negros, solo otro chino sería capaz de destruirla. Y aquí nos encontramos con algo terrible: ¡ningún chino deshace el maleficio, la morubba, que ha lanzado un compatriota!" (Quoted in Cabrera 1989, 33.)

The dark world of witchcraft is an overwhelming activity. But thankfully, all kindambazo, all ayé [ill], has a remedy. "Nail pulls nail" and "Mayombe throws and Mayombe responds". That is, what one wizard does, the other undoes: "The stick that kills the white dog, also kills the black dog," unless the "damage" is thrown by a Chinese sorcerer, as the magic of the Chinese has the worst repute and is considered the strongest of all, and in the words of our black people, only another Chinese would be able to destroy it. And here we find something terrible! Any Chinese undoes the spell, the morubba [*moyubá*], which has launched a fellow!" (My translation, Cabrera, 1989, 33.)

Mayombe, or Palo, itself much misaligned, and stigmatized as associated, almost exclusively with "the dark world of witchcraft" unusually is interpreted in this passage as a positive sign of Afro-Cuban religion. What is interesting here is that Palo [religion or sorcery] is juxtaposed, not with an identifiably cognate Asian-derived tradition, but

against an ethnicity: the identification of the Chinese sorcerer. The Chinese, by their very being or embodiment, are feared and othered, because of their mysterious powers for which Afro-Cuban religiosity does not have an antidote. The Chinese, in the above passage, do not fit into the Afro-Cuban ethnic and religious episteme and hence are greatly excluded from it. The practices of Chinese persons, rather than their religion are the root of the disruption and speak of a racialized fear. Another lead explores this theme further, offering a testimony that is effectively nationalistic in its construction. According to Lydia Cabrera's informant, José de Calazán Herrera, *Bangboché*, known as "El Moro," a priest of Shangó:

La brujería china es tan hermética, que Calazán Herrera... quien "para saber ha caminado toda la isla", jamás pudo penetrar ninguno de sus secretos ni aprender nada de ellos. Solamente sabe que comen a menudo una pasta de carne de murciélago en la que van molidos los ojos y los sesos, excelente para conservar la vista; que confeccionan con la lechuga un veneno muy active; que la lámpara que le encienden a San-Fan-Con alumbra pero no arde; que siempre tienen detrás de la puerta un recipiente lleno de un agua encantada que lanzan a espaldas de la persona que quieren dañar, y que alimentan muy bien a sus muertos"

Chinese witchcraft is so tight, that Calazán Herrera... who "you know, has travelled all over the island" could never penetrate any of his secrets and learn about them. It is known only that they often eat a paste of ground bat meat, in which are ground eyes and brains, it is excellent for saving vision, and they make a very active poison with lettuce; the lamp he lights to San-Fan-Con lights up but does not burn; who always has, behind the front door, a receptacle filled with enchanted water that they throw behind the person they want to harm, and who feed their dead very well" (my translation).

(José de Calazán Herrera quoted in Cabrera 1989, 34.)

The above passage although inflected with rampant stereotyped and racist imaginaries further stigmatizes the Chinese as othered, and reifies within their presence the performativity of witchcraft and fear. This implication is furthered through the invocation of the motives of Cuban Palo religions that make use of human remains. The

trade in Chinese bones, as mentioned in the introduction is one of the prominent means of trade in Cuba, and furthers the idea of the Chinese being feared, and associated with special power. The use of Chinese bones is widespread; in complete contradiction to the gravity and reverence Chinese give to their ancestors and associated physical remains. Todd Ramón Ochoa notes that in Palo practice, there is a distinction made between the human bones used in the construction of *prendas*, consecrated vessel altars and *bilongos*, bundle bound assemblages of medicine constructed for a specific purpose. Although both are made with human bones, if they are constructed with bones from persons that have been baptized during their life they are called *prendas cristianas* and *bilongos cristianos*. These determinations are derived from the place the bones have been disinterred from, for example a Christian cemetery, and the spirit or *nfumbe* contained governs the range of actions the *prenda* can undertake. Such constellations, “Have a pact with God, made at the moment of their baptism” (Ochoa 2010, 200) and cannot be used to harm. A *prenda* or *bilongo* that is inhabited by a Chinese *nfumbe* through the use of Chinese bones, gathered from the Chinese section of the cemetery are deemed unbaptized, and are contained within the same category as Jewish bones, another ethnic presence in Cuba’s complex religious landscape. The scarcity of sources for acquiring these Chinese bones has resulted in the elevated premium the remains now fetch and the propensity for more religious entrepreneurs to specifically target Havana’s Chinese cemetery and also, Guanabacoa’s Jewish cemetery. The belief in and use of Chinese relics within Afro-Cuban religious practice is so prevalent that many Chinese –Cuban and Afro-Chinese practitioners of these religions are taking great pains to express their distance and distaste of such practice. Many Chinese are repatriating the bones of their relatives interred in

Havana's cemeteries to China with the help and mediation of Cuba's Chinese associations. Alejandro, an orisha priest and palero of Chinese descent, spontaneously offered me the following thoughts on our walk home from a ceremony conducted in the foothills of one of Guanabacoa's rocky ledges:

You know [taps his head] the *kiyumba* [skull/skeleton] of us Chinese are considered really strong, very powerful. When I die, I want to be put on fire [cremated]. ¡*Qué va!* [No way!] I don't want to end up in someone's *prenda*, and forced to do witchcraft and serve these ignorant people, I want some peace (Alejandro 19 February 2012).

Alejandro's reflection was in response to many people stopping and greeting him on the walk to the house. He was aware of his identity as both an effective and revered *brujo* and how someone may wish to profit from this identity, *post mortem*.

Regla on the Margins

Los Lukumises, as present day practitioners refer to the African-born founders of their religion in Cuba, gave creole Yorùbá nicknames befitting the spiritual landscape of the island. Cosmopolitan olorisha in the capital were referred to as *Ara Ilu* [people of the town]. Those of the countryside, *el campo*, which in practice could refer to a multitude of provinces, including the not so distant Matanzas, were referred to as *Ara Oko*, [people of the farm or country]. The Afro-Cuban citizens of Regla were referred to as *Ara Okedon*, people from the mountain, as Regla has a fairly hilly topography.

Regla is a twenty-minute car journey or fifteen-minute *lanchita* [small ferry] crossing from Havana. It has consistently been regarded as a small but economically important periphery of Havana. Today it is a somewhat harsh industrial hub, and dotted all along its ragged harbor are numerous warehouses and factories, as well as an oil

refinery with a constantly lit fire. The refinery's bright flame is visible from the rooftops of the taller buildings by the *Capitolio*, Havana's answer to the White House, and beyond, the smoky plume is a beacon to industry, far removed from the flash and circumstance of the capital's touristic ecology, signaling Regla as a legacied gateway for both goods and people.

The 3rd of June 1847 saw the Spanish owned, ex-slaving frigate, the *Oquendo* arrive in the Port of Regla, bringing from Macao the first ever shipment of coolies. Although there is a plaque near the town's Catholic church marking the arrival, their initial arrival was not greeted with any great fanfare. An announcement in the presses of that week in June simply stated that several more coolie-laden ships were scheduled to arrive.

If you were to enquire after the santero, José Francisco in Lukumi circles in Havana, you would most probably receive blank stares, an occasional shrug and a whole barrage of follow up questions to triangulate who exactly is this José, to at least come up with a close approximation of someone that fits the bill. If you were to ask for *El Chinito de Regla*, on the other hand, you would likely have a lot more success and even be privy to a story or two about this legendary priest. I met El Chinito on the 2nd of June 2011 as part of the festivities marking the 165th anniversary of the Chinese arriving in Cuba. I later learned that this was an exceptional outing for El Chinito, who is often far too busy attending to his orisha family to get away. El Chinito was on a discussion panel that explored Chinese religion in Cuba, a mix of both priests and scholars (if we need to make such a distinction), which was a veritable gift from the gods for my research purposes. El Chinito gave a short and informal talk on Chinese artistry in Lukumi religion from his

personal experience and from that moment, I instinctively felt that he was someone I needed to know.

José Francisco was born in Regla, on the 4th of October 1949, to mixed Chinese-Cuban parents, and comes from a family whose previous generations were heavily involved in Afro-Cuban religion in Regla. José lives in the same house in which he was born, inheriting it as the eldest of two sons. He has been an initiated priest of Yemayá for 46 years. The name he received from his initiation is *Omi Atorun Wá*, “Water that Falls from Heaven.” Aside from being a devotee of Yemayá, El Chinito has a special affinity with the deity Babalu Aye, or Asowano and is one of the foremost authorities on the worship and ritual details of this orisha. While Oshun is the patroness of Cuba, Yemayá is the patron orisha of Havana, whose eponymous church is located in Regla. If you are born on or around September 7, the Virgin’s feast day, when her image is paraded in the streets of Regla, there is a good chance you may be named after her. It is Yemayá that unites El Chinito and I, as it is this orisha that we both have “crowned”, and more specifically, the same *camino* or avatar, Yemayá Okutí. It could also be that we are “*paisanos*”, of Chinese blood, as El Chinito refers to us. Needless to say there is a lot that connects us. Our friendship was instant and thus began, for me, an immersion in *Ilé Omi Atorun Wá*. On that first day of meeting, El Chinito invited me to a *santo* [priesthood initiation] that he was presiding over; his goddaughter was about to be initiated to Babalu Aye “direct” in the Lukumi tradition. A rare occurrence indeed, as most Lukumi readily state that crowning such a rare and complex orisha is a delicate and skilled operation, above and beyond the requirement and skill set of many orisha priests. Being invited to such an event was testament to the *confianza* El Chinito placed with me. What was to

follow and happily continues to the present day is a friendship and mentorship, both within all things Afro-Chinese but also all things Lukumi. In an interview conducted 14 December 2012, I invited him to share some of his biography:

José [J]: My father was born in Havana to *paisanos*, both his mother and father were from Canton. He worked the railways. His father, my grandfather had his Chinese ways. He would keep pigeons on the roof and make *caldo* (soup) with every last bit of them. You know, the Chinese eat every part of the animal [laughs]. Do you eat like that?"

[M]: No. Absolutely not.

[J]: [Laughing]... me neither, but that was his way. He just got on with it. My father was Abakuá, my uncles, every one on that side of the family, were ñañigos [inducted Abakuá members]. I wasn't sworn in. When I was a boy, my paternal grandmother said that I shouldn't be and so I never had to do it. Maybe she saw something back then...who knows? Nevertheless, my father and most of my family on that side were Abakuá, and, you know, Regla is an important center for ñañiguismo, it has that tough reputation. He was rather tough, a wildcard, and that is the time of people in Abakuá.

[M]: Was he a santero?

[J]: No, no. He was Abakuá. That was all he was interested in. He worked on the docks, it was tough manual labor. He worked all the hours god sent, we would see him every day, but he was so focused on maintaining our house and providing for us, that is the Chinese way.

[M]: Your mother looks quite Chinese in the photo you have above your *boveda*, what was your mother's heritage?

[J]: My mother was *mulatica*, her mother was black, Bantu, and her father was Chinese. I look quite Chinese...my eyes, my hair, you saw my brother, he is darker, he looks *indio*. [...] My mother, she had the temperament of a saint and was a great beauty. The sweetest woman, very calm, very caring. Everyone loved and respected her. May she rest in peace.

[M]: She was initiated?

[J]: Yes, she had Oshun made, but only later on in life. I was an adult and already initiated. When I was twenty-three years old or thereabout, she developed breast cancer. She was going to the doctor and she was also *prendido en santo* [destined or marked by divination to be initiated] but she didn't want to make *osha*, even

though she needed to for her health. Oshun was asking for her head. One day she saw how unhappy I was, I was just crying to myself, because I was really worried, and she asked me why. I explained that I would give anything to see her be initiated, because I was scared that I might lose her. She consoled me and told me not to worry, that because I wanted her to, she would do it. At that time we didn't have much money, so I pawned all my jewelry, all the things I had. So did she, and she made Oshun. Her Oshun was Ibu Aña, she got [possessed by] such a beautiful Oshun. Oshun saved her life. She went on to live another 15 years, happy and full of health.

José Francisco was initiated in Regla by two Afro-Cuban priestesses, Asunción Ylla and Delia Laza, pictured below. El Chinito says that in the early days he came across many difficulties accessing the religion and establishing himself as a priest in the wider community:

I was young when I got initiated, and you know, we, *los chinos*, appear a lot younger, I didn't even grow hair down there, [laughs] until my twenties and I wasn't taken seriously at all. When I would go to work a *santo*, I was turned away at the door, they took one look at me, and all they saw was a Chinese boy, they couldn't believe that I had *santo* made, and closed the door in my face. When my *madrinas* heard about this, they felt so sorry for me, they said, 'son, we are going to teach you everything we know and one day, these same people that turned you away will have to knock on your door and have a need for *your* help'. I learned everything with those old women.

And teach him they did. El Chinito credits his erudition to having good mentors:

They were *Ara Oko*, but those women were so knowledgeable and very well respected. No one could touch them, and no one understood why, when they had been reluctant to teach any of the more than 120 godchildren they crowned between them, why they confided their *secretos* in me. I think they saw something in me; maybe it was my *odu* [divination signs received at initiation]. While my friends were hanging out in the street or partying or chasing girls, I was with my *madrinas* learning, singing songs, asking questions and doing *brujería*. They became my world.

El Chinito explains that Babalu Aye or Asowano is an important deity for Chinese-Cubans in general and for him in particular for many reasons. First, according to El Chinito's Lukumi elders, before Dahomean-derived Babalu Aye propitiation was

established in Matanzas, there was a sizeable enclave of Arará worshippers in Regla, along with other distinct Afro-Cuban religions that have been maintained by slave populations in the area by way of Regla's prominence as an entryway for slaves to all parts of Cuba. Chinese and Afro-Cuban priests maintained the complexities of the worship of this deity in Regla and neighboring Guanabacoa unlike central Havana. El Chinito sees this as a legacy that was zealously guarded and rigidly maintained through the actions of a close-knit community of priests, many of which were of Chinese heritage. One of the eldest initiates of Babalu Aye in Regla is of Chinese and Kongolese origins and is given tribute by Chinito and other priests every time they perform a ceremony for the deity, sending to her house a part of the sacrificial offerings and gifts as a token of respect and acknowledgement of the presence of the deity in the elder priest, and to ensure, according to protocol, her blessings over the proceedings. Furthermore, El Chinito states:

Asowano is a unique orisha, a universe in his own right. He walks in the land of the orishas but also in the land of *Egun*, the ancestors. He is the only orisha that can mount a person regardless if they are initiated or not, and he can mount anyone regardless of a person's guardian orisha. When he does mount, his horse doesn't need to receive *achelelu* [a ceremony performed in order for the possessing orisha to speak], he just speaks. [...] His *patakines* [narratives/legends] speak of him being cast out of his Kingdom, and having nothing. But on his journey, he reaches a new land, Dahomey, and becomes king. Asowano is an orisha of conquering obstacles, of knowing what it is like to be cast out.

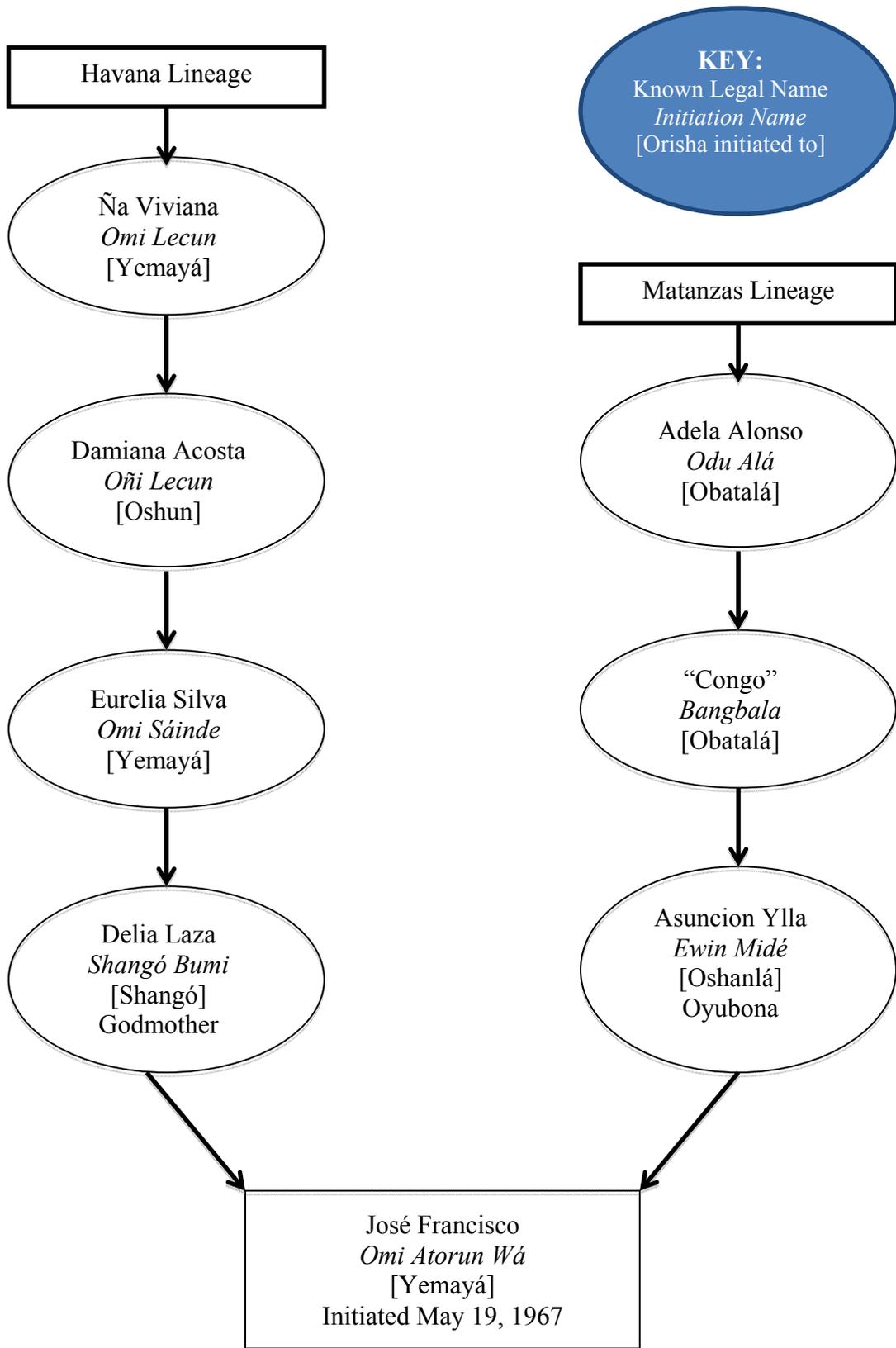


Figure 5.3 El Chinito's Lukumi lineage

I mention to El Chinito that Asowano's redemptive story parallels his own journey in orisha priesthood and he agrees emphatically:

Yes, yes, very much. And before I was initiated to Yemayá, Afrequeté Dosú, (an Arará/Dahomean name for Yemayá), I was known as a mount for *El Viejo* long before I was initiated to Yemayá. My Oyubona [second godmother] was especially devoted to Babalu Aye, he was her father in *santo*. She loved my Asowano.

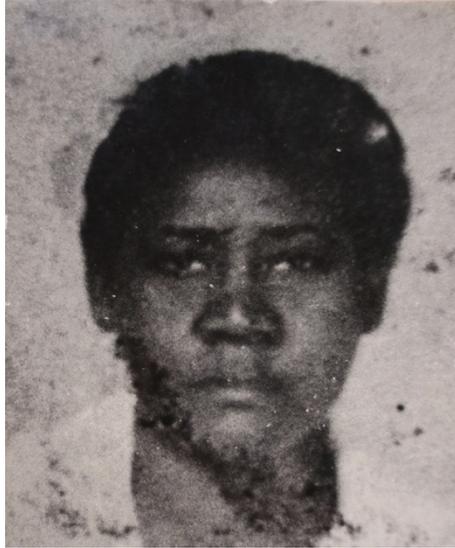


Figure 5.4 Delia Laza, *Shangó Bumi*
José Francisco's iyalarisha



Figure 5.5 Asunción Ylla, *Ewin Midé*,
José Francisco's oyubona

El Chinito places great emphasis on the intricate ceremonies and religious knowledge that he feels are in danger of being lost:

There is a song for everything. Everything! A song for lifting the *awan*, for dancing the *há*, for dancing the cane, to give dry wine on Babalu Aye's *yarará* [vessel], to blow tobacco smoke on him. There are so many details. When you initiate a child of San Lázaro, it is done at night and the only light that you have is by candles. Imagine, the ceremonies go on all night, and there is a ceremony for bringing the fire into the *cuarto de santo*. A child of Shangó brings in a lit coal from the kitchen hearth – all the cooking needs to be done on charcoal, and when the *omo* [priest of] Shangó brings in the flame he dances like this [El Chinito dances holding up an imaginary lit candle] and we all sing [sings song]. Nobody does this and hardly anyone knows these songs anymore. I try to teach and sing

these songs to my godchildren so that when I die, people continue to praise the orisha as I was taught.

El Chinito presides over a large *ilé orisha*, comprising members local to Regla, Havana, as well as nationally and internationally, with many godchildren visiting from Colombia, Mexico, North America and Europe. The formation of his international family is an interesting story:

I have never travelled, I live in the same house I was born in, and in fact the bed I sleep in is the one I was born in. I am a son of *okana meji*, for all the people you see here coming and going every day, I live alone. I love having people around, I love to cook, I am not happy if you are not eating something, it gives me a lot of pleasure to see someone eat. However, at night, when I close the front door, I am alone. It is just Yemayá, *El Viejo* (Babalu Aye / Asowano), and me. I'm very content with that (interview, 15 December 2012).

El Chinito explains his living situation as being presaged in *odu*, the divinatory signs that were cast for him during his initiation to Yemayá 46 years ago. His ruling *odu*, the one that is seen as the apical, governing *odu* of an olorisha's life is *okana meji*, a combination that is exceedingly rare and whose literature, oral, and textual narratives speak of someone that is destined to live alone:

I am a widow three times over. Now, I am practically a saint [he mock gestures the sign of the cross, making the lower cardinal point reach down a bit farther than is usually warranted by the Catholic Church]. We joke that we are not an *ilé* but a convent, we are all single and most of my godchildren are *viejitas* [little old women], we don't have husbands, boyfriends, lovers...just each other. My godchildren know I don't condone any *mariconería* [faggotry] here. We are serious, we leave that stuff outside, and it isn't welcome here. You haven't seen me get tough but I will and I have no problem sending anyone out (interview, 16 December 2012).

El Chinito is an influential member of Regla's orisha community and respected as such throughout the provinces. Although he does have international godchildren and is known throughout the island, his religious practice is firmly centered and rooted in Regla.

His godchildren are an extremely diverse group of multiracial people, ranging from heterosexual families, to gay and lesbian olorisha. Many travel from different provinces and countries to come to his house for religious counseling and ceremonies. Often, his godchildren, who are from rural parts of the country pass through Regla and spend a few days with their families in tow. His other godchildren that live close by and assist him on a daily basis tell me quietly how much more difficult it is for many families in the countryside, and especially, elder solitary priests. El Chinito understands this implicitly and, I witnessed on an almost daily basis, godchildren from *el campo*, arriving for a *visita*, secure in the knowledge that they will be welcomed and made to stay for at least lunch, and if El Chinito has his way, dinner too.



Figure 5.6 José Francisco (front, seated) surrounded by some of his godchildren that comprise his *ilé*

El Chinito is well aware of what his racial identification and perception mean today, and enjoys the irony from how different it was a few decades ago. El Chinito's articulation of being Chinese in a Cuban religious environment carries with it a form of religious capital that works to his advantage. His specialization in the worship of Babalu Aye also has important implications for his immediate community. Furthermore, he has taken his community efforts one step further, in the name of Asowano and established an organization focused on HIV/AIDS in the Afro-Cuban religious community. Labeled *Afro-Aché*, it was founded in 2000, in response to a perceived lack of government initiatives for HIV prevention, education, and awareness. Jafari S. Allen explains that although HIV/AIDS was not immediately associated with the homosexual community at the onset of the crisis in Cuba as it was in North America, "gay and other men who have sex with men have become the group with by far the highest incidence of HIV infection on the island" (Allen 2011, 146). Allen goes on to note that as in the north, it has been gay men and lesbians that are at the forefront of education, volunteerism, activism, and care within this field, which has gone wholly unremarked. Babalu Aye is the orisha closely associated with viruses and socially transmittable diseases – as well as healing them – and is the spiritual mascot of the religion and the outreach program that combines both spiritual and secular activities. El Chinito voices his motivations for doing so:

That organization was founded right here in this living room...with many respected Obás and olorishas of Regla and Havana. We have been recognized for our efforts and it is seen as a good thing. I have lost many godchildren to the virus, some of them didn't know until it was way too late and their immune systems were too suppressed to fight. I thought to myself, I can not stand by and do nothing [...] we work with health specialists to come and educate santeros, babalawos and practitioners about safe sex, about medication, we distribute information, and go with them to get tested and accompany them on their doctors' appointments. That's what we do as family and as members of the community. As

santeros, we hold an *awan*, [a healing ceremony connected to the orisha Babalu Aye] which is open to the public. Anyone can come, if they are seropositive or not. We do it specifically with those affected in mind, but every single person is welcome. We also conduct readings for those that need them and then carry out the offerings and *ebó* that the orisha mark in the divination (interview, 16 December 2012).

I asked El Chinito about the stigma associated with HIV, practicing Afro-Cuban religion and also race in Cuba:

There are many gay people in this religion, and we help many of those that do not get help elsewhere, or do not get help because of the taboo and stigma. I would say that the virus remains one of the biggest taboos not just in our Lukumi community, and many here, heterosexual or homosexual, whatever, are too scared to get help [from the government] because then everyone will know, and they are afraid that their family, friends, and neighbors will all turn their back on them. To be black, or mixed, to practice an Afro-Cuban religion, to be gay and then sick with HIV all those things mean life can be very hard for a person here. So I think it is our duty as a Lukumi community to help one another and provide the support that is not there outside of our *ilé* (interview, 16 December 2012).

Afro-Aché (see Figures 5.8 and 5.9) is one such volunteer organization that operates in the spaces made vacant through the lack of attention of state organs that do not recognize the particular requirements and struggles of being identified along alternative racial, sexual and religious lines. Indeed, different and separate instances in Cuba's recent history have been targeted as "social ills" resulting in Afro-Cuban religious practitioners and homosexuals being interred in forced labor camps for "re-education" in the late 1960s (Arguelles and Rich 1984, de la Fuente 2001, Saunders 2009 and Allen 2011).



Figure 5.7 Afro-Aché information leaflet



Figure 5.8 Afro-Aché information leaflet

As the head of a large orisha household and also by virtue of his training and the work that he carries out, El Chinito holds the title of “Obá Oriate”, a title given to those proficient in every facet of Lukumi religious practice, including divination, chanting, ritual protocol and more:

I don't consider myself to be an Oriate to give myself another title. I am an Oba because my godchildren need me to be one. I have trained four of my godchildren to be Oriates (interview, 16 December 2012).

On his sense of place and identity:

I consider myself a Cuban first, maybe a Chinese-Cuban second, and Afro-*Achinado* Cuban third. Above all else, I am Cuban, I know that we were considered for a long time as outsiders, as unwanted, but I am from this earth, of this country. My ancestors are *in* this earth, I was born here, that makes me as much Cuban as anyone else... And my religious ancestors, my Lukumi ones, my Palo ones, they were all African, and some were also Chinese. And yes, there is European and Taíno in there somewhere, but in mine and I am sure in everyone else that is Lukumi, they have Chinese as well as African elders that they must render homage to. It is our collective knowledge and working together that gives us *ashé* and allows us to continue to work. [...] We invoke our ancestors

continually, before every ceremony, so that they can lend their *ashé* to the event. They are our connection to the orishas and to this earth and to each other. If you don't know your elders, you can't really say you know who you are, spiritually. And that is a vital and very important piece of anyone. When I work the religion, when I am in the *cuarto de santo*, I am Lukumi. I have *Afrequeté Dosú* [Yemayá] crowned and she is the only one to pass any kind of judgment. When my godchildren come to my house and they salute the orisha by putting their head on the ground to render *moforibále* [prostration in front of the orisha shrine or an olorisha] they are ultimately paying respects to Yemayá, who resides in the vessel, and in my *lerí* [head] (interview, 20 December 2012).

The careful choice of El Chinito's words indicates the multiple and layered ways of identification that rely not just on physiognomy, but also on a culturally derived consciousness of racial mixing and religiosity. Through further reflection, we learn that José affirms ties to the land and soil indicating the importance of ancestral bonds that are also linked with physical space; these constitute the geography he inhabits. José also includes in his explanation the importance of his family being created through religious rather than blood ties, as a mark of it defining and understanding who he is, and the positions he holds within Lukumi. He ultimately relies on the spiritual, and his orisha Yemayá, his crowning divinity, which not only gives him a further identity indicating knowledge and deferring to her in terms of power and prestige, but also authority, both in his life and as the unifying bond with his orisha family.

It is important to understand religious familial and kinship structures, stressing the importance of heritage, lineage and hierarchy. I illustrated here the ways in which Afro-Cuban religion has and continues to be guided by the ethnic makeup of its members, the purposeful inculcation of ideas, symbols, and objects from a personal heritage and education to its adoption and wholesale use and impact within the religious setting. The transmission of religious heritage and lineage is achieved through a series of

conversations, repetitive liturgical and ceremonial praxis and an emphasis on the bounded, cohesive nature of the *ilé orisha* as autonomous units in a network of religious houses. The *ilé orisha* becomes more than a place, both spiritual and physical to “worship” orisha, it is intimately linked to a complex narration of identity, and kinship by way of both physical birth and religious ties. The *ilé orisha* is the foundation for accessing Afro-Cuban and Afro-Chinese persons and religious practices. A person that is initiated or aligns with an *ilé orisha* becomes part of that religious lineage of godparents and godchildren. These spiritual heritages unify people as “Lukumi” (as well as Ifá, Palo, and Abakuá,) that can produce claims to different religiously inspired kinship ties across racial categories.

Gendered, Racialized and Sexualized Religious Spaces

My discussions with members of Havana’s Afro-Cuban Lukumi community often organically touched on the issues of marginalization of practitioners with regard to Cuba’s racialized sex/gender constructions. I became increasingly aware that my focus of Chinese influence in Afro-Cuban religiosity opened dialogue on the experiences of religion by sexual minorities. My research drew attention to otherwise invisible Afro-Cuban/Afro-Chinese space making and its important implications not just for the racialization of its subjects, but also for sexuality. The subject of sexuality of Afro-Chinese religious practitioners is a subject that deserves much further analysis than can be offered in this current work and I make mention of it here, along with cursory interrogations to acknowledge its presence and call attention to the felt need to pursue this critical issue. Tanya Saunders’ (2009) work notes that the advances in public spaces

and discourse open to homosexual people in Cuba is uneven, as it privileges some groups of Cuba's LGBTQ population, mainly white and black men who have sex with men, and *travestis*, gay men who pass as women. Those that are left out are homosexual women and especially women of color, for whom there are no publicly recognized spaces or government-directed initiatives. State intervention in the battle to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDs has taken the form of producing programs to reduce the stigma and oppression associated with being gay. Emerging research on the implementation and reach of HIV programs has important impacts on different sexual and racial minorities, and in particular on the Cuban and Chinese-Cuban experience that has been touted as Cuba's sexual revolution (Saunders 2009). The results of several unpublished surveys conducted by the government on LGBTQ communities in Cuba show that state-initiated policies of inclusion have led to the allotment of greater public space and acceptance for gay male Cubans in particular. Saunders (2009) responds that these advances have failed to adequately assign space for their lesbian contingent and have rendered black lesbians, in particular, as socially marginal and invisible.

In my field journal entry of the day I interviewed El Chinito quoted above, I reflected on his moratorium on *mariconería* as an interesting comment that revealed several intermeshed personal and propagandist positionalities. *Mariconería*, or faggotry, is a derogatory term that often colored off the record conversations during my research. Its use can be understood within a broader social context where it is not the sexuality of the person that is being denounced, rather, how such behavior undermines state ideologies. The idea of faggotry, expressed by El Chinito refers to performativity that disrupts the ceremonial procedure at hand, misdirecting focus and disbanding the *ashé*

that Lukumi practitioners communally cultivate during initiations and ceremonies. Similarly, faggotry can be understood as being diametrically opposed to Revolutionary understandings of the “New Man”, that homosexual behavior in overtly flamboyant or sexualized manifestations was not welcomed because of sexual disgust, rather because it detracts from the nationalist cause. Homosexuals were “thought to be rapacious and flighty – concerned only with their own pleasure and unwilling to make sacrifices [for the Cuban nation] (Allen 2011, 68) and therefore something to be rejected. El Chinito was correspondingly giving a clear message of the type of behaviors that were deemed misaligned with the ritual proceedings and in the process, distancing himself from being associated with troublemaking action rather than being read as intended heteronormativity. Like race, sexuality plays a crucial factor in the state making and maintaining apparatus. The author M. Jacqui Alexander notes that when voting in favor of the anti-colonial nationalist party in Trinidad and Tobago, the country of her birth, her vote helped end foreign domination, but her homosexuality was subsequently criminalized by the new post-colonial state. The new nation-state inscribed in their citizens a marked sexual hegemony, producing a “heterosexual imperative of citizenship” the denial of which by homosexuals, “pose[d] a profound threat to the very survival of the nation (Alexander 1994, 360). I debated the ties that such an utterance may have to past lived-experiences of discrimination, violence, and repression not only for religious practices, but also for color, and sexuality. The very present history of multiple forms of persecution, and the intrusive ways in which the government regulate their citizens’ economic and social activities produces the shaky foundations on which black, gay and

Afro-Cuban religious practitioners move and participate in activities that are counterpoised to the prevailing ideological moorings of nationalism.

Further, the propensity for homo-normative Cuban experience has been understood in terms of specifically-raced gay male domination. Tomás Fernández Robaina (1996) tells us that attitudes and discrimination towards homosexuality vary in tone according to individual Afro-Cuban religious practices. They can inspire exaggerated performances of masculinity, which discourage and denounce homosexuality and sexual passivity. For example, many Abakuá fraternities, where *machista* values are rigidly upheld and promoted, deny membership to openly homosexual men, however, this prohibition does not extend to Abakuá members who have contact with homosexuals, “provided that the *Abakuá* acts as the “male” or active partner” (Robaina 1996, 205).

Ifá religious practices in Cuba afford limited membership and initiations to gay men and women, openly gay men cannot be initiated as *babalawo* because of their sexuality and women because of their gender. While these are commonly upheld conventions by adherents, in practice there are homosexual *babalawo* in Cuba and the diaspora. The Lukumi orisha traditions of Cuba maintain no barriers to initiation for homosexual men, or for women, and both form an estimably sizable portion of the priesthood. In practice, many gay and lesbian *olorisha* preside over large and prestigious *ilé-orisha*, and several gay men in particular, are ritual divination and initiation specialists, Obá Oriate.

Conversations I had with El Chinito and many other respondents that are aligned with Afro-Chinese *ile-orisha* were over-laden and under-laden with a discourse of gender and sexuality that requires further unpacking. El Chinito succinctly points to many of the

ways in which gendering and the performance of sexuality are questioned and addressed within the Lukumi field. El Chinito found himself excluded from the wider orisha community because of their perception of him as a boy, effectively characterizing and subjugating the Chinese-Cuban body as immature and incapable of operation within the Afro-Cuban religious field. El Chinito's particular experience of exclusion on the grounds of raced perceptions of his appearance propelled him to study and be mentored by elderly Afro-Cuban women, imbuing El Chinito with much coveted and zealously guarded religious capital in the form of intricate Lukumi knowledge on the ritual practices of marginalized orishas. El Chinito's ritual capital aids in leveraging his standing within the wider Afro-Cuban religious community, eclipsing previously held notions of immaturity of embodied *Sinalidad*. The large numbers of elderly, single women that comprise El Chinito's *ilé* may be a result of his earlier negative experiences as an under-developed other, and echoes negation of *Sinalidad* and the suppression of Afro-Cuban religious discourse experienced in the 1960s.

Celia, La China Obatalá

Celia Sen, “La China Obatalá” (Figure 5.9) arrived for our meeting at her daughter's house in the sidecar of her daughter's motorcycle at precisely the same time I did. Celia stepped out of the sidecar with ease, and I noticed she was wearing a beautifully beaded white bracelet, associated with her orisha, Obatalá. She was full of energy and warmth and moved with an agility and grace that defied her seventy years of age. I could picture her giving people half, or even a quarter of her age, a run for their money. Within the space of a few minutes she has greeted her extended family assembled

in her daughter's house, picked up the toys her grandchildren have scattered across the floor of her orisha room and made a huge pot of Cuban coffee. After pouring the café into a dozen demitasse cups and distributing them, she sits down opposite me and tells me with great aplomb, how nice it is to have some time to relax for a change.

We had agreed to meet on one of the few days off she was not working the religion, she was staying at her daughter's house for the holidays, a quiet time in the calendar of Lukumi religious events. The house is in the far north of Havana, where Celia has a large room to herself and where her orishas and the orishas of her daughter also reside. When she is working in the city, she stays in an apartment by the Malecón, with a fellow santera, with whom she has a very close friendship.

I had made the journey by foot to her daughter's house. I had little choice as it was the first Sunday following the start of the New Year and both *guaguas* [buses] and *carros de diez pesos* [shared taxis] were hard to come by, especially in this part of town. Being the start of a new year, and because I am a priest, Celia laid down an *estera* or straw mat in front of her Obatalá and performed a libation by sprinling water on to the floor from a half gourd while I prostrated and rang Obatalá's silver bell, his *agogo*. Celia intoned a *moyubá*, a Lukumi invocation, and then a short *oriki*, a praise poem for Obatalá, asking her guardian orisha to bless me this coming year with “*iré owó, iré omá, iré arikú babawá,*” blessings of money/prosperity, of knowledge and wisdom, and that I may be blessed to live a long and full life. Celia lit a candle in front of her *canastillero*, the cabinet containing her orishas, and we sat down for the interview. I asked her to tell me about herself:

Well, my name is Celia, I'm *Cubana* [laughs], I was born in Lawton but grew up in central Havana, in Gervasio, I was born 1st October 1943, my mother, Mayora Vascal was from Tenerife and she came to Cuba as a young child, my father's name was Manuel Sera, he worked on the railways and was from Canton. I have one brother, who is a Babalawo. I got married at 23, had three daughters and I was widowed at the age of 30. [...] I worked and raised my daughters by myself. They are my pride and joy and I have six grandchildren, 4 girls and 2 boys who are all healthy, thanks to God (interview, 1 January 2013).



Figure 5.9 Celia in front of her orisha shrine

[M]: How did you get involved in the religion?

Celia [C]: I was initiated at the age of 7 because of serious health issues. I suddenly got very sick and nobody knew what was wrong, the doctors could not diagnose it. I almost died... My mother had *santo* [initiated as a priestess] she had Oshun made, her *osha* [initiation] name was Okantomi and before I was made [initiated], we were always doing something. My mother was a tremendous spirit medium, she ran a small *centro* from her home and every week we had a *misa espiritual* [spiritist séance] I saw so many spirits, they were like family members. I had gotten very sick for the first time when I turned 6, and the spirit of one of the most famous *espiritistas* in Lawton who used to come...her spirit, *una conga*, called Ma Teresita – I will never forget – said that I needed to make *santo*. She said that Obatalá would be my doctor, my surgeon, and make sure I would live. My mother took me to be read with Orunla, and Orunla confirmed that I would be fine if I made *osha* and that I needed to make Obatalá as soon as possible. My mother got everything ready with the help of the *osha* community, as they knew it was for my health, and within 16 days I was initiated. I have been healthy ever since and right up to this moment I have had a very full life.

Celia's parents were of mixed Chinese and Spanish ancestry. Her mother was born in Spain and had moved with her parents to Cuba as a young child. Her father, who was a prominent member of Havana's Chinatown, and prior to the 1959 Revolution had owned an import and export business operating out of the capital, had met Celia's mother through the business. Her father who was a native-born Cantonese had migrated to Cuba as a small business entrepreneur. Although he was not an initiate, he was heavily invested in Havana's orisha community, supporting his wife and his daughter's involvement and receiving divination for business matters. Celia's initiating godparents preceding generations were very well known and respected Afro-Cuban and mixed Cuban Lukumi. Celia discussed with me the enduring importance of her ritual kinship ties by virtue of her initiation and related them to her genetic or biological family:

My *babalorishá*, my godfather was Apolinar González, Oshaweyé, everybody knew him as "Polo," he was also a child of Obatalá. My *oyubona*, Innocente Mariana was from an African family, she had Oshun name. My Obá was Liberato

Valdés, Ewin Letí, again a child of Obatalá. They were very, very strict, and they had their rules, it was their way or get out. That's how it was when I was a young person growing up in the religion. [...] Polo was white, and Liberato was black, I was Chinese and that sums up how it was back then, we are Lukumi and we are family! We make a distinction between family of blood, Oché [one of the *odu* verses connected with blood, family and relationships], and family of stone, *otá*. What lasts longer? [Pause] A stone doesn't go anywhere it isn't fragile like blood. That is how we understand our Lukumi lineage. When I die, I will be remembered in my *ahijados' moyubá*, they will call on me by my *osha* name, Oni Osun, and just like my elders do, I will continue to look after them.

Celia asserts that her multi-racial Lukumi heritage through initiatory descent is of great importance to her life and identity as a Cuban Lukumi priest. Every day she is surrounded by her biological family, her *oché*, as it is referred to, as well as her religiously affiliated family, her living godchildren and her orishas, whose enduring bonds are related using the metaphor of immutable stone. Sacred stones, or *otá*, are the material foundations for the consecrations of orishas and they form part of the hidden, sacred contents of orisha vessels (see Cabrera 1954, and Brown 2003a). The symbolic importance and permanence of stones is captured beautifully in a Lukumi ritual song, *oyigiyigi ota l'omi* [unmovable stone under water (Thompson 1993, 47)].

Polo (Figure 5.10), Celia's initiatory godfather was a huge influence in her life and it is her religious relationship with him that has greatly influenced the success of her career as a religious mentor and practitioner. The special relationship Celia shared with her godfather endured both Polo's migration from Cuba and his passing:

Up until the time *padrino* left for New York in the early seventies, I was assisting him in *oshas* that was my training. When he passed, he left a large house and had many crowned godchildren. Some of them started coming to Cuba to do their religious things and that is how I started working with them. I am called a lot work at *oshas* for foreigners; they trust me, and they know my lineage.

Polo, as Celia states, moved first to New York and then to California. Polo migrated to America when already relatively advanced in age and it was in the US where he passed in 2000. After his migration and up until to his passing, Polo continued to work the religion in the US, building an expansive *ilé* by initiating a large number of godchildren, as well as officiating as a peripatetic Obá Oriate for many of the orisha communities dotted around the country. Many US olorisha are religiously related to Polo and, from his status as pioneer of many Lukumi rituals performed on US soil, he is well remembered as an elder in the *moyubá*, the invocation prayer said before every Lukumi ritual to call the *ashé* of the elders that have passed.

Many of Polo's godchildren, and subsequent generations made the journey to Cuba following his passing. Some have forged relationships with Celia who they view as a religious connection or bridge to the lineage that they were initiated into. Celia, through being a religious godchild of Polo, has been an active participant in the ceremonies of these religious visitors. Several come to perform initiations in Cuba, often preferring to do them there rather than in their home country for a variety of reasons that hinge on money, politics, religious manpower and knowledge. They prefer to work with someone like Celia who is deemed family and trustworthy, rather than seek out different and unknown priests, to prevent being taken advantage of by unscrupulous priests. A form of religious capital that Celia has is her status as elder, one that is measured by years of initiation. Celia also continued to work with Liberato Valdés (Figure 5.11), the master of ceremonies for her initiation, whom she referred to as her "godfather of *odón*" referring to the large, sacred, inverted wooden mortar upon which a person is seated during initiation. Liberato was an Obá Oriate of immense knowledge and well respected by the

Lukumi community. It was with Liberato that Celia learned much of her religious protocol. Celia described Liberato as her ritual kin because of the privileged and central role he played in her initiation as Obá Oriate. At the time of interview, she had completed 62 years of initiation to the Obatalá priesthood. The achievement of advanced ritual age, such as Celia's conveys seniority, where the Lukumi traditionally mark elder status in 16-year periods. When a priest has attained 16 years of initiation, they are deemed an "alagwa" [Yorùbá: *alàgbà* – respected person/elder], meaning elder. For every further 16 years completed, the term "lagwa" is appended to the title as a way of flattering and honoring the person through *oriki* or praise poetry. Celia is therefore titled "alagwa, lagwa, lagwa" indicating her advanced status. This is something Celia is proud of:

There are many younger priests out there who don't have a lot of experience. There is an *odu* that says, "el que no oye consejo, no llega a viejo" [he who doesn't heed the advice, doesn't live to old age]. I must be doing something right [laughs]. Seriously, I take my duties very seriously and consult with Obatalá on all the important matters in life. I never go against his wishes for me and I have been fine doing that all my life... I think that is important, and that is what other people see in me, that is how they know they can trust me. I am not treating this as a business or for personal gain like so many people do nowadays. I was taught to respect people by my elders. Both Polo and Liberato Valdés were *sabios* [deeply knowledgeable, worldly] and they were great men in this religion. Liberato was so sharp and he didn't take any nonsense (interview, 1 January 2013).

Like El Chinito de Regla, Celia practices the religion full time and is financially sustained from it. She is called to help at various initiations across the capital. She asserts that she is in demand because of her religious lineage and because of her knowledge:

I grew up in this religion, I spent my time going from one ceremony to the next...I became proficient in many areas of working *santo* so that when I am called, I just get on with it. Nobody needs to tell me what to do. For example, when I get to a *santo*, I check that everything has been prepared, the coco, the table inside the *cuarto de santo* [used to hold all the items needed during the

ritual], the orishas – I check there is nothing missing. If there is something out of place, I fix it. You need to have a good eye for detail because it is the worst thing to be in the middle of an *osha* and find something is missing, it interrupts the sacred moment. I am mostly called to be the *oyubona* [the second initiatory godparent, that assists with all of the practical details of the initiation and whose duty it is to take care of the initiate during the weeklong process – bathing, clothing, feeding him or her]. That way, they have a Cuban *oyubona* alongside their godparent that brought them to Cuba. They become part of my religious family and I become part of theirs.

[M]: I want to ask how being Chinese-Cuban influences or affects the religious work that you do.

[C]: It has never been an issue, for one. I have always had respect, for my knowledge and because of my elders. The Lukumi are really mixed, like all Cubans. When we *moyubá*, you will hear the names of many *egun* [ancestors], both santeros and babalawos referred to, who were Chinese-Cuban, *los Chinos Lukumises*. There was “La China” Estevez, Luisa “La China” Silvestre *Oshun Miwa*, Adela Alonso “La China” *Odú Ala*, Raúl “El Chino” *Eshubi*, “El Chino” Tanke *Iroso Di*, and José “El Chino” Poey *Oche Yekun*, to name but a few. I am sure there are more if I thought about it. These were important priests, the architects of the religion we practice today. [...] I don’t think many people consider the extent of how much the religion rests on priests that were Chinese. I am very proud of my heritage and I see it as complimenting my religious life very well.

[M]: How Many godchildren abroad do you have?

[C]: [Exhales loudly] I don’t know, my son. A lot, I have been involved with people coming from abroad since Polo left and that was more than thirty years ago. It would be in the hundreds. Some come back regularly, some every few years when they can afford to, and others I see once and never again. I know it is hard to maintain contact, and they know where I am. I would definitely say it is a lot. I have maybe 20 that come to Cuba every year, or send people to me. I am very busy with all that (interview, 1 January 2013).

Celia’s extended network of international godchildren help to insulate Celia from facing some of the hardships of living on the island. Although there are fluctuations and times wherein Celia may not see a foreign godchild for an extended period, when they do come to Cuba and work with Celia, they bring foodstuffs, presents in the form of clothes, toiletries and small electronics. They also pay for their religious ceremonies and services

in foreign currency, including the *derecho*, or “right”, which is a form of compensation designed to honor the status, time, and *ashé* that the priest brings to the ceremony. Like most secular things in Cuba, nationals pay for goods and services in Cuban pesos (CUP), and foreigners pay, often at a higher order using a different currency, the designated Cuban convertible peso (CUC), pegged to the US dollar. As I indicate in Chapter IV, the cost of Lukumi ceremonies for foreigners in Cuba is often a great deal more than a Cuban national living on the island would pay. The funds that are charged to foreigners are an indication of the disparity in the socio-economic levels of practitioners on and off the island. Further, funds from foreigners, as in the case of Celia, help to maintain her and her immediate family in between visits, and can be thought of as another form of [religious] family remittances.



Figure 5.10 Apolinar "Polo" González, Oshaweyé. Celia's Lukumi godfather



Figure 5.11 Liberato Valdés, Ewin Letí. Celia's Obá Oriate

The experiences of the priests I have introduced above indicate a racially (and sexually) complex portrayal of Lukumi religious practice, one that has historically and contemporarily relied upon the actions of Cuban-Chinese and Afro-Sino-Cuban practitioners. The life histories of both El Chinito and Celia indicate that identity is composed of several distinct ideas and ways of identification. El Chinito's early negative experiences of rejection from the Lukumi tradition served to temper his and his godmothers' resolve to ensure that he would have the religious knowledge that would make him not only self sufficient as a priest but also a prized and sought after member of the community. El Chinito's personal devotion to the orisha, Babalu Aye informs much of his practice; he dedicates his time and energies to doing work for the community via Afro-Aché in the deity's name, and for those that are deemed as falling under his care, he allows access to those that need either practical or spiritual help.

Transnational Lukumi Ties: A Network of People, Gods and Goods

On one of the few occasions when we are alone, Celia wants to show me something that she has tucked away in the armoire next to her orisha cabinet. Padded in many layers of tissue paper and several plastic bags whose knots are so tight it takes a full ten minutes for Celia to carefully unpick them, is a large coffer. It is approximately eight inches in length, six inches high, and made of sterling silver. The chest was commissioned by one of Celia's closest godchildren, a Mexican priest of Oyá who now lives in Vancouver, Canada. Celia is slowly preparing to have the orisha Oduduwá consecrated for her; it is the ultimate in satellite orishas a Lukumi olorisha can aspire to "receive". Oduduwá is reserved for elders and is the orisha that will eventually reside in

this silver chest. This is, according to Celia, the most expensive item she has ever owned. The coffer is impressive and an exceptional gift by any standards, however, I am equally struck by the collection of items that fill Celia's cupboard. Inside the armoire is a wealth of items that Celia's godchildren have gifted her over the years. Some of these are used religiously and are regularly incorporated in orisha initiations and celebrations. There are piles of neatly folded and color-coordinated expensive cloths, *pañuelos*, used to adorn orisha vessels with which they are "dressed". These panels have been commissioned in the home countries of her *ahijados* and no expense has been spared on the lavish materials and ornate trimmings that condense a great deal of artistry and flare into each piece.

The next shelf down holds a vast collection of secular items: perfumes, fans, jewelry, purses, even small electronics that have been given as gifts for Celia's participation in *pinaldo* ceremonies and orisha anniversaries. She jokes that her wardrobe amounts to *un bazar* [a bazaar], and jests that she has more here than is available for sale in Carlos III, Havana's famous shopping mall. Celia's cache is an accumulation of tangible goods arising from her direct participation in Afro-Cuban religious functions, mainly for and with foreign priests in Cuba. Celia is privy to circulations of goods that many Cubans on the island do not have access to and carefully guards these items to buffer her family against possibly future austerity. Celia is also aware of the precarious position that working with foreigners in an unregulated religious manner puts her in. Cuban olorishas who work with foreigners run the risk of being accused of swindling by the authorities, a serious offense that will result in an *asedio*, a harassment charge designed to protect tourists.

Along with the *derecho*, the money paid to *olorishas* such as Celia for the time and *ashé* they lend to the ceremonial event, the person for whom the ceremony is carried out may also give gifts. The type of gifts varies according to the means of the individual, and the type of gift received may be influenced by several factors: initiatory age, status, and the role each participating priest plays within the ritual proceedings. The godmother or godfather of advanced initiatory age may well receive a more lavish and costly gift than a junior or inexperienced priest that has a supportive or peripheral function within the ceremony. Celia credits Obatalá for bringing her the godchildren that are thoughtful enough to bring these items, and she is quick to stress that her *ahijados* are equally welcome independent of money or tributes. As Sarah J. Mahler and Katrin Hansing fittingly show, the adoption of a transnational religious lens can uncover “religious ties between Cuba and other nations, ties that disrupt the convenient fiction of modern day Cuba as an isolated outpost of Communist zeal” (Mahler and Hansing 2005, 42). Greater use of a religious lens is needed to understand fully the socio-economic and the cultural impact of transnational Lukumi networks, as well as how such flows of knowledge, people, and religion itself have been affected by both domestic and international politics and relations.

Celia does not have a telephone herself and so relies on handwritten letters for correspondence with her *ahijados*. These are delivered sporadically by visitors and her responses are sent with people that visit her, (such as myself) who post them on her behalf once back in the U.S. With the rising popularity of home DVD and VCD systems in Cuban homes, several of her godchildren have started to record “visual letters” with home camcorders and burn them to disks so that Celia can then play them when she is at

her daughter's home. Celia thus gets to see and hear her godchildren rather than reading about them. New media such as these are producing what Aisha Beliso-De Jesús terms “multilateral transnational linkages” (Beliso-De Jesús 2013, 704) that allow for the restructuring of space, circulation and travel. Coincidentally, the use of video recording devices specifically *within* ritual settings is becoming increasingly common. Their use and the distribution of classified or secret ritual processes is causing concern among practitioners, Celia included, who see this as an unwelcome and sacrilegious intrusion. Lukumi ritual is premised on highly policed ritual spaces that are only accessible by the initiated, and thus unsuited to being recorded because of the potential of being viewed by those that fall outside of the initiate remit. Beliso-De Jesús points to the curious phenomenon of those priests that condemn recording yet own, watch and circulate videos they have in their position – simultaneously celebrating and denouncing their existence (Beliso-De Jesús 2013, 706). Lisa Knauer notes the place these “audiovisual remittances” have in grassroots transnationalism of Cuba with its diasporas, and that these connections help to establish and maintain social capital and reshape what can be determined as a global Afro-Cuban cultural “scene” (Knauer 2009, 161).

Both El Chinito and Celia's overseas godchildren indicate what has been occurring over the last few decades: a progressive development of transnational connections of priests and devotees from various countries that form a political economy of religious movement. While neither priest has had the opportunity to travel abroad, even for a short visit, their international counterparts bring news, information, goods and people to Cuba, and in exchange, these priests and many others offer information and services of a religious nature. Celia's godchildren in California have been trying to

persuade her for some time to visit them, a trip that they are willing to arrange and collectively fund for her to spend a few weeks with them. The trip would not be for religious purposes. Instead, the express purpose for Celia is to get to experience being in her godchildren's own homes, with their families and life in America in general. While she expresses this with great pride and happiness that her *ahijados* would go to such lengths, she is uncharacteristically ambivalent about going:

Well, I'm a *vieja* [laughs] and I don't want to be stuck in a foreign country, God forbid, and something happens to my girls or me while I am gone. No, I think I am happy for them to visit me and to see them on the [DVDs]. If I was a bit younger, maybe, I also don't like the cold! [laughs] And I don't speak the language, I wouldn't know what is going on (interview, 1 January 2013).

These experiences serve to highlight the multiple ways in which *la Cubanidad* is negotiated in Afro-Chinese religious practice. Priests are able to invoke the *Chineseness*, or *Sinalidad*, inherent in their Afro-Chinese ancestors. That is present in every religious event in terms of the *moyubá*, as indicated by Celia, and they may also claim, via the same religious ancestry, that by being Lukumi, a semblance of *Africanness* by virtue of Afro-Cuban elders, although passed, continues to play central and important roles in their everyday lives.

The terminology used within Cuban-making discourse is inextricably linked to the ability to effectively and successfully delineate the processes of identity formation, the ability to communicate the nuances that underlie the process and its impact on state ideas of *Cubanidad*. Descriptors such as Afro-Cuban, Afro-Chinese and Chinese-diasporic can be confusing, and contradictory if not handled carefully according to the specific trajectories and histories of race and identity-making in Cuba in light of the plurality of religious identity markings noted above. In their own terms and also separately, Chinese

and African persons are portrayed as having very well delineated histories, experiences and contributions. Their unions call to mind the problems raised by ascribing identity ascertained by race and ethnicity compounded by a further mixing and layering of the ethnicities of racialization of the religious kinship lines.

Official discourse on Cuban national character has been forged on what Ferrer calls inclusive and exclusive constructions of Cuban identity (Ferrer 1999, 39).

Accordingly an excluded factor was the ability to discuss the diversity of race, instead of purposefully articulating and enforcing discussions centered on fraternity and solidarity for producing an accepted *Cubanía* or *Cubanidad*. José Martí as a key figure in Cuba's fight for independence furthered this notion of a Cuban nation inclusive of, but not determined or defined by its racial profile. Writing in the early 1890s, his rhetoric included the following statement: "Man is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black. Cuban is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black" (Martí 1963, II, 298-99). According to Christine Ayorinde, Martí dismissed race as a social construct and sought to forge commonalities that would define a national identity, and allay fears of the nation being subsumed by larger, hostile U.S. powers and identities (Ayorinde 2004a, 34). Similarly, Fernando Ortiz's most prized contribution later became a model for furthering a raceless Cubanity. Usefully, transculturation moved beyond essentialist and ethnocentric notions of acculturation. However, transculturation served to privilege and further reify two cultures present in Cuba: Spanish/European and African rather than equalizing all as creative, dynamic and transformative. Native Taíno and especially Asian or Chinese were relegated to third and fourth orders of importance within this transculturation process, as indicated by the propensity to concentrate on the importance

of African and European influences. The same was to be said of religious mixing (Iznaga 1989, 12; and Ayorinde 2004a, 57).

I offered the above examples of popular imaginings of the Chinese in Cuba, and juxtapose them with the life histories and places that current Afro-Chinese practitioners occupy. I am inspired by the difference in two prevailing pre-occupations of Cuban informal renderings of the Chinese in Cuba: on the one hand, the pantomimed Chinese *brujo* or wizard, and the respected, agentive and knowledgeable, Chinese priest or *olorisha*. I posit that the polarity of Chinese/Afro-Chinese subjectivities has been fashioned as a result of the historical absence of any direct and in-depth articulation, acceptance, or acknowledgment of Afro-Chinese as a social, cultural or racial identity. Afro-Chinese absence is mirrored in the construction of Afro-Cuban religiosity, whereby any contributions attributable to Chinese and Afro-Chinese priests and worshippers are subsumed within the prioritized and privileged category of “African”. Celia and El Chinito, themselves, their Chinese and mixed religious and blood ancestors, are testaments to the understudied and misunderstood facets of the negotiation and production of Lukumi religion according to racial and ethnic demarcations. Gregor Benton (2013) warns us that the transculturation is weak in its ability to help us understand religious encounter for two reasons: first by the lack of focus and contribution of the Chinese in the model, and second, for a lack of understanding of specifically Chinese cultural interaction in Cuba. We therefore require a different model than the existing understanding of transculturation, one that is able to detect the subtleties of cross racial input and religious causality, if we are to adequately observe, record Chinese and Afro-Chinese persons in the Afro-Cuban religiosity and its theoretical explications.

Aside from the foregrounding of black and European experiences in the transculturative understanding currently being offered, there is a lack of discussion of the significant multiplicity, flux, and dynamism that is inherent in every racial/ethnic category that makes up the model. Moving from a broad perspective, to one that looks at the individual components of the existing model, a new perspective is sought, where Chinese transculturative understanding needs to emphasize rather than ignore the synthesizing, polytheistic and heterogeneous traditions that are constituents of the umbrella term of “Chinese religion”. If the Chinese are to be restituted into the model of transculturation, so too must the particular experiences, histories and identities of Afro-Chinese be entered into, rather than relegated to an oblique African subjectivity.

The pronounced projection of a raceless nation in Cuba from 1902 clearly did not result in a state where racism did not exist in everyday life and has led to interesting ways in which Chinese, Afro-Chinese are imagined and depicted in Cuban vernacular and religious terms. The deployment and prevalence of a multitude of Spanish aphorisms of the Chinese seeks to separate and “other” the Chinese in relation to accepted definitions of transculturated Cubanity. Further, the distinction and separation created by the view of the Chinese as strange, impenetrable wizard/*brujo* divides religious spiritual and religious action in terms of ethnic polarity: the transculturated Afro-Cuban santero or palero, falls within the Cubanizing parameters of identity and action. The untrammelled and unknowable witchcraft of the other/foreign element is embodied in the practice of the Chinese. The space within transculturation that should be occupied by the Chinese has resulting in the conjuration of the imagined Chinese, foreign, exotic, and feared for harboring unknown powers, which are mocked in speech and performance but respected

or reviled, and motivated by fear of difference. Fear of the imagined Chinese may have its roots in an Orientalizing discourse that transculturation has unwittingly furthered. Certainly, the ways in which Afro-Chinese relations may be viewed as suspect and anti-*Cubanidad* may bear directly on current renderings of social ordering.

The above data illustrate the importance of understanding that both Chinese and Afro-Chinese identities and connections are not static, neither are their historicities a unified trajectory. It is clear that the emergence of the Afro-Chinese was born out a clear historical moment associated with transnational economies and colonial furtherance of sugar production. According to Claude Meillassoux such a historical moment should be understood within a continuum of identity formation, not its denouement for its constituents. Black and Chinese subjectification and definition in contrast to white categories is fleeting, occurring at the moment of enslavement and indenture; it rapidly leads to a reconfiguration of identity, which is centered on an ambiguity in status and marginality of the slave's or coolie's social identification (Meillassoux 1975). Following the incipience of servitude, a de-commoditization process occurs, causing a new social identity to emerge, and a process of incorporation into the host society (Kopytoff 1986, 65). We can build on this understanding of transformational cultural and religious manifestations to include the experiences and development of Chinese and Afro-Cuban fusion.

We can glimpse from the work of Chuffat Latour, Wilfredo Lam, and others that the Afro-Chinese became a significant and complex categorization for the connections between Chinese and Afro-Cubans, one that developed out of but not governed by colonial and economic forces. These unions produced a new identity within the existing

topos of the Cuban nation. Afro-Chinese is a type of unwarranted *mestizaje* that had no prior exigency or governmental apparatus that could offer a response of definition. These unions are similar to what Whitten and Corr (2011) discuss of connections between black and Indigenous peoples of South America, in particular Amazonian Ecuador. These unions resulted in ethnic merging unmediated by the state, and thus producing a crisis of existing racial classification by the emergence of a new *mestizo* built on previously polarized *negro* and *indio* paradigms. Such offspring were conceptualized as *zambo* in colonial and contemporary discourse and as *yumbo* within indigenous cultures (Whitten and Corr 2011, 62). Their very presence troubles existing racial orders and provokes great anxiety to existing orders of colonial power because this mixture was not engineered or mediated by hegemonic, white forces. Furthermore, the *zambo* came to represent “bodies of human beings with shamanic powers... to challenge that control system” (Whitten and Corr 2011). Both the feared *mestizaje* and embodied supernatural powers echo the experiences related above. Hierarchies of power that are contingent on polarized, racially separate beings are contested by their unification, and, crucially, phenotypic characteristics become intimately associated with cultural and religious characteristics.

Through textual and artistic productions, early twentieth century Afro-Chinese intellectuals began to fashion a topology of their own agency and achievements in contrast to the historical course of events that brought their preceding generations to Cuba. The isolation and reduction of specifically Chinese elements in the schema of transculturation produced a skewed understanding of the constitutive ethnicities, privileging and polarizing the process to black and white forces. The lack of focus and

inclusion of the Chinese, and later, Afro-Chinese enabled misunderstanding and racialized tension to exist openly in the public sphere, as witnessed in popular sayings that set the Chinese apart and outside official the official discourse of Cubanity. In contrast, the continued complicity of Afro-Chinese priests in the crafting of Afro-Cuban religiosity was subsumed in existing discourse as being attributed to African transculturation. The voices and lived experiences presented here, update these historical processes and stress the need for a new understanding of the trans-diasporic processes and religiosity that evidently constitutes Cuba's contemporary religious landscape.

CHAPTER VI HAVANA'S CHINATOWN

You know instantly you have arrived in the Barrio Chino by the huge portico / *pailou* [La Gran Puerta] that looms over the west entrance at the intersection of Calles Dragones and Amistad. From there, Calle Zanja, the major thoroughfare leads you to Calles Cuchillo and Salud, which are the busiest streets in the Chinese quarter. Zanja means 'ditch' and recalls the previous landscape of open muddy sewage drains and running water that constituted this once undesirable part of Havana, as the Chinese initially encountered it. Today it is a multi-use environment, awash with shops, restaurants, and homes. You can glimpse Chinese murals, red lacquered architecture and if you look up, amidst the hanging laundry, loose wires and birdcages, you can see a myriad of storefronts with faded lacquered and painted Chinese characters next to inauguration dates spanning the last two centuries of businesses that have come and gone. Calle Cuchillo, literally – Knife Street – cuts through from Zanja to the heart of the Barrio Chino where the majority of its Chinese mutual aid associations are located in close proximity to one another – six are located on Calle Dragones alone. At the northern end of Cuchillo, next to the Kwong Wah Po newspaper and the perpetually under construction Chinese museum hangs a brass plaque with a poem to Chinatown that reads:

<i>Yo te espero</i>	I wait for you
<i>bajo los signos rotos</i>	under the broken signs
<i>del cine cantonés.</i>	of the Cantonese cinema.
<i>Yo te espero</i>	I wait for you
<i>en el humo amarillo</i>	in the yellow smoke
<i>de una estirpe deshecha.</i>	of a lineage undone.

From *El Barrio Chino* by Miguel Barnet, 1940.

The poem to Chinatown is one of many verses on the Barrio penned by one of Havana's most famed living ethnologists. It hangs, with wry poetic justice, slightly forlorn and weather beaten, amidst many closed storefronts fenced off, whose once grand façades have been covered in scaffolding for years, signaling stalled structural renovations as part of a government initiative to give the tourist destination a cosmetic overhaul. Chinatown is a place whose Chinese residents "of a lineage undone," as the poem extols, are feeling increasingly isolated from their cultural legacies as the state continues to promote the Barrio as a major destination paradoxically rendered as 'authentically' Chinese.

Initially established by Chinese that had fulfilled their contracts, former indentures started opening businesses there as early as 1858 (López 2008, 59) and became an urban beacon for Chinese settlement. Havana's Chinatown population was further buoyed by a successive wave of (free economic) migration around 1917, when restrictions to Chinese entry to Cuba were lifted, as 30,000 Chinese entered Cuba directly from China, and circuitously from California and Mexico to work in Cuba's bustling agricultural labor market (Pérez de la Riva 2000, 178). By the mid 1920s, Chinese-owned fruit and vegetable stalls, restaurants, tailors, watch and shoe repair shops and groceries filled the Barrio (López 2013, 165-166). A 1927 tally of Chinese-owned and operated businesses in Havana reported a total of 535 fruit stands, 118 food stalls, 293 laundries,²³ and 63 groceries (Herrera Jerez and Santana 2003, 41-42). Havana's Chinatown was also a nexus of *huiguan*, Chinese mutual aid associations or fraternal societies, organizations that were a nexus of transnational movement and communication operated by and for

²³ Called "laundromats" in Cuba. See Yrmina G. Eng Menéndez 2007, 136, note 128.

Chinese. Each of the societies that are in operation today were established in the decades either side of the turn of the nineteenth century. Their function at that time was to help newly arrived Chinese quickly acclimatize to life in Cuba. They helped the newly landed to find work, access healthcare, acted as informal creditors, and helped to legally change or modify Chinese names to European ones.

With the spread of regional branches to many of the larger sugar provinces of the island, these associations, also called “tongs” or guildhalls, acted as lifelines, allowing Chinese to meet with people from their clan or geographical vicinity of origin. Over the course of a century, these societies have weathered a changing Cuban demographic, adapting their mission and purpose accordingly. Cuba as a whole, and especially Havana’s Chinatown and regional communities, witnessed a dwindling native Chinese population from massive outflows of Chinese-Cubans both before and after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Successive generations of mestizo Chinese-Cuban descendants surfaced as the dominant Asian demography. The impact of these large-scale migrations has meant that Chinatown and its associations have significantly altered in terms of member identifications over time. They have reinvented themselves over many decades, relaxing the criterion of being native Chinese born, or *jus sanguinis* for membership, to one of *jus soli*, opening their doors to Cuban born Chinese descendants. These changes in Cuban-Chinese demographics raise questions of what it means to be “Chinese” in Cuba, and the significance of having and politically ascribing space, identified by and for its Chinese presence, given the mixed heritages and political implications of Cuban identifications. The fairly recent economic and political interest in fostering partnerships and channels of communication that has developed between Cuba and the Dragon –

China, has meant that Chinatown and its associations have come under the spotlight, as a state project of regeneration and for some Cubans to be able to explore transnational connections. Havana's Chinese quarter thus becomes a space where orientalist exoticism is promoted for state benefit, and whose residents, workers and interested citizens have had to critically examine their role and place within Havana's racial taxonomies as well as the wider Cuban social and cultural milieu.

As sites for the preservation, practice and now state favored promotion of inherited Chinese customs and religious rites, the Barrio Chino is rediscovering, and in some instances reinventing, Chinese culture and religion to appeal to a wide range of people by using the materials, people and structures available. The Chinese associations are distinct, governmentally sanctioned channels of communication for Cubans and China; their major focus was helping newly arrived Chinese understand Cuba, but they are now facilitating Chinese-Cuban to get to know China. The Chinese mutual aid associations assist with bone repatriation for those who die in Cuba and have willed and left money for their remains to be taken to China for proper burial. Ties to filial piety, ancestry and the land remain a highly important process for many Chinese. Cuban cemeteries are thus seen as temporary resting places for Chinese cadavers until the time it is possible for their descendants to fulfill these requests. The Chinese associations also aid the living in getting to Cuba, visiting family, finding work and industry placements, and language and cultural exchanges, for periods ranging from months to years.

These exchanges allow Chinese-Cubans to understand better their heritage, many of whom are third, fourth and higher generations of migrants (see Mitzi Espinosa Luís' story in Luís, 2004, and López 2013). As a result of this focus on the east, Cubans are

forging new personal ties with China, as well as with Chinese family located in other global diasporas, unearthing genealogies previously obscured by a dominating nationalizing rhetoric, and resuming participation in expansive creolized transnational relationships. Surprisingly, many of these Cuban-Chinese associations, through their people, have an active role in shaping Afro-Chinese religious practice. Shrines dedicated to Chinese Gods in Chinatown form part of contemporary Afro-Cuban religious topography. Chinese olorisha and babalawo, who have connections to Havana's Chinatown and its associations, utilize this space in novel ways that help detail the extent of discernible Afro-Chinese practice. In Chapter VI discuss the ways in which many Chinese intimately connected to the Barrio, and who make their livelihoods from it, are deeply enmeshed in Afro-Cuban religion and negotiate their practices according to both Afro-Cuban tenets and Chinese influences. These persons also operate in a complex transnational nexus that is made possible by a combination of Chinese-Cuban identity and diasporic Afro-Cuban religious connections. The scene is further enhanced by the interplay of secret, Chinese masonic societies whose impact on these persons is discussed here. These priests are breathing new life into the Chinese quarter and making it their own through their worldviews, practices and participation within Chinatown, a geographic and cultural center that also acts as a gateway to international trade and travel. These Chinese-Cuban initiates are mobile, forming links through businesses and religious contacts abroad and realizing opportunities that are closed to the majority living on the island. In turn this has an impact on their lives in Cuba as well as the associations to which they belong.

In the present chapter, I also investigate the religious landscape of Havana's Chinatown, its associations and how these relate to the emergence and negotiation of Afro-Chinese religion. Havana's Chinatown started out as a necessity for its green Chinese migrants. During the last century, before the 1959 Revolution, it had become better known as a site of red light and black market activity, negatively impacting the already fragile and marginalized Chinese racialized subjectivity. The district gained notoriety as a site of underworld activity including prostitution and organized crime. Of particular concern was the Barrio's connection to drug use; Eduardo Sáenz Rovner writes that because opium use as opposed to other, widely used drugs, was confined to the Chinese in the Barrio, this greatly heightened xenophobia and contributed to maltreatment (Sáenz Rovner 2008, 46). As a result, prejudices, observable in Ortiz's early work, entered academia: "Through opium, homosexual practices, and other highly developed corruptions of its secular civilization, the yellow race weakened [Cuba's] moral fiber" (Ortiz 1916, and quoted in Sáenz Rovner 2008, 54).

Since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and with dwindling numbers of native Chinese in Cuba, Havana's Chinatown has been under the spotlight, and has recently been subject to vigorous projects of renewal and revitalization by the state for economic purposes. Kathleen López writes that the changing landscape and demographics of the Barrio Chino led by the government and specifically by non-native Chinese over the last 30 to 40 years have resulted in its re/production being filled with contradictions and tensions. These frictions are a result of differing formations and claims of Chinese identity and productions of a Chinatown that is supposedly fashioned after ideals of Chinese cultural

authenticity (López 2009, 177), when in fact, the project is driven by “mixed” heritage Cubans, and motivated by increasing its value as a tourist destination.

Chapter VI illuminates some of these cultural and identity tensions by focusing on Chinese institutions in Chinatown, their shrines, and orisha and Ifá practitioners of Chinese descent that live and or work within Barrio Chino. These institutions, all founded around the turn of the nineteenth century with specific goals in mind, have long and complex histories; each is struggling to come to terms with its identity and is facing economic barriers.

La Caridad, Guanyin and Oshun

On Calle Salud is located the government-sponsored Casa des Artes Chinas that helps to keep Chinese culture alive. Almost opposite it, on the corner of Manrique, is the Presbyterian Church dedicated to Nuestra Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre [Our Lady of Charity and Copper], the patroness [*la patrona*] of Cuba. It is an incredible and busy church. La Caridad is syncretized with Oshun, the deity of fresh water and, along with La Caridad, is also seen as the Afro-Cuban sovereign of Cuba. Quite unusual is the fact that this church also houses a painting of Guanyin, the female Buddhist bodhisattva that hangs to the west of the main altar. The Chinese Consul donated it in the 1950s when the church was under the control of Chinese Franciscan Monks (López-Calvo 2009, 94); it was presented by Chung Ma Cu of the Saint Joseph School of Art for the Deaf and Mute in Hong Kong [personal communication with Mitzi Espinosa Luís, 2012]. It is a curious composure of Chinese Buddhist and Christian imagery, as it depicts the Virgin Mary as the Bodhisattva, cradling the baby Jesus in her arms. Her head is veiled and depicted with

a Christian inspired gloriolo. Cuban printed prayer cards in the style normally associated with Catholic Saints are printed for Guanyin (and Sanfancón); these contain an image and a prayer in Spanish (see Appendix III) and are distributed in Afro-Cuban religious kiosks that offer yellow candles and fresh sunflowers for Oshun. Aside from the circulation of these physical goods, used and circulated in interesting ways between these three female deities, there is also the very popular and legendary story of Guanyin appearing in Cuba. In 1880, a Chinese in Matanzas, by the name of Li Yong, saw a vision of Guanyin on the banks of the sea “dressed in silk with a bunch of flowers in a basket.” Her appearance was taken as a sign that she had come to save her children from hardships (Crespo nd).



Figure 6.1 Painting of Guanyin hanging in la iglesia de la Caridad del Cobre in Havana's Chinatown

The overlapping and cross-referencing of imagery and associated propitiatory symbols are complex contemporary renderings of syncretism, as Guanyin is an important deity for Chinese-Cubans, as discussed below. However, as López-Calvo writes, there is a third order of syncretism – some Chinese in Cuba see this deity as the Chinese version of Oshun (2009, 94).

The painting and its positioning suggests that the syncretism between Guanyin and La Caridad del Cobre is both warranted and welcomed, unlike overt iconography of Oshun which does not appear in this or any other church dedicated to La Caridad. However, that is not the only syncretism being made here as Guanyin is equally, if not more, syncretized with Oshun. Guanyin's image, which I discuss in Chapter IV, graces countless Afro-Cuban altars. It may be possible that the syncretism refers to Oshun or may have occurred by way of Oshun rather than directly between European and Catholic elements.

Havana's Chinatown contains a large number of Chinese mutual aid associations, *huiguans*. Initially they were established to provide help to Chinese bachelors in Cuba through practical means. Between 1900 and 1929 there were 35 state registered associations in Havana (López 2013, 177). Their activities consisted of credit/mutual aid, providing temporary accommodation, letter writing and paperwork help, as well as promoting cultural and festive celebrations of the Chinese lunar calendar. Over the decades, these associations changed and adapted, along with the needs of the Chinese-Cuban population. Newspapers ran sensationalist reports of Chinatown and specifically fingered the associations for having suspected links with the black market, gang warfare, gambling, opium, and prostitution. These reports heightened public suspicion of the

Chinese as clannish and impenetrable and greatly furthered *sinophobia*; the apogee of this suspicion culminated in a nationwide closure of Chinese associations around 1967. For 25 years, because of governmental imposition, the associations went underground to avoid public scrutiny and have since re-emerged as government licensed organizations that have stated aims of assistance and education. Already suffering from being misunderstood, these associations were deemed lifelines to the Chinese community, the roles they play for their members, how they are perceived, and what they signify within discourses pertinent to the Chinese in Cuba.

The Genesis of Havana's Barrio Chino

According to Antonio Chuffat Latour, the site of present day Havana's Chinatown can be traced to the first Chinese-owned and operated business in 1858, and from that moment, the area rapidly began to be populated by Chinese (Latour 1927). It soon developed into a self-sufficient community of Chinese businesses and residences, much like many other Chinatowns, and yet it remained intrinsically linked to the wider city, the island, China and other parts of the world through commerce and transnational residents. Yrmina G. Eng Menéndez states that the golden age for the neighborhood was from 1930 to 1950; it remained the acme of decadence and splendor in the 1960s but started to decline in the 1970s and hit rock bottom towards the end of the 1980s (Menéndez 2007, 202).

Over the last decade, Cuba has been forging stronger ties with China, linking Havana and Beijing in economic undertakings and fostering similar social-political understandings. China benefits from the natural resources mined in Latin America (Hearn

2007, 65) including nickel from Cuba, while China's hand in Cuba is evident in the Chinese made infrastructure and industrialization, importation of various goods and tourism and educational exchanges. Havana's Chinatown acts as a point of reference for China and Cuba's relationship as a tourist destination and an economic venture in its own right. Those Chinese-Cuban descendants present in the Barrio and Havana at large are at the forefront of the Chinese cultural renaissance, itself an intermediary space for negotiation of the translocal economy.

Tongs, Associations, Societies and Lodges

As part of my analysis of Havana's Chinatown, I surveyed the 13 Chinese associations²⁴ operating within Havana's designated Chinese district. I collated a wide range of historical and contemporary data, examining available association archives and investigating the lives of their members.

Table 6 Data from survey of Chinese associations in Havana's Chinatown

Association / Society / Lodge Name & Current President	Founded	Current Address	Membership and Activities
CHEE KUNG TONG, HONG MEN MIN CHIH TANG 朱公堂, 民治党	15 January 1887	Calle Salud 14, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Restaurant "Min Chih Tang". Published the Hoy Men Kong Po periodical "Enlightenment

²⁴ Most literature states that there are 13 clan associations in Havana's Chinatown. The 13th is The Chinese Socialist Alliance of Cuba, 古巴中華社交联誼会. It is located on Calle Zanja, between Lealtad and Escobar. I did survey it but as its name suggests it is a political organization with virtually no relevant cultural or religious action. I chose to omit it from this table.

President: Rolando Chiong Chiang ²⁵			Daily”1922-1969.
FEDERACIÓN CASINO CHUNG WAH 中华总会館 President: Juan Eng Jong	09 May 1893	Calle Amistad 420, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Headquarters for Chinese Associations in Cuba. Prints <i>Kwong Wah Po Diario Popular</i> newspaper Top floor houses Sanfancón 关羽 and Guanyin 觀音 shrines.
CASA ABUELO LUNG CON CUN SOL 龙关公所 President: Graciela Lau	04 th April 1900	Dragones 364, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chinese with the surnames: Lao, Cuang, Chiong, and Chiu. Restaurant “Casa Abuelo”. Top floor contains Sanfancón 关羽 shrine.
SAI LI CON SOL 李陇西 President: Niurka Eng Doval	27 January 1909	Dragones 313, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chinese with the surname Li / Lee. Restaurant on site.
WONG CON JA TONG 黄江夏堂 President: Caridad Wong Lui	May 1914	Dragones 414, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chinese with the surname Wong/ Huang. Restaurant “Bavaria Dragones”.

²⁵ I am grateful to Mitzi Espinosa Luis for indefatigably helping me to compile data pertaining to these associations.

SUE YUEN TONG 源總堂 President: Julio Fong	1917	Dragones 355, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chinese with the surnames: Fong, Kong, and Lui. Restaurant “Café Los Tres Chinitos”.
CHANG WENG CHUNG TONG 陳穎川堂 President: Rosario Chang Sau	1919	San Nicolás 517, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chinese with the surnames: Chang, Chiang, and Ching. Restaurant “La Unión de la Familia Chang”. Opened a gymnasium for members in 2003.
SOCIEDAD REGIONALISTA CHUNG SHAN 中山自治所 President: Cecilio Lau	1920	Dragones 311, Barrio Chino, Havana.	For Chinese originating from the region of Zhongshan in Guangdong Province. Previously this region was called Xiangshan and renamed after Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925). Restaurant “Los Dos Dragones”.
CHI TACK TONG 至德堂 President: María Elena Ung	1920	Dragones 356, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic and ancestral association for Chines with the surnames: Hung, Chao, Choy/Choi, and Yong. Restaurant “El Viejo Amigo Lou Pang Yau” opened in 1996.
YI FUNG TOY TONG	19 Jan 1923	Campanario 453, Barrio	Patronymic and ancestral association for

余风采堂 President: Rafael Yi (deceased). Presidential elections yet to be held		Chino, Havana.	Chinese with the surnames Yee / Yi, Ma, and Chie / Xu. Restaurant “Chan Li Po” (now closed) Created academy of martial arts in 1996.
ON TENG TONG 安定堂 President: Juan Eng	1923	Manrique 564, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Patronymic association for Chinese with the surnames Eng, León/Leóng, Bu and Chang. Restaurant on site.
KOW KONG 九江公所 President: Angel Chang	10 October 1924	Manrique 415, Barrio Chino, Havana.	Restaurant opened in 2005 (no name). Contributed to the 2003 campaign “Para Aprender de Martí”.

These various associations have rich and complex histories, whose missions are evolving to account for their present realities and a growing international, increasingly diversifying Cuban-Chinese population. They are sites where tradition is ostensibly being cultivated as a precursor to forging new links to China. In practice, Chinatown’s changing role and landscape is premised on romanticized popular Orientalized imaginaries that are retrospective rather than modernizing. I investigate here the novel ways in which these tongs or guildhalls themselves become areas of exchange, knowledge production and reconciliation, and the direct sociocultural impact this has had on Lukumi and Ifá worship in Havana.

I focus on three societies in particular: Casino Chung Wah, Lung Con Cun Sol, and Min Chih Tang for their prominence in the Cuban-Chinese community, and also because of the rich data gleaned from their members and associates who are initiates in Afro-Cuban religion. Reviewing these three associations in particular also affords a broad understanding of the types of Chinese associations in operation in Cuba; one is geared to the care of the elderly and maintaining Chinese religious customs, another is heavily ensconced in fostering transnational ties, especially with China, and the third is concerned with an ancient and poorly understood secret fraternity. The histories and actions of these associations are rooted in the successful settlement of the Chinese coolies in Cuba, and they each played pivotal roles in the functioning of Chinatown and its expansion as an economic center. Just as Chinatown as a whole has had to adjust to the realities of the Cuban Revolution since 1959, so too has the purpose of these organizations been adapted over the decades, from their start as mutual aid associations for newly landed Chinese migrants, to an increasing accessibility and relevance to Cubans of mixed descent who claim Chinese heritage. Once membership was open only to Chinese born in the mainland. Currently, these associations are run by and for mixed Chinese; they rely on a system of membership and dues, coupled with donations and profits from business enterprises such as restaurants for their operation. All aspects of the operation are observed acutely by the Cuban government.

Casino Chung Wah: Rethinking and Relinking China and Cuba

The years following the 1959 Cuban Revolution were marked by a concerted effort to foster a *Cubanidad* that engendered equality and evinced demarcations along

racial and ethnic boundaries as a strategy against the reproduction of previous hierarchies of power and marginalization. Both the Revolution and its precursor rebel armies and military coup, were fought with the aid of many Cubans of Chinese descent who were involved in the movement at the highest levels (Choy and Wong 2005). In an effort to produce a raceless and cohesive semblance of Cuban identity, Chinese-Cubans were essentially educated to “downplay race” (Triana and Herrera 2009, xxii) through nationalist paradigms that sought to level the social playing field, and an education system that reinforced the idea that everyone was equally Cuban (Wilson 2004, xx). The drive to fashion *Cubanidad* effectively saw a widespread loss of transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge between successive, mixed generations. Furthermore, ties between Cuba and China were strained during the Sino-Soviet Split, where complex ideological and national differences between the two countries deepened the divide (López 2009, 187). Only towards the tail end of the 1980s, with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the beginning of the Special Period did Chinese-Cuban relations turn around (García 2003, 83). The 1990s in particular, saw a renewed interest by the government in recognizing Chinese culture, and the thawing of relations was witnessed by Chinese interest in redeveloping Havana’s Chinatown. The Chinese government sponsored the building of the *pailou*, or portico that graces the entrance to the Barrio and the Cuban government showed renewed interest in Chinese culture and the restoration of Chinatown through the formation in 1990, of the *Grupo Promotor del Barrio Chino de la Habana* (now part of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana) and The House of Chinese Arts and Traditions, a language and arts school in 1993.

One bastion of Chinese culture and assistance in Havana's Chinatown is the Casino Chung Wah (CCW) founded 9th May 1893. Its chosen name was selected for being analogous with the prestigious European style private social club, Casino Español of Havana, which was popular and influential at that time. The CCW was a center for both practical help and culture for the Chinese in Cuba. It acted as a link and conduit of communication between the two countries and was a major news source for both sides. It was also a place for learning the Chinese language, as well as offering medical consultations for traditional Chinese medicine, providing a site for Chinese festivals and celebrations, and a place for practicing various martial arts. Its original location was 103 Calle Amistad, where it comprised two floors and housed a Chinese language school. On 16 August 1954, it moved to its current premises, which is a purpose-built, four-story building close to the portico at 420 Amistad. The merchant community built it during the economic boom of the 1950s and the association was controlled by the Guomindang [Chinese National People's Party] and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and was so opulent, it was nicknamed "the palace" of the Chinese community (López 2013, 223).

The first floor originally housed the Bank of China, nationalized in October 1960 (García Triana and Herrera 2009, 63) and the edifice still bears its name. The second and third floors were originally rented out as office spaces to Cuban-Chinese businessmen and has since been converted to residences, and the fourth floor houses the federation's offices, various meeting and state rooms, a small library/archive, a Chinese medicine consulting room, and a shrine to Sanfancón and Guanyin. The top floor has been beautifully restored, with the light and airy rooms filled with inspired lacquered furniture and large Chinese lanterns. The CCW was regarded as the *de facto* Chinese embassy in

Cuba (Kenley 2011; López 2004; and Ma 1990) and it has maintained close working relationships with all Chinese associations in the capital and their regional branches. The Casino oversees the Chinese Pharmacy on Zanja in the Barrio Chino, which is currently being restored. It is also responsible for Cuba's Chinese language newspaper, the *Kwong Wah Po Diario Popular* [Shine China Daily], Cuba's only privately run broadsheet (Weissert 2010) that is typeset by hand using thousands of individual lead-type Chinese characters and a printing press built in 1900 by the National Paper and Type Company. The newspaper's circulation over the decades has dwindled from being printed once every week, to once every few weeks, to every month, then every six months; currently, it is not being printed as a result of a lack of specialist manpower needed to run the ancient press. The CCW governs the Chinese cemetery in Havana and has been organizing bone repatriation to China for decades.

At the time of my fieldwork in 2012, Casino Chung Wah had approximately 250 male members and 150 female members. The Federation's President, Juan Eng Ong, was born in China and came to Cuba at the age of 13. At 73, he represents the oldest native Chinese member of the *huigang*. Cristobalina Li Medina, the Casino's administrator explained that the small shrine room dedicated to Guan Gong and Guanyin is often frequented by Chinese-Cuban santeros and babalawo:

They come and pray here as they see Sanfancón as Shangó. There is also Guanyin. It is a fully functioning temple, we have Chinese Buddhist monks that come and perform ceremonies here and it is very busy at Chinese Lunar New Year and for the observation of *Qing Ming*. The santeros give Sanfancón offerings in both the Chinese tradition and in their own tradition. You will see incense being burned for him and food offerings such as oranges, which is the Chinese way, [...] and then you see people leaving things of Afro-Cuban religion, like rum and cigars (interview, 1 September 2013).

Qing Ming [清明节] is a Chinese ancestral festival (Menéndez 2007, 229) and, considering the Chinese propensity for filial piety and the importance and centrality in Daoist and Confucian religiosity to venerate the ancestors, the Qing Ming remains one of the most popular celebrations within the calendar of events of the Chinese associations in Havana. At the present time, a number of associations are examining their operating budgets closely and reducing the number of ceremonies held each year. However, the Qing Ming is likely to continue. Casino Chung Wah's shrine room has an offering table where visitors can leave food and *ex-votos*. Like the shrine in Lung Con Cun Sol, it also has a donation box for monetary offerings. Cristobalina showed me the bottle of rum one olorisha had left on his previous visit, which was used to give libations to the deity. It was kept beneath the statue.



Figure 6.2 Sanfancón Shrine in Casino Chung Wah



Figure 6.3 Rum bottle and other Lukumi offerings beneath the Sanfancón statue.

One member of CCW, Teodoro, is an orisha priest initiated to the orisha Ogún, an Abakuá member, and is of Chinese and African descent. He lives in Central Havana close to Chinatown, and brings his initiatory godchildren to Casino Chung Wah's Temple in addition to the Catholic Church following their priesthood initiations:

Traditionally, part of the initiation ceremony for a new iyawó is to go and visit a Catholic Church following the weeklong initiation and being installed in the throne. This visit to the church is to signal to Olofin, who was syncretized with God the all powerful, that a new initiate had been made. Sanfancón is like God to us, he represents Heaven and is the Emperor. Therefore, as part of our ritual process, I take my godchildren to be presented to Sanfancón right after I take them to Church. I do this in honor of both my religious family, the priests I *moyubá*, and my blood family, and the ties we have to our Chinese ancestors. Many of my godchildren are at least part Chinese, but even if they are not, or don't know it, they are being initiated by Chinese-Cubans and they must know their religious roots, which include Chinese and [it] is a very important thing. This temple and this image have been here for generations; it is to me, a representation of the divine full of *ashé*, and of my ancestors and my heritage (interview, 28 July 2013).

Juan Chao Li, another member of CCW, gained his admission by being a descendant of Chinese grandfathers, and spoke with me of his involvement in the Barrio Chino and Lukumi worship. Chao Li works in Chinatown, in his café on Zanja that sells refreshments and Chinese and creole food in Cuban pesos. "Cafeteria El Templo Chao Li" is a colorful and enticing kiosk that attracts a lot of the foot traffic in the neighborhood. It is decorated in bold red and incorporates symbols of prosperity and martial arts. Customers order off the menu displayed next to the window and wait for their food there; it is very typical of the small pizza joints dotted around Havana and the rest of the island, however Chao Li offers Cuban versions of Chinese favorites such as pork fried rice and *mariposas* [fried wonton wrappers]. The majority of customers on the afternoon I spent in the store with Chao Li were for shots of thick and pungent *café*

cubano, reconstituted powdered *refresco*, and the decidedly non-Chinese *pan con lechón*, a cold sliced roast pork sandwich. Chao Li has been a babalawo, Iwori Ogbe, for 11 years and was initiated as a priest of Yemayá 22 years ago. He states that there is a generational difference between those that come to Chinatown to worship at the shrines of Sanfancón and Guanyin, and those that come seeking orisha initiation:

Not many people outside of the Barrio Chino know about the associations, especially if they do not have any Chinese family. The societies are generally quiet, they do things publicly for carnival, and for the Chinese New Year, but only if you are a member of one of them, or know someone who is, you probably would not get to see inside. Most Cubans cannot afford to eat in the restaurants that are attached to them...they normally draw the tourists who can pay in CUC. The tourists won't know about the associations either. There are a lot of Cuban-Chinese and Afro-Chinese santeros and babalawos in the Barrio; they are probably the ones who use the shrines the most. They honor the Chinese deities and also see them as the orishas, too. They can go and ask Sanfancón at the Casa Abuelo with divination tools to get answers. Promises [*promesas*] are also made to them, where you ask for something to happen and then when you get it, you give them an offering that is your part of the transaction. I know many people go to the altars to pray for assistance for travel, for help in their marriages and for protection (interview, 20 June 2013).

Chao Li is godfather to many in Chinatown, but has also traveled to the United States, invited by his godchildren who are Cubans that have emigrated. He goes periodically, at their invitation and expense, to look after them religiously, performing readings, offerings and related ceremonies.



Figure 6.4 Babalawo Juan Chao Li



Figure 6.5 Cafeteria El Templo Chao Li in Havana's Chinatown

Chao Li's godchildren also bring clients to him in Miami, and some travel to Cuba to perform larger initiations with him there. Chao Li speaks Spanish, Mandarin, and English and is well placed to cater to all who require spiritual services. He represents the younger generation of mixed Chinese-Cubans, having purposefully learned both Mandarin and English. His religious clientele attracts more work and travel possibilities to him than catering in the Barrio Chino. He has benefitted from his membership in the Chinese association, which has opened up avenues for travel, including to China, on government-sponsored exchanges. Unlike many Afro-Cuban religious practitioners on the island, Chao Li is able to travel for religious practices, meaning that he is an active part of the political economy of religious tourism in a distinct way – one who is multinational, a position that not many Cuban residents are able to engage in.

Sociedad Lung Con Cun Sol: Praying Afro-Chinese Style to Sanfancón

The shrine for Sanfancón at the *Casa Abuelo*, as Lung Con Cun Sol is usually referred to, is arguably the most popular Chinese shrine in the Barrio Chino. As the name suggests, the association is a daycare center for the elderly. On my first visit to the association, a handful of senior Chinese were sitting in the enclosed courtyard on the ground floor, watching the Cantonese movie playing on the overhead television set while reading Chinese language newspapers or playing mahjong. I was shown up to the third floor by Alejandro Chiu [Chiu Yee], a second generation Chinese who is one of the caretakers and whose son heads the busy restaurant attached to the *huiguan*. Ascending the stairs, I was able to glimpse the various function rooms, which were impressive, and in good repair; these are used on special occasions such as member banquets and calendar celebrations. The entire property was immense, and its rooms were filled with teak furniture with exquisitely carved details. Alejandro knocked three times, as is customary on the closed shrine room door, “to alert the spirits inside, so that they know we are coming in,” unlocked it using a large brass key for the mortise lock, and ushered me in. Inside was an impressive and extremely elaborate altar dedicated to Sanfancón or Emperor Guan.

The shrine is comprised of a tall wooden altar that contains three memorial tablets dedicated to the ancestors of the Wong, Chiu and Chiang migrant families that founded the association. Above these tablets hangs a silk tapestry portraying Guan Gong, depicted with three of his statesmen. These pieces are ensconced in a beautiful and highly intricate wooden alcove shrine and in front of it is positioned an equally ornate offering dais, both

of which exquisitely render carved depictions of Guan Gong's biography as well as symbols of Chinese prosperity and longevity.



Figure 6.6 Sanfancón shrine in Long Cun Con Sol

Alejandro stated that the altar was commissioned and made by artisans in Guangdong Province in the 1880s and shipped in pieces to Cuba. It was made entirely without nails, using instead mortise and tenon joints. The other shrine furniture and implements, including a seven-foot tall *guan dao* [偃月刀] or halberd that is Guan Gong's mythic weapon were also commissioned in China. The wooden shrine having endured decades of a tropical climate and environmental damage, was restored by a multidisciplinary and international team of conservators at the request of the association's president and in tandem with the National Center for Conservation, Restoration and Museology in Havana, and the caretakers of the temple in October 1999 (see Cornu 2001). The shrine room's location on the third floor, and away from the hustle and bustle of the street meant that it was a very serene and tranquil place to be. I had arrived in the late afternoon, past normal visiting hours, and the sun was starting to descend, though

just about visible through the horizontal wooden blinds over the large picture windows facing the altar. I discussed the shrine room implements with Alejandro, and the use of the altar in connection with Afro-Cuban religion:

Martin [M]: What is the significance of the tapestry? I noticed in Casino Chung Wah, Sanfancón is represented by a large covered figure with a red face. Here Sanfancón is surrounded by his aides, and he has what appears to be a normal face.

Alejandro [A]: Yes, yes. The tapestry of Sanfancón [motions for me to get close to it and inspect it] is very old. The altar was made in Canton in the 1800s but we do not know how old the tapestry is, it was in the family of one of the founders for generations. We do know that tapestries were used to represent the gods before they were painted and before they were represented in carvings and statues. It is a very old way of depicting the gods. It is one of a kind and it is our most treasured item.

[M]: It is exquisite. The altar and the staff, how are they connected to Sanfancón?

[A]: Sanfancón is our God, he is the emperor, and the sun, and a mighty warrior. He is particularly important to us Chinese that live outside of China because he looks after us. He is a war general, yes, but he is not about war. He represents loyalty and brotherhood, and helping each other. That is why he is important among gangs, where loyalty is everything...much more important than being able to hurt people, for example. He is fearless and that makes him a good leader. Above the tapestry you will notice a sun. He is the emperor of the Sun, which is why he is associated with Shangó in *Santería*. The wooden altar shows Sanfancón's kingdom. You will notice that the front carved panel of the offering table which contains is covered in gold leaf, is split in two horizontally– the top half represents Sanfancón's travel and conquering of hell, the bottom half shows heaven. Why is heaven on top? The Chinese are very clever you know! If you think about the tilt of the earth and the hemispheres, what appears to be below, is actually above, and what is above, in relation to standing in China, is below.

[...] The staff is called a *guan dao*. Its full name is the "Green Dragon Crescent Knife". That is his weapon and it is what he uses as a symbol of his rule and power over hell, heaven and earth. It is also used in martial arts, which Sanfancón is the patron of. If you notice, the blade is coming out of a dragon's mouth, the most feared and powerful animal in Chinese mythology. Then, on the blade, you have an orb. That is the sun. Above, that you have is the constellation representing heaven. With the *guan dao*, Sanfancón gets rid of all enemies; ghosts cannot be present where this staff is.

[M]: Many have told me that he is worshipped by people on both sides of the law, for example, by police and in businesses, but also he is worshipped for protection from the law, by those that maybe involved in illegal activity.

[A]: He is worshipped by everyone because he is seen as a protective god, and one that never breaks oaths and puts great value in sworn allegiance. Those Chinese that are involved in illegal activity like drugs or intimidation are said to worship him and ask for his protection. They swear allegiance to other members in the presence of his image. He is invoked in codes of honor and to ensure that you are not double-crossed which is a problem amongst thieves! I don't know too much about those things [laughs]. I do know that depending on which side of the law you are on will determine in which hand Sanfancón holds his *guan dao*. The people of the underworld worship Sanfancón holding his *guan dao* in the left hand, and for those that live with very high morals, then it is placed in his right hand.

[M]: I understand, and I was not aware of that distinction in the way Sanfancón is portrayed. Now, Sanfancón is connected with the orishas, Shangó as you mentioned. Can you please tell me more about this? I am wondering if this shrine is any way connected with the Afro-Cuban religious community.

[A]: OK, look, I know that many people here in the Barrio Chino worship the orishas and have Chinese gods on their altars for the orisha. Sanfancón is known as Shangó and I think also as Orunla for the babalawos. This is for many reasons. I know Shangó is a warlord like Sanfancón, he holds an axe, which is a symbol of justice, much like the *guan dao* – that is also why Santa Bárbara with her sword was also seen as Shangó in the Catholic Church, and they all have these weapons. There are two feast days that are important for the orishas; one is December 4th for Shangó, and the other is October 4 for Orunla. On these days, many priests come to pay their respects to Sanfancón. They are very respectful, and they always bring some offerings (interview, 4 May 2013).

Alejandro is referring to the Catholic saint feast days that have been used to celebrate the orishas. It is on these days that personal orisha shrines are opened to the wider *ilé*, for people to come and pay their respects and pray to the orishas. December 4 is the feast day of Saint Barbara, and is celebrated with a public procession of the statue of the saint, and later, by more private offerings and celebrations that use *batá*/Anya drums in Lukumi celebratory rites for Shangó. Similarly, October 4 is the Catholic feast day for Saint Francis of Assisi, the saint syncretized with Orunla, divinatory patron deity

of babalawos. On October 4, babalawo may receive their godchildren and god family at their homes to celebrate the orisha Orunla, installing the orishas implements in a cloth throne and holding small festivities. The babalawo's godchildren bring offerings of a yam, coconut, plate and candle and present them to Orunla. Alejandro tells me that these Catholic feast days are being reinterpreted within the Chinese-Lukumi context in the service of the orisha. These specific days are held to be more important in the calendar worship of the orisha than the Catholic saint to which the orisha was syncretized, extending or perhaps focusing the meaning and intent of the day more on the orisha and their chosen syncretism with Sanfancón than with the Catholic saint.

Alejandro was extremely patient and receptive in answering all of my questions and discussing the life and ritual connected with association's shrine. He did not seem to mind spending his time with me outside of official hours. Towards the conclusion of my interview, having gathered several narratives of Sanfancón as remembered by this venerable Chinese-Cuban, Alejandro very politely asked me if I wished to pray "Chinese style" to Sanfancón. After quickly agreeing, and being told to think of my petition and wishes, Alejandro clapped his hands three times and formally introduced me, in Cantonese, to Sanfancón and the ancestors. A million thoughts and wishes went through my mind at that moment, including the profundity of researching something that seemed at once both so near and far in terms of emotion and understanding. Alejandro explained to me after, that he had summoned the Emperor to be present so that he could see who had come to visit him, and petitioned him to look after "brother Martin, a *Huáyì*," an

overseas Chinese [华裔], just as Sanfancón has been protecting the other *Huáyì* so diligently for generations in Cuba.



Figure 6.7 Sanfancón's altar



Figure 6.8 Sanfancón's Guan Dao

A Chinese-Cuban Secret Society: Asociación Nacional Chee Kung Tong

Havana's National Association Chee Kung Tong [Cantonese *Zhigongtang*, "Hall of Universal Justice"], commonly referred to as *Min Chih Tang* [MCT], currently has 198 members, (96 women and 102 men), 24 of whom were native Chinese born and the rest comprised of mainly second and some third generation Chinese mixed Cubans. It was founded 15 January 1887, by five Chinese: Li Sheng Zhen, Wen Zhu Chi, Tan Gen Pin, Li Kai Rin, Cheng Zhong and Li Jin Pao.

Society members pay twelve Cuban pesos (approximately 50 US cents) for annual membership.²⁶ According to one report by Kathleen López, the association

²⁶ Membership dues for the other associations, including Casino Chung Wah, at time of fieldwork were also 12 Cuban pesos, a token fee, requiring overheads to be met and income subsidized through other means such as restaurant ventures.

maintained 10,000 members throughout Cuba in 1938 (López 2009, 179). Founded in Cuba in 1887, the lodge (which is how members refer to their organization – *logia*) has its roots in an underground fraternity in China whose motive was to overthrow Manchu, Qing rule and fight for the reinstatement of the Ming Dynasty. Brotherhoods such as the MCT were founded in China on the principles of loyalty and fraternity, operating clandestinely, and branching out from Southern China to form a vast transnational network wherever large populations of Chinese overseas immigrants [*Huaqiao* 华侨] are present. It is different from the other patronymic, regional and clan-defined organizations in the Barrio Chino as it is regarded as the only Chinese secret society that incorporates the principals of the Hongmen fraternity operating there.²⁷ It was founded in China in 1761 or 1762 in the Guanyinting – Goddess of Mercy Pavilion, in Gaoxi township, Zhangpu county, Fujian Province (Murray and Qin 1994, 5) and has been operating in Chinese overseas communities at least since the nineteenth century. Also called Hungmoon, meaning “vast family”, and according to Mitzi Espinosa Luís [personal communication] the Hongmen maintain that their society was born out of an alliance between the revolutionary group known as the Red Flower Pavilion [Hung Fa Ting] and five Shaolin monks: Choi Dak Jung [蔡德忠], Fong Daai Hung [方大洪], Ma Chiu Hing [馬超興], Wu Dak Tai [胡德帝], and Lei Sik Hoi [李式開].

Both the Cuban MCT and its historical southern Chinese predecessor are referred to as the Heaven and Earth Society [天地會], where Heaven is viewed as the

²⁷ For a thorough rendering of Chinese masonry in mainland China and its operation in the Americas, see the website for the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/history/chinese_freemasons/index.html.

father, the Earth as the mother, and members are brothers and sisters. Heaven, Earth and Humanity/brethren form the three most important and fundamental elements of the organization that are echoed in its iconography, ritual and code of practice. The importance of the triadic relationship and triangular images is reflected in further names given to these secret societies: Sanhehui [Three Harmonies Society: 三合會], and Sandianhui [Three Dots Society: 三點會].

The societies' religious activities, their wealth of sacred symbolism and ritual have been overshadowed by researchers who have reported on their socio-political rebellion, and in some instances, criminal activities. David Ownby writes that the confiscated manuals and other written documents of the Tiandihui describe in great detail the religious undertakings of the society and its members, attesting to the overlap of these organizations "and other varieties of popular religion" (Ownby 1996, 131). In the religious practices, we see the predominance of deities of heaven and earth, the construction of altars, and recurring Daoist and masonic emblems. Guan Gong in China, or Sanfancón in Cuba, is the deity that lodge members venerate, and in front of whose image oath taking and initiations are conducted, further highlighting why this God is of paramount importance to many overseas Chinese and why his shrine, above others, is the most numerous in Havana's Chinatown. The female goddess/bodhisattva Guanyin is also revered by members and her image and that of the Earth God are represented in Tiandihui initiation ceremonies along with a banner that reads, "let the gods descend" (Ownby 1996, 132).

The many names reflect the popularity and vast regional spread of the Heaven and Earth Societies. Tiandihui was one of several associations documented in eighteenth

century China, most of them not geared specifically to the working classes, but whose membership could be described as “socially marginal”. The Hongmen provided a globally connected social survival strategy (Harr 1998, 3) as well as financial assistance and credit (McKeown 2010). Gustaaf Schlegel published one of several early accounts of diasporic Hongmen activity after confidential, internal documents were seized from the house of a Chinese living in Padang (then, Sumatra) in 1863 (Schlegel 1866). It detailed organizational structure, codes of practice and ritual lore of the fellowship.

A close social cognate is European derived Freemasonry, which itself is popular in Cuba for people of Chinese descent, for practitioners of Afro-Cuban religion such as babalawo, as well as among secular Cubans. Contemporary Heaven and Earth societies in Asia, colloquially called “Triads” because of their tripartite structure and symbolism, have gained a reputation of being criminal, having originated as a perceived threat to British rule in colonial Hong Kong.

Recent research into Chinese secret societies has explored their linkages to European and North American Freemasonry practices. Chinese Masonry and European Freemasonry are similar in form, as both require oath taking by members. They both have highly ceremonial and ritualized forms of conducting meetings and use symbolic and specialized or secret language as well as internal separations of men and women. They also have a pronounced hierarchical structure, and legends and narratives that give the membership and its structure a rationale (Choy and Ortiz 2009, 239). The MCT uses symbols of European Freemasonry in its iconography, especially the square and compass with the letter “G” and this is often combined with Chinese-derived, Hongmen

iconography such as triangles representing the trinity of heaven, earth and humanity, as well as flags in five colors representing the five founding Shaolin monks.

María Teresa Montes de Oca Choy and Yasmín Ydoy Ortiz write that the adoption of European Freemasonic symbolism in the 1990s coincided with a move to regenerate Chinatown as a destination for Chinese society and culture; they suggest that these Chinese societies are similar but not linked to European Freemasonry. The MCT was eventually officially classified as a friendly society, whose objectives were to “conserve Chinese traditions, to continue true union among its members and to promote education, and assistance to the elderly²⁸”. Kathleen López writes that the association’s political functions in Cuba were not exhaustive, and did not extend past the support of the overthrow of Qing rule in China. In Cuba, the MCT became less revolutionary, and much more invested and active in Chinese migrant life on the island by providing assistance and mutual aid (López 2013, 180).

Cuba’s MCT’s membership drew from all socio-economic strata. However, it catered specifically to the working classes, thus garnering the widest base of membership compared to the other associations. The MCT was regarded as the most respected association (Kenly 2011) and specialized in helping economic migrants and laborers adapt to life in Cuba (López 2013, 179). Associations built and provided access to healthcare institutions paid for by its members, as well as connecting migrants with networks associated with Chinese labor – small agricultural enterprises, or laundries.

²⁸ The majority of information presented here was obtained from discussions with MCT members. Mitzi Espinosa Luis, the lodge’s historian, archivist, and cultural liaison, provided technical data and history of the lodge. My unreserved gratitude goes to Mitzi and also to her mother, Violeta Luis Quintana, for their painstaking work and avowed interest in my research.

They often provided lines of credit to members to establish new business ventures. Aside from providing business help and forging transnational networks for Chinese migrants MCT's role, along with other tongs, greatly broadened their Chinese cultural programs. These included opera as well as martial arts under the supervision of Alay [see below], and later, Roberto Vargas Lee.



Figure 6.9 The meeting hall of the Min Chih Tang

The MCT was one of the most widespread Chinese secret fraternal organizations in Cuba, the wider Caribbean and Latin America. In the 1960s, there were 11 regional branches of the organization operating on the island, today there remains four active branches: in Villa Clara, Guantánamo, Ciego de Ávila, and Santiago de Cuba, each ranging from 80–200 members with single digit senior “native” (Chinese-born) members in each chapter. The headquarters, like Lung Con Cun Sol, is known as a *casa abuelo* [grandfather house], referring to its elderly day care activities for members. With the backing of the Ministry of Health, Havana's headquarters of the MCT feeds

approximately 60 elderly Chinese every day of the year; the meal consists of a free breakfast eaten in the adjoining restaurant, and a hot packed lunch to take home. The main masonic meeting hall doubles as a social place during the day for members to read, watch television, play mahjong and follow other pursuits.

Carlos, the Chino Babalawo Mason

Carlos Antonio Alay Jo [Ho] was 54 years old at the time of our interview (May 12 2012) and lives and works in the Barrio Chino; he is a Chinese-Cuban mason, and babalawo. He was born in Cuba to parents who were both of Chinese descent. His grandfather, Felipe Tang Supin, came to Cuba from Guangzhou as a merchant, a polyglot and world traveler. He settled in Cuba and was a successful businessman and prominent member of the Chinese community. Carlos has four siblings: Jorge, America, Antonio and Ernesto, all of who are initiated orisha priests. Carlos is the middle child of parents who had both Chinese and Spanish names. Carlos's father was known in Chinatown as Tang Kwok Sen, and as Rufino Alay Chang, or simply, Alay (1928-1995). Alay was famed for his martial arts prowess and was a member of the MCT. With the help of Fernando Ortiz, Alay established the tradition of lion dance performance in Havana's Chinatown, beginning in 1930 with the Athletic Youth Troupe of the association [*Juventud Atlética del Chee Kung Tong*]. The lion dance is not only an iconic symbol of Chinese culture but is itself rooted in Chinese martial arts history and legend; it also directly relates to the worship of the Daoist/Buddhist goddess, Guanyin, an important religious figurehead, along with Guan Gong for the Triadic Heaven and Earth Societies. Because of Alay's actions, and the sponsorship of the MCT, a Cantonese lion processed

through the streets of Havana for the first time in Cuba's Chinese history, and later in 1937 became an integrated part of Cuba's annual carnival celebrations.



Figure 6.10 Carlos Alay Ho

Triana and Herrera report that Alay was a key insurgent against the Batista regime and supported the armed struggle for which he was jailed. Alay is well remembered and revered by older members of Cuba's Chinese community for his acts. Pedro Eng, narrates the story of Alay's involvement by stating that:

Alay played an outstanding role in the creation of the Chinese Revolutionary Militias, both in the retail food sector and in catering. He had the honor of being the first person to raise the flag of the PRC above the palace of the Chinese Community (Casino Chung Wah) in 1960. Because he knew a lot about Kung Fu, he was selected to join the Revolutionary Armed Forces, and at a later date, the Ministry of the Interior, where he passed on his knowledge of martial arts to several generations of fighters.

(Pedro Eng quoted in Triana and Herrera 2009, 40)

Carlos's mother was Jo Mei Chau, known as Rosa Jo Chang, and was a teacher in the Barrio Chino. Carlos is married to Miriam Peralta Guin, whose paternal grandfather was from China, and whose other grandparents are of European heritage. Among his Ifá

contemporaries and orisha family Carlos is known by his *odu* or divination sign, *Irete Ansa*. Carlos has two children: Carlos Junior was born in 1988 and is a priest of Oshun and a babalawo, and his daughter, Mayrim, born in 1986 is a priestess of Shangó.

On Carlos's personal religious practice and beliefs:

[C]: I think that being Chinese has helped tremendously with my training and understanding of Ifá. Being a babalawo, and the philosophy of problem solving through divination verses is very similar to Confucius and Daoism in that it is a process... of remedy through action and intellect. In China there are various forms of divination, the *jiaobei*, or moon blocks which answer yes and no, like the coconut oracle/*Biagwe* that santeros and babalawos use. There is also the I Ching, which uses hexagrams and texts; like the babalawo “*tefas*” or marks *odu* – they are very similar. Sanfancón and Orunla are like Confucius, they use philosophy and measured action to overcome obstacles. It is a highly intellectual pursuit. It is not about brute strength, or being a warrior, but more about strategy and engaging the intellect. To be a babalawo you need to be a good student, always learning, and to understand the world, I think a Confucian worldview helps me to achieve that. Growing up, our household was Chinese, my father was a *wushu* [gung fu/kung fu] master and disciplined, and that was a good teaching in itself. He embraced the Confucian belief system and instilled it in us. Then you realize it is all connected. There is a spiritual and religious element to everything, and the Chinese way is to honor that. We try to see the religion as all encompassing; it is inclusive rather than exclusive. All this helped me understand what it means to be Cuban and why I chose to become a babalawo. [...] Being a babalawo and believing and practicing Confucian and Daoist beliefs, the latter two I was exposed to through my upbringing, I believe, works together quite harmoniously. One hand washes the other and both hands wash the face.

[M]: And you practice both Chinese and Ifá divination?

[C]: I do both, and I use the I Ching sometimes. However I prefer to use my *ikin* and *ekuele* [Ifá divination instruments] for most issues as it has the most complex and complete system of *ebó* to fix things through. I am a student of *odu*. It is like the I Ching but even more complex! That is where our knowledge and our history live. Ifá is a lifelong dedication to learning. There are many references to the Chinese in *odu*. The Chinese first appear in Obara Meji, where Shangó travels throughout Asia, through China and as far as Mongolia. That is also where Sanfancón is spoken about. The *odu*, Osa Bara speaks about the “*tierra Filani*”, China, and how the Chinese aligned themselves with the orishas and accepted them when they traveled from Africa to China. That is how we understand the two cultures as meeting; the orishas met the Chinese in China (interview, 12 December 2013).

Carlos did not know for sure the origins of the myths of these divination narratives. He stated that they were taught to him by senior Afro-Cuban babalawo who would have likely learned these verses orally from their own elders, rather than from Ifá training manuals or the *libretas* (Brown 2003a, 83-84) that are a common resource for novice *awo Ifá* [Ifá priests] today. These *odu* narratives exemplify what anthropologist Martin Holbraad writes are “principals of classificatory exemplarity” (Holbraad 2012, 117) where the orishas, through *odu* verses, establish ownership and belonging and, at a fundamental level, connection. Holbraad states that the stories of *odu* connect not only humans and geographical terrain such as rivers and mountains to the orisha, but portioning these domains to the orisha. In this vein, we can view the inclusion and narration of China, the Chinese and Chinese cultural products and ideas as forming further, open-ended examples of the cosmology of Ifá divination through classificatory associations.

Competitive Claims: Interdiasporic Cross Fertilization in Action

In Chapter IV, I discussed the special places that both Shangó and Orunla occupy in Lukumi and Ifá practices. On the subject of Sanfancón, Carlos was adamant that Sanfancón is syncretized with Orunla rather than Shangó, a claim that he made using data from both Chinese narratives and Daoist understanding of Guan Gong as well as Afro-Cuban *odu* Ifá:

[C]: There are only tenuous reasons as to why Guan Gong has been linked to Shangó, which is mainly to do with having a red face, red being the color of Shangó, and the *pataki* of Shangó in his Lukumi form where he is dressed in red. That is how the newer statues of Guan Gong depict him, with a red face, very mean and these statues are used to protect businesses and scare away ghosts.

[M]: I have seen the red faced Guan Gong in shrines for Shangó. I think the Sanfancón at Casino Chung Wah has a red face and many santeros worship there and give offerings as if it represented Shangó.

[C]: Yes, exactly. That Sanfancón is very popular with the Lukumi community here [in Havana]. Those statues I would say have begun to appear here in the last few decades. More and more Chinese-Cubans that are able to travel to China and America bring back the red-faced Guan Gong for that purpose. [...] Have you been to see the tapestry at the Casa Abuelo? That is an ancient tapestry and Sanfancón has a regular face there, he doesn't have a red face. You see, there are stylistic elements that lend themselves to matching the worship of Shangó with Sanfancón, but if you consider the history and biographies of all of these deities, and also what *odu* tells us, you will see that Orunla matches Guan Gong or Sanfancón better. [...] Starting with the iconography, most of the old statues did not depict Sanfancón with a red face, that is relatively new, and it is in his role of ghost and demon-scaring that he puts on the red warrior face. Also, if we go by colors, one hundred years ago he was usually depicted with a regular face and beard and, what's more he is dressed in a yellow and green robe, and those are also Orunla's colors.

[M]: Guan Gong shares the same colors as Orunla?

[C]: Yes, and there is the *odu, Irosun Owani* which describes the time that Orunla had to disguise himself in order for him to get out of trouble. He put on a red mask, which is how he escapes his captors. That explains why Guan Gong, even when he is depicted with a red face is Orunla, it is Orunla or Guan Gong in disguise, like a camouflage to outwit his enemies. [...]. I think he disguised himself so well he became Shangó for good! What a strong *ebó*. For those that know about the Chinese gods, and Confucianism, they know that Guan Gong is a war general, he is a thinker and an intellectual, and his brain is his weapon. That is why he is also the patron of martial arts; he is all about strategy and using your head. Orunla is our sage; he is the owner of wisdom and of divination and making *ebó*, Orunla is the one that elevates our spiritual head, our *lerí*, and making sure we are aligned with our destiny, making him even more relevant to Guan Gong's character (interview, 12 December 2013).

Carlos' description clearly associates Sanfancón or Guan Gong with Orunla, and posits a compelling argument for his preferred syncretism according to his set of protocols and correspondences. Sanfancón, Orunla and Shangó are integrated into several cultural spheres and the disparities in their specific interdiasporic crossovers indicate the

processual nature of assigning syncretisms. The interdiasporic approach to syncretism and is an ongoing intellectual discursive procedure and can be conceptually mapped as follows:

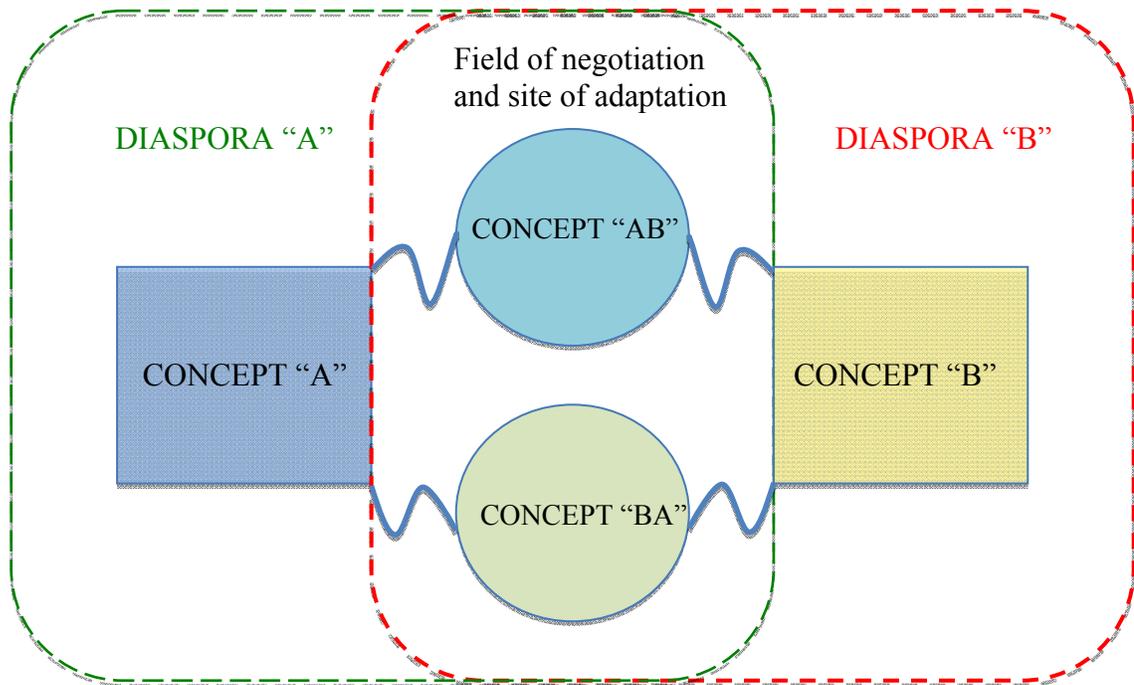


Figure 6.11 Interdiasporic cross-fertilization

Carlos draws on his authority as babalawo and simultaneously invokes cultural knowledge from his experiences of being Cuban-Chinese and having been influenced and exposed to competing sets of iconographies, narratives and experiences. In working out both his relationship to the orishas and Daoist deities, as well as the intermeshing of different pantheons, the processual ruminations of syncretism are exposed. Carlos also demonstrates in his discussion that both Chinese and Afro-Cuban religiosity are not compartmentalized, self-contained dimensions of Cuban identity and cultural practice by stating: “you consult Guan Gong as you would Orunla – with divination. The Chinese use divination tools to get help from Guan Gong, and babalawo use their divination

implements to consult Orunla”. The relationship be further charted by inserting the example of the interdiasporic syncretism of Sanfancón with the orishas Shangó and Orunla:

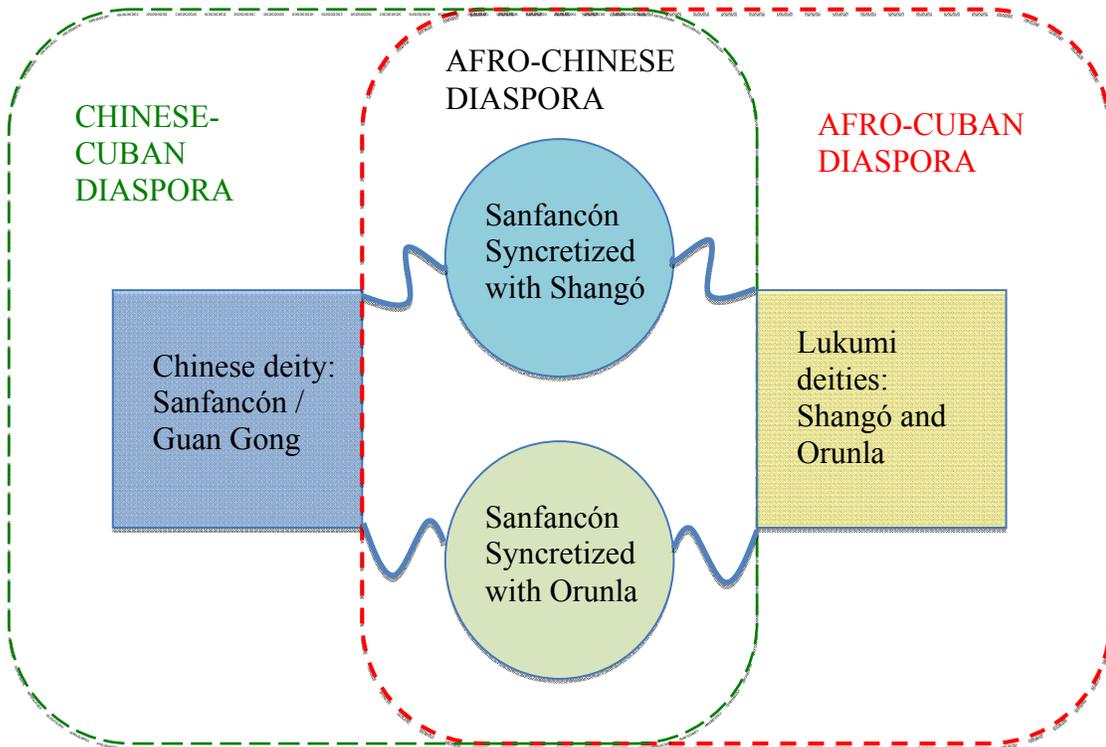


Figure 6.12 Interdiasporic cross-fertilization Sanfancón example

The middle space shared between the two diasporas is the site of cross-fertilization, where contact between individual practitioners is mediated by establishments such as Chinese institutions and *cabildos de nación* (Chapter VII). We also find a distinction between different practitioners in Afro-Cuban religious practice – that of *babalawo* and *olorisha* fosters some differentiation and plurality in syncretism discourse. The presence and ability to have plural fields of syncretisms indicates a rich dynamic religious discourse that is generating new symbolic and culturally relevant identifications. It is through performativity and lived experiences that particular historical

moments are framed; these provide the dimensions for the impetus of interdiasporic cross-fertilizations in religious praxis to occur.

Vision, Entrepreneurship, and Transnationalism in Chinatown

Lázaro Cuesta Valdés, babalawo, Iwori Koso is the coordinator for the Commission for the Letter of the Year [*El Coordinador de la Comisión Organizadora de la Letra del Año*], a position he has held since 1986. He is one of the most well-known and respected babalawo practicing in Cuba and is also the leader of an Abakuá “*juego*” [lodge/chapter] in Havana. He is a 33rd degree Freemason,²⁹ holding the title of Sovereign Grand Commander and is of Chinese descent:

My Grandmother was Chinese and she was a priestess of Oshun, her name in *santo* was Oshun Kayodé. It is through her that I became involved in the religion. I owe my religious upbringing to her. I have been initiated as a babalawo for 45 years, and as an olorisha for longer than that.

²⁹ Lázaro Cuesta Valdés is very active publicly in Cuban Freemasonry. His full title is “El Supremo Consejo del Grado 33 para la República de Cuba” [The Sovereign Grand Commander of Cuba, 33rd Grade], and an Internet presence has been established: <http://supremocuba.org/>. As such, he has organized annual symposia on Freemasonry, and held an event June 6, 2012 exploring the Chinese presence in Freemasonry. http://supremocuba.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30&Itemid=25.



Figure 6.13 Lázaro Cuesta Valdés and author June 5, 2012

Lázaro is the coordinator of Cuba's yearly reading, a consummate diviner and well versed in *odu*. He discussed some of the divination narratives relating to the Chinese:

Everything has its basis in *odu*, the Chinese who have been a part of this religion in Cuba since the mid nineteenth century and they have their voice in *odu*. Moreover, there is every facet of life represented there. For example, a vice such as opium is spoken about in the *odu*, Irosun-Bara. That is where Orunla first discovered the smoke that is opium and how it was dangerous for his mental faculties and for his divination. We also find a lot of Chinese customs that we think are African but are from the Chinese, such as the custom of eating and sleeping on straw mats – *esteras*, which represents, according to the Chinese, life and things of the living, vitality...long life. This is a Chinese custom and is very sacred. We do all our rituals on straw mats. We initiate our priests on straw mats. That is how central and important they are to our religion. The Chinese also hang them in windows, which is exactly as we do when we want to keep Ikú [death] away. Many of our remedies and prescriptions that we mark as *ebó* [offerings, divination prescriptions] in readings are also of Chinese origin, such as keeping birds in the house, as well as *odu* specific taboos such as the prohibition against making holes which may have its roots in Feng Shui (interview, 5 June 2012).

Cuesta Valdés also works closely with some of the members and many of the employees of the MCT and other societies, officiating as their “Ifá *padrino*” or initiatory

godfather. One of his godchildren is Elena Huang, who is the maverick behind the financial success of the lodge. Elena was born in Cuba to a native Chinese father and mother also in Cuba to native Chinese. She earned a bachelor degree in economics from the University of Havana, and is a priest of the orisha Obatalá, specifically the *camino* or path called Ayaguna, envisioned as a young male warrior orisha. Elena is definitely her orisha father's daughter, very hard to pin down for more than a few minutes and playing a very active role in the promotion of all of MCT's activities. Elena single handedly spearheaded the renovation of the property in 2008, which involved completely remodeling the meeting hall where a mixed media mural of the Great Wall of China measuring 16 meters long and 8 meters tall was commissioned from Chinese-Cuban painter, Luís Chang. The entire renovation process was completed in 31 days. Elena swiftly followed it with the complete overhaul of the eponymous restaurant located next door, installing state of the art facilities and transforming it into a world-class kitchen. For the restaurant, Elena commissioned extensive artwork by Cuba's most well known contemporary Cuban-Chinese artist – Flora Fong – and had the entire premises designed according to principals of Feng Shui.



Figure 6.14 Elena and the MCT Board of Directors

Andrew Apter (2004, 161) notes that Africanity, and we can add to that, Sinology, is built upon ideological constructions of Africaness, and Chineseness respectively. *Sociedades* and tongs reinforce these constructions, codifying groups of memories and practices as belonging to imagined communities, rooted in or united by a somewhat selective past, and reinforced with selective collected memories and constructed geographies of a very real and complex Cuba. China, (and also Africa) are also imagined and presented in different ways. State-implemented efforts have led to the construction of a Chinatown that is more representative of Cuba and its Orientalized projections of what it means to be Chinese in Cuba, (and how it can be incorporated within governmental aims of tourism and commerce), than it does an “authentic” and contemporary or historical version of China. Havana’s Chinatown is populated by a large number of Cubans with distant or tenuous links to Chinese culture and an ever-dwindling population of Chinese-born residents, who were once culturally and socially set apart by their reliance on the Chinese language.

Given the long history of the Barrio Chino and its mixed Chinese-Cuban population, the presence of Chinese speaking Cubans is understandably diminishing, as is the Barrio’s supporting infrastructure such as the disappearance of Chinese language print publications. Apart from business and related economic interests in learning Mandarin, Spanish, rather than Cantonese is spoken by Chinese-Cubans. Thus, perceived linguistic alterity is no longer a signifier with impact, but a marker of diasporic processes for this Chinese community or their descendants in Havana. The loss of communication in Chinese, along with Chineseness in the diaspora as Ien Ang (2001) describes it, can be

the source of dissonance and anxiety in delicate moments when diasporic Chinese sense a lack of cultural capital because of the ambiguities of diasporic identity politics, which require them to act and perform in line with Chinese imaginaries (Ang 2001). There are particular difficulties in rescuing the voices of Chinese that have occupied Havana's Chinatown but are now breached and scattered by the political machinations of pre- and post- Revolutionary Cuba. There are many life stories missing from the written records of Chinatown; however, there are adequate signposts and narratives that are remembered and require us to think of various historical moments that have affected and impacted the Barrio. Lisa Lowe writes that our understanding of the Chinese, Africans, and the indigenous Antilleans is sparse, a paradox given that through sugar and labor they are intimately related to the rise of European modernity, producing what she calls the "intimacies of four continents" (Lowe 2006, 191). Yet, as Lowe goes on to explain, few have documented the complex histories and survival of native Caribbean and African people in the Americas, and fewer have examined the "connections, relations, and mixings of Asian, African, and native peoples in the Americas" in whose written history there is a palpable and particular loss of the Chinese figure (Lowe 2006, 192).

Lisa Lowe's second meaning of intimacy in relation to the Chinese subject hinges on the idea of privacy. It takes the configuration of conjugal and familial relations in the bourgeois household (Lowe 2006, 195). Lowe writes that such a formulation rests upon a distinction of a private, familial home occupied and literally domiciled by the feminine, and the public masculine work world, modeled after regulating norms experienced in British, European, and northeastern American societies. The paradigm of separately gendered spheres for ordering relations of society, Lowe notes, cannot be readily

extended to the descendants of native, African and Chinese peoples in these contexts, as they are shattered through the machinations of colonial desires and mercantilism, as well as the vicissitudes of slavery and indenture.

We can find further evidence of this differentiation of intimacy in the Chinese-Cuban setting, where no easy abstraction of domestic and work spheres can be made. The notion of public and private spheres is not easily demarcated given the liminal status that the predominantly male Chinese in migration occupied in Cuba through indenture. Differentiation of intimacy is coupled with the experiences of black women who formed unions and partnerships with Chinese men, and whose particular social realities were far from reminiscent of European familial and conjugal scenarios. Rather, these women operated outside of the private/public paradigm, in a space that equated black and mixed race women, and their mixed Chinese female descendants as “laboring women” experiencing subjugating practices that “disrespected such separations, ranging from rape, assault, domestic servitude...between colonizers and colonized” (Lowe 2006). An echo of the experiences Lowe describes is evidenced in the role that women like Elena play in a post-indenture world that bears the competing historiographies of empire making and communism. What is apparent from recognizing the futility of a public and private fractioning is that social and cultural spaces, like “Chinatown”, and the “Chinese associations” operating within it offer a possibility for racial (and associated religious) classifications to be “defined and defied. Chinatown, the people associated with it, and the infrastructure entwined within it, serve as a juncture where relations between colonizer and colonized could powerfully confound or confirm the strictures of governance and the categories of rule” (Stoler 2001, 83).

Emerging from the panoply of chattel slavery, indenture, and the specific and peculiar ways that Chinese and the Afro-Chinese bodies were constructed in relation to the political apparatus of colonial empire and plantation rule, Havana's Chinatown reflects these moments in its socio-cultural and religious formations. In the present chapter, I have identified a different veneer over Havana's Chinese landscape, one that is far more African than previously recorded as demonstrated in the plurality of religious practice found among Chinese-Cubans in the Barrio. I attempt to understand it by troubling the landscape and singularity of previous studies that have looked at such neighborhoods in terms of the spectrally constituted nature of Asia in diaspora. It is clear that the Barrio Chino, as Kathleen López has identified the Chinese that settled in Cuba, is as much a story of migration as anything else in terms of settlement and maintaining ties with China to create a "transnational social field".

Barend J. Ter Haar writes that the Heaven and Earth Societies in China are exclusively male brotherhoods (Haar 1998, 3) with extensive rituals, much like the Afro-Cuban Ifá-babalawo cult. Both the Heaven and Earth Society and Ifá worship have roles for women, and in Cuba we can see that Elena occupies a pivotal role in both fields. Furthermore, Elena is an *olorisha*, enabling her to conduct initiations and rituals for other *orishas*, something that she has done to great effect. Workers in the lodge, both in the administration / masonic part and in the restaurant operations include Cuban employees of a myriad of mixed Cuban identities, several of whom have been initiated to Lukumi priesthood by Elena. Similarly, the lodge employs the Chinese-Cuban godbrothers of Elena, initiated to Ifá by Lázaro Cuesta Valdés, thus providing access to divination and also Anya drumming through their sworn members. The lodge has an unofficial alliance

with Afro-Chinese orisha and Ifá worship, through its members and its employees. Elena represents an interesting facet of Chinese-Cuban life in connection with Afro-Cuban religion and the Barrio Chino. By virtue of her personal and business ties, Elena travels frequently to these countries for family and orisha purposes, as well as traveling to China and the US regularly in connection with lodge business.

We can view these tongs, and especially the MCT, as complex sites of action whose membership is determined by a notional idea of Chinese heritage, lineage, affiliation or descent. However, there are also Afro-Cuban derived ties, with both members and lodge employees united by Lukumi/Ifá religious practice, forming a network of Chinese masonic babalawos and santeros. The membership of the lodge, like other masonic institutions, is not made public, and codes of conduct, rites of initiation and methods of greeting through handshakes and passwords are kept secret from outsiders, a practice that serves to identify and legitimize co-members. Similarly, the initiation rites of Ifá and Lukumi orisha priesthood are not disclosed to non-initiates. The MCT requirements of secrecy and discretion are understood and upheld by orisha initiates, and both require the entrant to invest time and dedication to learning the rules and privileged knowledge, thereby forming a distinct layer of identity for Cubans of varying racial and ethnic persuasions. Through an expansive network of lodges that operate in the most heavily concentrated areas of Chinese-Cubans, the movement of “immaterial commodities – i.e., secrets and cult agencies” (Palmié 2007, 109) becomes a distinguishing factor. The Chinese masonic lodge is a means by which Afro-Cuban or, Afro-Sino religion operates outside of the home, or individual *ilé orisha*. By no means is orisha initiation or practice a necessity for lodge members, as many of the elderly

Chinese that are members and participate in lodge activity are unaware of any connection of its people to Afro-Cuban religion, suggesting that they are personal, non-advertised connections.

Today it is Mandarin that is spoken and taught rather than the historically precedent Cantonese within Havana's Chinatown, reflecting the Cuban government's initiative to foster links with the superpower and politically aligned China. As López states, the renaissance of the Barrio Chino since the 1990s has been a tendentious one, principally because the drive for an "authentic Chinese cultural space" is being imagined and made by non-Chinese officials and mixed Chinese descendants, and promoted with economic and tourist potentials in mind (López 2009, 178). We see here the promotion of a specific identity and use of Chinatown leaves many Chinese-Cubans in a grey area, trying to adapt, and as a result, venerable institutions such as Casino Chung Wah, Lung Con Cun Sol, and Min Chih Tang are having to rethink their place and participation in the revitalization projects that are occurring around them.

The sample of Chinese-Cubans discussed and interviewed here offers a different viewpoint of the way that claims of identity, culture and politics are being expressed in these spaces. These Chinese and mixed Cubans are each heavily invested in Chinatown; their economic success and livelihood depend on the Barrio Chino, and directly impacts the community there. Many of the Chinese that live and work in the Barrio Chino are proud initiates of Afro-Cuban religions, symbols of which, such as flags, shrines and statues are found in Chinese-Cuban businesses in the Barrio. The respondents that I worked with in Havana's Chinatown were well connected on a transnational basis — operating within different global and local fields of exchange, commerce and movement,

all of which are unusual characteristics of Cubans living on the island. I offer here an alternative view of Chinese-Cubans and Havana's Chinatown, who through the auspices of associations such as those surveyed here, are able to move and conduct business on an international scale. Coupled with the degree to which most Chinese-Cubans are mixed, existing ethnic and racial categories afforded to Chinatowns and their residents in other parts of the globe stand apart from those witnessed here. With the dwindling rather than growing native Chinese *Huaqiao* population of Havana's Chinatown, coupled with emigration from Cuba since the end of the 1950s and the propensity for mixed Cuban-Chinese descendants, Afro-Cuban religion is a prominent factor in cultural and religious fields of action. The preservation of Chinese religious practices as connected to the secret fraternal underpinnings of the Heaven and Earth Society and their promotion of the deity, Guan Gong, or Sanfancón, has helped to continue to make this deity and associated ritual relevant to successive generations of Cubans with Chinese heritage who also adhere to Afro-Cuban religiosity.

Carlos Alay, the babalawo and mason who describes his Chinese and Afro-Cuban divination practices as both complementary and synergistic, gives examples of the fusion of the two as delineated and narrated in Ifá divination texts. The Chinese and their culture become entrained in the Ifá *odu* corpus in Cuba, and are the means by which the orishas classify and relate ownership of those things they encounter as discussed above. As Martin Holbraad states, orisha cosmogenesis is made possible by the extent to which orisha religions catalogue experiences in narratives of "biographical thickness" (Holbraad 2012, 117). These instances of Chinese people, place, and experience that surface in widely quoted divination stories effectively insert and locate the Chinese within Afro-

Cuban religion, and religion as part of the Cuban-Chinese culture and experience. The ability to provide Chinese genealogy in Lukumi and Ifá divination narratives is made possible by the elastic divination system that allows for the expansion of countless new identifications and classifications to be described in terms of ownership by either *odu* verses or the specific deities that are narrated within them.

Jacqueline Nassy Brown, writing on African diasporic and gendered spaces explains that mapping racial signifiers onto geographical ones creates social locations rather than physical topographies (Brown 1998). Brown's writing on black identity in Liverpool can be applied to Chinese identity in Cuba, specifically the construction of a Chinatown by which such identities are constituted in separation or even opposition to Cuban identity. Paradoxically, the construction of these identities and spaces are made by mixed Chinese-Cubans and inhabited by relatively few native Chinese who feel isolated from their surroundings. A key narrative that surfaced in many of the discussions with my informants were rich, poignant tales and references to the splendor of the past Chinatown, as well as the relations that these mixed Chinese have in terms of their involvement in Afro-Cuban religion, seeing these practices as intrinsic rather than extrinsic to culture and identity formation.

We see here how Chinese-Cubans, through the space provided by Havana's Chinatown and its institutions, have furthered the practice of both Afro-Cuban religion and its Chinese iterations, and troubled the already shaky premises by which space and race have been registered in Cuba. Havana's Chinatown as being constructed and invested with a claim for authenticity with regard to Chinese identity is readily exposed as just that – a contemporary construction and an investment. By focusing on the Barrio

Chino as a site of action, I am interested in giving a sense of being local and specific to the ethnographic enterprise of distinctive Afro-Chinese religion. The neighborhood stands as an icon of the legacy of the Chinese and how that has been relatively swiftly concretized into an understanding of Chinese identity through a specifically Cuban ideological understanding.

I am conscious of the framing of Afro-Cuban religion, and the Lukumi religion specifically, as being discussed, with few exceptions, as singular, homogeneous and static. By interrogating the different and special ways the religion is practiced in Havana's Chinatown through the people interviewed, we see that there are local, diffuse distinctions apparent in the way Afro-Cuban or Afro-Chinese religion is practiced according to place. These distinctions, in racial terms, distinguish the religion in terms of national and local frames, where one is not necessarily the mirror for the other. The result is careful, ethnographic racialism. These Chinese-Cubans have accessed and articulated Afro-Cuban religious and cultural productions for decades and for generations alongside Chinese religiosity and some cultural constructs. We glimpse through these interlocutors a different sense of Cuban-Chinese identity, developed in tandem with black Cuban and other racial signifiers.

The notion of a Chinatown in Cuba thus has different meanings when considering the ordering of its space and the practices of its peoples – those who live, work, or by descent are intimately identified with its production. By no means is the idea of Chinatown in Havana strictly limited to or delineated by people of Chinese descent. The global flow of tourists headed to the neighborhood as directed by the Cuban government, are able to consume an orientalist experience on a par with any other specific

construction of ethnic place for the benefit of commerce. However, these tourists may also be surprised to find, in the Barrio Chino, little which truly signifies Chinese people, or China for that matter. The presentation is of mixed Chinese with little phenotypical discernment, no Chinese languages being spoken, and challenges to the way that Chinese food and other markers can be produced. As Paul Gilroy's framework of black diasporic culture and identity exemplifies, all is not reducible to a singular point of exigency, following circuitous rather than linear routes (Gilroy 1987). Gilroy's paradigm applied to black Atlantic spaces and interconnections can be expanded to explore Chinese diasporic experiences, and form the foundation for thinking through the intercultural and transnational formations of the black Atlantic. Gilroy's work (1993), following Du Bois' focus on a modernity that excites a double consciousness through its vagaries and its sophistication in striving to be both European and black. What this might look like with the surfeit of Asian transnational circuitry and cultural commodities is a dynamic, multi-local platform being continually reinvented in line with changing modern identities. It is the relation and routing of these ideas between centers of black culture that become of interest and importance to me. These cultural objects and their subjects have a truly global reach, and embody, empower and broaden the fields of reference that shape the worlds of people that may identify with a particular geography or culture different than the one(s) they are situated in.

I have tried to show here a different veneer to the changing façade of Havana's Chinatown by focusing on its key institutions and key participants. With the growth in international trade and the further dissolution of longstanding barriers to trade and travel, Chinese-Cubans, such as Carlos and Elena are playing important roles in these endeavors.

They are participants not only in transnational economic and cultural interactions, but are also bringing with them Afro-Sino knowledge, experience, and networks courtesy of their deep participation in these religious spheres. In so doing, they are redefining religious discourse through their presence, influence and practices, and discerning new levels of syncretism that make use of public and private ideologies, rituals and knowledge. Just as the painted figure of Guanyin hangs in the nave of a church dedicated to La Caridad, which just so happens to be identified as Oshun, these complex symbolic interactions are being conducted and carried out in the lives of these Chinese-Cuban initiates.

CHAPTER VII MEMORY MAKING IN THE AFRO-CHINESE CABILDO OF SAGUA LA GRANDE

From my very first interviews and discussions with Havana and Matanzas-based Afro-Chinese olorisha and babalawos, it was evident just how crucial political economies of tourism and transnational networks had become over the last few decades in the successful practice of Afro-Cuban religions. In particular, the informal economy of Lukumi initiations and associated rituals in the capital and surrounding areas is heavily reliant on international contributors and overseas practitioners who maintain ritual ties with religious families on the island. In Chapter VII, I explore the regional differentiation of Afro-Cuban and Chinese-Cuban impact/involvement by examining a particular Afro-Chinese *cabildo de nación* or Afro-Cuban mutual aid association, in the interior, in Santa Clara Province. I document the historical practices of the cabildo, made famous by Afro-Chinese and relate it to its current operation, linking it to earlier discussions of economies

of tourism and foreign interest in Lukumi religion, both of which the cabildo is not privy to. The association rose steadily to economic and political importance from its founding at the turn of the nineteenth century, reaching its apogee prior to the 1959 Revolution. With very few cabildos remaining, their unique religious and hierarchical structure, methods of orisha worship and processes of initiation are unknown to many Lukumi practitioners that are members of orisha families that do not have public institutions. The majority of Lukumi practitioners in Cuba, are instead practicing the Havana-centric individualized and home-situated style of worship which is also the type of orisha worship popular in the diaspora and with Lukumi practitioners outside of Cuba. As a result of difference in religious practice and its geographical location the cabildo de los Chinitos is a testament to the past that is struggling to survive in the present.

The first Afro-Cuban cabildo was established in 1568, and over the centuries they were particularly important organizations for the successful promotion and practice of Afro-Cuban religions on the island. Their presence and function today are severely reduced, and Lukumi cabildos in particular are virtually non-existent. One challenge to the trend is the *Cabildo de los Chinitos* in Sagua la Grande, which is a Lukumi cabildo governed by Afro-Chinese priests. I explore how the Sagua cabildo engages *Sinalidad* and *Cubanidad*, as well as the struggle that the cabildo now faces in being cut off from financial support as a result of its isolated location, and maintaining its relevance as an Afro-Cuban religious institution in an age of autonomous, home-located religious practice.

The present chapter also illustrates important regional difference of Afro-Cuban Lukumi religiosity in particular, and the ways Chinese-Cubans are and have been

engaged in its making. In so doing, I give an alternative view of cabildo ethnicity and religious practice. Below I set out the cabildo's physical and material topographies and its geographical location as situated in a historically important site for sugar production and Chinese demography. I weave the narrative the racialized and gendered factors of this cabildo that contest existing understandings of their historicity with the changing framework of Afro-Chinese and Afro-Cuban religiosity. I frame my research on the Afro-Chinese participation and impact within this regional cabildo and ensuing Afro-Chinese religious implications through collective memory.

El Mundo Sagüero

Sagua la Grande, or Sagua for short is a municipality located to the north of Santa Clara. It is a somewhat forlorn city, even by Cuban standards. Today, you could very easily pass by Sagua and not even know it. Sagua has an illustrious industrial past, which you can still glimpse in the grand colonial architecture and its many main squares. In the nineteenth century, Sagua's rolling fertile terrain was turned over in swaths, from west to east as sugar production and mechanization radiated from Havana to the east. To date, Sagua is one of the few cities in Cuba that still maintains a sugar refinery and whose population is still very much reliant on sugar labor. Sagua is also important for its longstanding Cuban-Chinese population and their descendants. It has a substantial Afro-Chinese population, with several famous Afro-Chinese-Cubans, including Wilfredo Lam³⁰ originating from there; it is also considered a wellspring of Afro-Cuban – Lukumi

³⁰ Wilfredo Lam (1902-1982) was the son of a Cantonese father and “*mulata*” mother. His body of work explored *afrocubanismo* and contained Afro-Cuban religious elements. He was also personally involved in Lukumi religion, through his *madrina* (Lukumi godmother), “*Ma*’

and Palo/Bantu religiosity that are distinctive in practice to cognates found in Matanzas and Havana.

Sagua was officially established in 1840³¹ and became instrumental in the growth of the sugar industry across the island. Its settlement and expansion coincided with the first rollout of mechanized *ingenios*, which caused its population to rapidly swell, and attracted a large number of African slaves and indentured Chinese in particular. Sagua was once designated as part of the now defunct Las Villas Province (1879-1976), before administrative boundaries were redefined in 1879 by the Spanish colonial government, splitting the existing six administrative areas into its present 15. Today, Sagua has a population of approximately 56,000 (Cuba Census 2004) and lies within Villa Clara Province whose capital is Santa Clara.

As is true for other parts of the island, the recording of demographics of African ethnicities implicated in slavery and sugar production is rather imperfect in Sagua. Piecing together Sagua's historical ethnic composition from the vestiges of sugar and slavery to present day is challenging and requires the exploration of a range of primary sources. The impact of subjective and often contradictory uses of recorded ethnic and racial categories by different parties over the course of indenture and slavery adds a further layer of complexity. Sagua's registers of births, deaths, and marriages remain a crucial source. The Catholic Church maintained separate ledgers until 1903 segregated

Antoñica Wilson, africana en el barrio Cocosolo," an African in the Cocosolo neighborhood of Sagua whom Lam stated "had the power to call forth the elements" (Núñez Jiménez 1982, 66-67).

³¹ Antonio M. Alcover Beltrán (1905, 52) dates the founding of Sagua to 1812 when Don Francisco Javier de Aguilla purchased land of an area called Jumagua that was formally named Villa de la Purísima Concepción de Sagua la Grande in 1866 by Elizabeth II of Spain.

according to two subjective racial categories: one broadly labeled as “the whites,” *los blancos*, and the other, “the coloreds,” *los de color*. The latter category included all those that were excluded from the former: *morenos/as*, *morenos/as libres*, free and enslaved people of African descent, and *asiáticos católicos*, Catholic (baptized) Asians (Testa 2004, 47). The 1864 Sagua register divides its African-derived population into the following components: 1,197 “Congo” (at 32%, the single largest ethnic group), 592 “Lucumíes”, and 301 “Gangás”.³² Alongside the African-derived workforce in Sagua, the Chinese made the next largest ethnic demographic of labor in operation there. Juan Pérez de la Riva records that Las Villas in 1862, accounted for 7,306 or 21% of Cuba’s total native Chinese population, half of which were located specifically on plantations in Sagua. In 1872, the number of Chinese in Las Villas Province increased to 15,878 or 27% and 7,427 Chinese were located in Sagua – the highest recorded single concentration of Chinese in any Cuban province (Pérez de la Riva 2000, 199-200).

Sagua as a town was established and populated in direct response to the rise of sugar monoculture. Sagua was ranked alongside Havana, Cienfuegos, Cardenas and Matanzas as being the most important sugar ports on the island (Moreno Friginals 1976, 70). Prior to the nineteenth century, the area was forested and was known for the quality of its timber. Its importance for plantation economy was enhanced by its reputation for its

³² These are broad, ill-defined, and misunderstood genealogic categorizations. *Congo* is an estimation of Kongolese, west and central Africans; *Lucumíes* refers to west and southwestern African ethnic groups including people from present-day Yorùbá and Benin empires. *Gangá* is the most contentious and de-territorialized term, and unresolved debate ensues as to whether it relates to descendants of the Malinké / Mandinka of the Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone or is closer to west central Africa (see Christopher 2013). Figures here are derived from *Alta y baja de esclavos de la jurisdicción de Sagua la Grande*. ANC Fondo Tenencia de Gobierno [FTG], file 959, folder 99,965. These are also reported in Testa (2004, 47).

sprawling plains as being incredibly fertile. Funes Monzote (2008, 142) writes that Sagua planters extolled the prodigious growth of sugarcane, where it reached an astonishing height of 8 *varas* or 6.7 meters (as opposed to the national average of 4–5 meters). In the first half of the 1840s there were 26 *ingenios* in operation, which rose to a total of 74 within the confines of the several subdivisions that comprised Sagua la Grande.³³ The fertility of the region, and subsequent density of mill production firmly placed Sagua on the map and amassed great fortunes for the area, where the largest concentration of Chinese workers in Cuba were employed. Sagua is significant to my research because it represents one of the longest, continuous Chinese populations in Cuba (López 2013, 84). Esteban Montejo describes what could have been the nucleus or beginnings of a small Chinatown in Sagua, on Tacón Street, that sold “great numbers of strange things [...]”. They also had tailor shops, candy shops, and opium dens there” (Barnet 1994, 89 also quoted in López 2013, 84). Here I explore the equally rich and fertile Afro-Chinese religious legacies of the area. I had heard about Sagua while conducting research in Havana and Matanzas. Many of my interlocutors had mentioned the possible existence of an Afro-Chinese orisha cabildo, however my respondents were unsure if it was still in operation.

Getting to Sagua to conduct fieldwork was a logistical challenge. I had been concluding my research in Matanzas and had gotten rather comfortable staying in María Luisa’s house. Well into her seventies, María Luisa is an ultra-glamorous and generous host; her *Gallego* father had married Ariana Lui Chen, whose Cantonese father had

³³ These were under the jurisdiction of the deputy government of Sagua La Grande: 49 in coastal subdivisions and 33 located in the interior. Source: ANC, GG. 1849-1852. File 334/16062 “Expediente de subdivision interior del distrito de Sagua la Grande” (Funes Monzote 2008, 143).

arrived to work in the Hacienda Arroyo in Matanzas at the close of the nineteenth century where he had married a free woman of color. Even though María Luisa did not have any proof, everyone believed her Chinese grandfather was well over 100 years of age when he passed, and his genetics, María Luisa states, are the reason for her having the energy of a woman in her twenties. María Luisa prides herself on her hospitality and judiciously so. Each night was a feast of fresh locally caught langoustine, or pork in *mojo* accompanied by platters of steamed rice, beans cooked according to a secret family recipe, salad, yucca with more garlic, and plantain chips cooked the “correct” way: in rendered pork fat for extra crispness and color. Sometimes she would cook the few Chinese dishes she was taught by her mother, who in an effort to cater to her father’s Chinese palate had mastered the skill of making southern Cantonese delicacies with a Caribbean twist: Chinese soya sauce meets *vino seco*. At first, such culinary sensations and abundance were a little unsettling given my location, and especially so having experienced rather more austere experiences of fieldwork in Cuba. I quickly acclimatized to *chez* María Luisa, and contentedly yet somewhat guiltily reveled in the temporary oasis.

The company, the food, and the blissful homeliness encountered at María Luisa’s were soporific, conjuring romanticized daydreams of Cuba’s glamorous past, a fragile reverie that quickly evaporated each time I set foot outside María Luisa’s frescoed, art deco house in the area of Matanzas city known as Jovellanos. I had initially met María Luisa shortly after arriving in Cuba. She is the cousin of one of my most helpful participants in Havana and the Afro-Chinese grapevine saw to it that I had a place to stay “among family” while working in Matanzas. I understand that María Luisa, probably

because she has Spanish citizenship through her father's side of the family, and whose adult sons now live in Europe, lives in a somewhat rarefied Cuba out of reach of the vast majority of *Matanceros*. With touristy Varadero nearby, the socioeconomic disparity is ever more heightened, and there is inequality evident in every turn. As much as I hated the thought of leaving María Luisa's home, I started preparing – physically, but also a emotionally, to move on to Sagua la Grande where I was eager to discover if the *Cabildo de los Chinitos* was still in operation. Armed with only the first name and vague contact address of someone there that could help, I set my sights on Sagua.

Doing my best to ignore María Luisa's good-humored attempts at making me remain, ["there's nothing in Sagua, *mi'jo*, stay here and relax, there is plenty of *folklore* here on *los chinos*..."] I eventually managed to depart for Matanzas. Getting to Sagua, for an *extranjero* [foreigner] is anything but straightforward. It took me a few days to secure a ticket on a Viazul coach leaving from Varadero, itself an hour's drive from María Luisa's house. The coach would get me as far as Santa Clara. At the terminal, after waiting for two hours for our vehicle to arrive, there was talk of an ongoing delay in our pickup – the driver was on his way, he had made an unofficial detour on his previous coach trip by way of Madruga, to deliver some black market cheese and butter, I heard. Clandestine dairy run completed, our *yutong* duly arrived, loaded quickly with people and luggage, and skillfully made its way through the narrow Matanzas streets, eventually hitting the highway and heading 150 miles southeast to old Las Villas. The sleek Chinese-made coach deposited me at Santa Clara at around midnight, where my only choice of transport on offer was a horse-drawn cart. I would be staying in the province's capital with Juan, a friend of María Luisa's, who occasionally rented a room in his house

to foreigners. María Luisa had telephoned Juan ahead of time, after reluctantly accepting that I was truly leaving, and explained to Jorge that I was a poor student, while giving me an exaggerated wink. Thus, Juan and his wife, a musical family, knew I was on my way. In turn, Juan had hired a driver for me for my time in Santa Clara; this was crucial considering Sagua la Grande was still an hour away.

La Sociedad Santa Bárbara: El Cabildo de los Chinitos

Located off a nondescript rural strip of overgrown land hidden from the street stands the Cabildo de los Chinitos [the Association of the Little Chinese]. It is very easy to miss and rather difficult to find without the help of a Sagüero. Before leaving to Cuba for fieldwork, Silvina Testa, an anthropologist who authored a book on Afro religious organizations in Sagua (2004) had provided the name of Nora, a local government worker and potential contact that could help me locate the cabildo and also serve as my introduction. I managed to track her down, *a lo Cubano*, Cuban style, by asking people on the street. In no time at all, I was sitting in her office – albeit a different one than written on my piece of paper, on a different street, explaining my research and beseeching her help to locate *la casa de los Chinitos*. As I explained my reasons for taking up her time, Nora remained stoical, not giving anything away in relation to what I was saying, not even a nod to let me know she was following my explanation and my sometimes tenuous Spanish verb conjugations. I was terrified that my efforts had been in vain and decided the best course of action was to believe the cabildo was still in operation. It *had* to be there and, if not, I momentarily prayed and formulated a plan B, perhaps Nora could locate some people that had once frequented it? I eventually stopped

talking, and felt a palpable pause that was broken by Nora, who simply stated that she wasn't sure if anyone would be at the cabildo premises today, and that the only way to know for sure was to go and have a look for ourselves. Nora announced to her colleagues that she would be taking two hours off, and together we headed in the direction of the cabildo. As we shut the door on the car I had hired, with Nora in the front seat navigating, I silently thanked all that existed and added a new petition to make sure the cabildo was open.

When we arrived at our destination, I was not at all prepared for the state of the cabildo. A sign above the doorframe (Figure 7.1) declared in bold red lettering “CABILDO de STA BARBARA” arching over a hand drawn trio of Matanzas style *batá* drums, the consecrated Anya [also spelled Aña / Àyàn] ensemble that is sacred to Shangó. Below the drums, the sign also gave further clues to the association's patronage and activities: the words “Conjunto TyLegua” painted in bold red and white is a creolization of the Lukumi “Musical group *Eti Elegua* [Elegua's ear]”, referring to the mercurial trickster orisha's penchant to know and eavesdrop on people's business, and alluding to the cabildo's consecrated drum music. To the left of this appears “*casa de los Chinitos*” “house of the little Chinese”, which refers to the racial identity of the succession of its keepers and members.



Figure 7.1 The sign above the front door of the cabildo in Sagua la Grande

The Importance of Cabildos to Afro-Cuban Religion

The term *cabildo* in Cuba has many interpretations, and conjures up complex entanglements of ethnicity, identity, religiosity, organization and legality. *Cabildos de nación*, fraternal clubs instituted from as early as the sixteenth century were modeled after similar Iberian religious black brotherhoods, *cofradías de negros* (Ortiz 1992, 10-12). These guilds, or mutual aid societies of color, are important spaces in Afro-Cuban history as they are sites where ethnicities, freed and enslaved, and religions overlapped. Dotted throughout the island, they were arranged according to ethnic, sociolinguistic, and religious ties. Spanish law tightly controlled membership, especially for freed slaves, requiring that the stipulations of cabildo involvement be true to the division of ethnic boundaries set by the state. María del Carmen Barcia Zequeira notes, however, that because of inter-ethnic unions in Cuba the rule was occasionally transgressed, where “the Africans included their creole descendants in the activities of their cabildo” (Barcia

Zequeira 2003, 122). Cabildos were sanctioned by Cuban law and tolerated by slaveholders as places for members to congregate on their days of rest and specific Catholic holy days for socializing and promoting Christian educational activities.

Each cabildo was geared to fostering community assistance in times of sickness and death, and also for leisure and recreation. They were one of the few spheres of Cuban life in which members did not experience discrimination or racism (Brandon 1997, 70). They became locations for the promotion and maintenance of African languages, principally Yorùbá, Kikongo, Fongbe, and Efik/Ejagham as well as customs and cultural heritage (Howard 1998, xiv). Following the Spanish *cofradía* model, they were designed to give members Catholic instruction, and society members partook in their affiliated Church's activities, in particular, bearing the cabildo's saint image or banner in public processions. Aside from their Catholic activities, cabildos were also places for Afro-Cuban religious activities, ostensibly engineered as cultural and folkloric performances/gatherings. The majority of ritual practices were accessed only by initiated cabildo members to successfully avoid persecution and discrimination. With regards to its use in Afro-Cuban religious terms, cabildo can refer to both the physical structure and the congregation/admitted members. While some accredited cabildos did have designated premises for their functions, they were more often members' houses that doubled as meeting spaces.

Cabildos were prevalent in Cuba in the first half of the nineteenth century. Membership in cabildos, like the Chinese tongs discussed in the previous chapter was open to the subsequent generations of African and *criollo* [creole] born Cubans. Cabildos had internal structures of council, headed by a president, as well as other titleholders and

functionaries such as treasurer and *vocero*, or spokesperson. Both free and enslaved Africans and their Cuban born descendants established a plethora of cabildos in the 1820s (Montejo Arrechea 1993, 18) and there was a stellar rise in the number of every Afro-Cuban ethnic category of cabildo during this period. However, cabildos quickly fell out of favor with colonial authorities beginning in the 1880s as they were regarded as segregating spaces, unaligned with the government's policies of assimilation (Ayorinde 2004a). They were also deemed by successive generations of black and mixed-race Cubans as backward looking and as an unpleasant reminder of their previous "lowly condition" (Montejo Arrechea 1993, 43). Instead, Afro-Cubans were encouraged to integrate and join societies that were modeled on Spanish casinos called *sociedades de instrucción y recreo* [societies for instruction and recreation], which resulted in reduced membership and cabildo popularity (Ayorinde 2004a, 35).

As noted above, Cuba's current cabildo topography comprises only a handful of Lukumi associations, many of which are maintained solely in name, not in practice. Paradoxically, the only category of cabildo that continues to maintain a strong national identity and presence is that of the Abakuá (Efik/Ékpè religious and fraternal organizations). Locally called *cabildos de Carabalí* they reconstituted the palaver houses of Ékpè and Ngbe as walled lodges (Brown 2003b, 14). The Abakuá and Ñañiguismo – public performance of Abakuá ritual – in particular, have garnered enduring negative connotations of criminality and have been deemed responsible for Cuba's "social ills" (Allen 2011, 44). They have been singled out since the nineteenth century as an "idolatrous religion... a reflection of the barbaric customs of the African soil" (Landaluze 1881, 142-145). Mounting suspicion over their secretive practices has, if anything

intensified over the years. Another notable exclusion to the demise of cabildo function is found in Matanzas Province. There, Dahomean/Benin “Ewe Fon” derived religiosity, called Arará in Cuba, is still specifically organized and operated through cabildo structures (Brice-Sogbossi 1998) such as the Cabildo Arará Sabalú Nonjó which I visited during fieldwork.

Currently there are a scant handful of active Lukumi cabildos operating in Cuba. All of the illustrious Havana and Regla cabildos of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have long since ceased operation. They are remembered as much for being governed by women, as they are for their Lukumi religious reformations, and are overwhelmingly viewed as the “origins and strongholds of Cuban Lukumí culture and religion” (Brown 2003a, 74). A prime example is the “last cabildo of Yemayá” (Pedroso 2008, 3) in Regla, presided over by the famed priestess, Susana Cantero, whose initiation name was “Omitoké” (d. 1949). It was bequeathed to her niece Carmen Cantero, “La Negra”, until her death in 1961 at which point it ceased operating.

The cabildo of the Chinese in Sagua la Grande redefines the contours of race, so far associated with these institutions in the Cuban Lukumi religious context. What sets the cabildo in Sagua apart is that its custodians and the majority of its membership were mixed-race Afro-Chinese-Cubans. Its custodians have all been men, which again contrast with the historically female leadership of cabildos made famous for their impact on Lukumi worship. The casa de los Chinitos requires careful interrogation to understand its place, both historically, and contemporarily within the Afro-Chinese religious worldview and its making. Below I set out the cabildo’s stewardship, its physical and religious

material structures, its location, and the Lukumi (and briefly, Kongo) assemblages it contains.

Los Mulatos Achinados

La casa de los Chinitos' history is a long and distinguished one. Two men, José Luís Armenteros, an aspiring Afro-Cuban councilor and Basilio Rasco, a manumitted slave, founded it. Rasco had initiated Armenteros to the priesthood of Shangó, and had consecrated the *ashé* of the cabildo dedicated to José Luís' guardian orisha. The cabildo was officially registered on December 4 1898, Saint Barbara's feast day, and incorporated in Lukumi liturgical calendars to celebrate Shangó and also Sanfancón. Organizations such as the casa de los Chinitos had to be registered according to the 1878 Cuban Associations Act to be formally recognized as a cabildo.

Luís Martínez is the current keeper of the cabildo. He inherited it from his biological father, Rafael Martínez Moreno, who in turn inherited the cabildo from his Lukumi initiatory godfather, Luís Chis. Both Rafael Martínez Moreno and Luís Chis were Afro-Chinese. Luís Chis had inherited the cabildo from Armenteros in 1954 and it had reached great social prominence and affluence in that decade. Thanks to the political motivations of José Luís Armenteros, the cabildo enjoyed the patronage of local government officials in particular. The premises acted as a meeting place for politicians, and also enjoyed a very full and elaborate ritual calendar of Lukumi and Catholic events. Luís Martínez plainly states that Armenteros's downfall and sudden death was because of his political ambitions, something that the orishas did not support. As the story goes, Armenteros did not heed the advice given to him in his priesthood divination, instead,

going against it by running for local political office. Armenteros's sudden death in a fire was seen as a direct punishment from Shangó, who owns fire, for not having listened and for having neglected his duties as a priest at the head of the cabildo:

Luís Armenteros was an oní Shangó [priest of Shangó] and he didn't listen to his *itá* like many of his [Shangó's] children. José Luís was a railway worker but he was intent on becoming a politician and being famous, you understand? He had very big ideas and was in a hurry to get there. Increasingly he forgot about Shangó and stopped attending to him [performing sacrifices], he was very capricious. In fact, his political career he was warned against pursuing in his divination but he thought he knew best (interview Luís Martínez, 1 February 2012).

Luís Chis, Armenteros' successor was a renowned Obá Oriate, master of Lukumi ceremonies. Along with his protégé and ritual godson, Rafael Martínez Moreno, they officiated in countless ceremonies for the residents of Sagua. Many of them, Luís recalls, were wealthy patrons affiliated with the cabildo through its official presentation as a Catholic mutual aid association. The social elite in Sagua would quietly consult with Chis and Moreno in their capacities as diviners and perform Lukumi offerings, some also undergoing orisha priesthood initiations. The cabildo became a nexus for orisha activity that quickly gained notoriety throughout the province. In so doing, the cabildo forged links with orisha specialists in both Havana and Matanzas whose priests journeyed regularly to Sagua to help *los Chinitos* perform initiations. As Luís Martínez states the cabildo became resolutely known as the house of the Chinese:

It was from this growth that the Sagua cabildo became known as *la casa de los Chinitos*, as it was through their actions that it became famed for orisha worship, they were the pioneers. My father was a great man and his godfather was *un sabio* [a wise man]. They had the best of both worlds, the ancestral knowledge from Africa and the cunning from China [laughs].

I noticed Luís kept on speaking about these items in the past tense. When I brought this to his attention, he gave an audible sigh and nodded in acquiescence:

Yes I know. There are times when I don't think that this cabildo will be around for much longer, already it is in this state, and there are many repairs that need to be done. No one is interested in taking over the place when I die. My son has a job; he is not interested in such things. All this will be lost, the legacy, the history of the golden age of Sagua. It is also the history of the Chinese that helped build up this town, and this cabildo and the love they had for both blessed Saint Barbara and for the Lukumi religion (interview Luís Martínez, 1 February 2012).

Its leaders and the members of the public that frequented it intimately link the ascendancy of the cabildo with Afro-Chinese-Cuban action. Luís also explained that many Afro-Chinese from Sagua and Santa Clara, including his own family and especially those that used to financially support the cabildo have long since migrated to North America and Europe, leaving them without the means to implement many of the larger, elaborate public festivals. The emigration of Chinese-Cubans from the region started in the years surrounding the 1959 Cuban Revolution, leaving the cabildo without new members that it would have naturally derived from successive generations of Chinese-Cubans.

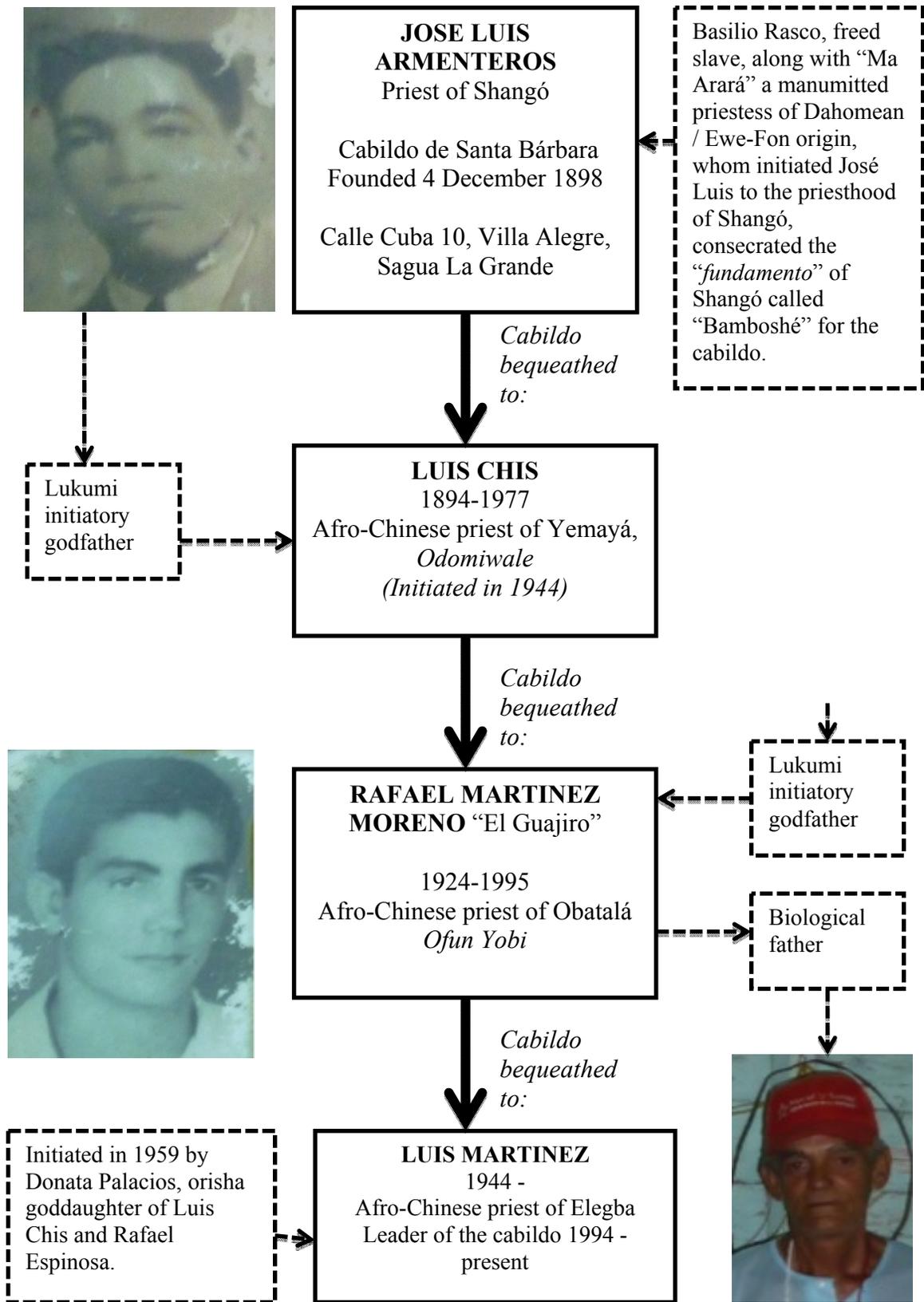


Figure 7.2 Line of inheritance of the Casa de los Chinitos

The Physical Cabildo

At our first meeting, Luís took me on a tour of the property; he was keen that I got a sense of how it used to be, in its prime, when his elders put the place on the map, rather than how it appears now. Luís explained that Sagua was a magnet for post-indenture Chinese migration where many families of mixed unions drawn by the tales of the city's modernity and hoping for work stayed, for better or for worse, finding solace in the cabildo and the many Afro-Chinese that were members there. For Luís, the cabildo was a religious stronghold, the epitome of regional Lukumi religious practice that, as he explained, was quite different from both Havana and Matanzas means of orisha worship. The Havana model, Luís stated, revolves around personal, household orisha shrines and autonomous orisha priests and their respective *ilés*. The cabildos were the opposite; their orishas were for the community, regardless of each member's initiatory status. It was their job to offer both physical and spiritual aid. Matanzas practice, Luís explained, still had vestiges of cabildo activity and different priests rallied to create cabildo-like celebrations even if they did not formally organize their religiosity according to cabildo structures. Luís states, "Sagua is located somewhere between Havana and Matanzas, they are of equal distance to us so we get influences of both styles of orisha worship...that is how I would explain our practices, as lying somewhere between the two."

The current state of affairs and disrepair of the cabildo, Luís lamented, was out of his control. He said that he had weathered the toughest years of his life, during the years immediately preceding the 1959 Revolution and again, during the economic scarcity of the Special Period. Walking around with Luís, seeing the cabildo through his eyes and hearing his fond experiences of growing up in a space that was very different than it

appeared now, I was able to sense the grandeur and camaraderie that would have made this place special and somewhat unique.

The cabildo's physical structure, which is a large residential house, is wood and has seen far better days. The rooms leading from the central corridor have decayed considerably and are way beyond the means of Luís and the handful of active members to repair. In particularly critical condition was the room that used to house the statue of Saint Barbara, its two-tiered purpose built red dais was now fully exposed to the elements and being devoured by termites. In recent years, Luís has concentrated the various orisha shrines into two rooms; in the first, closest to the main entrance is housed the Saint Barbara statue that the association is dedicated to, the shrines of the water orishas, Yemayá and Oshun, as well as Luís's personal orisha shrine – Elegua – and the cabildo's consecrated Anya drum set. The Sagua cabildo is also where Luís spends most of his time, and where his bed, a 1950s Soviet refrigerator, and other personal items are located for when he stays at the cabildo. The furthest backroom of the cabildo contains the inherited deities of his birth father and religious grandfather, as well as the cabildo's more mysterious end esoteric deities: Oduduwá and Yewá. Outside in the yard is a miniature *bohío* or hut, housing the Kongo *prenda* inherited from Basilio Rasco. Collectively, these shrines hint at the racialized historiography of its members and the plurality of the cabildo's religious practices; they are a visual and physical terrain of interdiasporic and religious cross-fertilization.

In the years that immediately followed the 1959 Revolution, tight state control over the activity of registered cabildos and a heightened distrust of their clandestine religious proclivities severely hampered the ability of cabildos to perform both public

Catholic ceremonies and private Lukumi rituals. There was an intensified risk associated with cabildo membership and practices of “folklore”, which were depicted as un-modern, racially divisive and, most damagingly – counter-revolutionary. Many started to distance themselves from such associations for fear of repercussions, and following the Cuban Communist Party’s early hardline stance on all forms of religious practice many olorisha found it safer to practice their religion within their own homes, *ilés* than in cabildos. In Sagua too, the scarcity of goods also became one of the biggest factors to affect religious practice especially during the dissolution of the USSR.



Figure 7.3 The cabildo today



Figure 7.4 The cabildo's saint room with dais

In its heyday of the early 1950s, the cabildo conducted close to 40 ceremonies each year. Presently, the cabildo manages just one annual event, the public procession of Saint Barbara on her feast day of December 4th. The celebration has occurred every year since the saint’s arrival and the dozens of handmade Chinese silk brocade capes donated

by past wealthy patrons that have adorned the statue on its route to church now languish in plastic bags. The statue's red (a coded reference to Shangó and Sanfancón) wooden palanquin is kept fastened to the interior wall of the shrine room along with the trio of *batá* drums. Looking around at these objects, and the cabildo's physical demise, Luís voiced his uncertainty as to how much longer the cabildo would be open. Luís was finding it ever harder to acquire the funds needed to keep its doors open and in turn, there had been no new members for over two years.

The Spiritual Structure of the Cabildo

As I walked around the property with Luís, he pointed out the various shrines to me. The orishas that are housed in this cabildo are a collection of orisha consecrated for the founders and for the cabildo. These are inherited through successive generations, with the prospective successor being confirmed through divination. Once the person has been positively identified, rituals are performed to prepare the new cabildo head to take on these duties. The deities are held in trust, conferring their *ashé* to the new caretaker. Luís had gone through an orisha initiation whereby his guardian orisha, Elegua was consecrated for him along with a few other accompanying orishas, which is different to the practice of consecrating a new olorisha in Havana. Following this consecration, Luís received an *orukó*, or Lukumi initiatory name, and being the inheritor of the *fundamentos* of the cabildo, was empowered to work with them all in the capacities of divination, making *ebó* and sacrifices, for and on behalf of the community. In total, I identified and surveyed a total of 38 distinct orisha shrines in the cabildo, the majority of which were

consecrated within the first few years of its operation and others that have accumulated over the years by successive leaders.

Returning to the shrine room containing the statue of Saint Barbara, Luís dug under the bed, revealing the *fundamento* [foundation, fundament] or the *ashé* that spiritually empowers the cabildo, consecrated to the orisha Shangó and given the appellation “Bamboshé”. This *ashé* was comprised of large smooth celts and a set of *dilogún* or divination cowries. The *fundamento*, literally the “fundament” or “foundation”, referring here to the spiritual base of cabildo action is kept hidden between the mattress and the bedframe. Luís explained that the consecrated Shangó acts as the heart of the cabildo, beating and radiating *ashé*, making sacred by its presence the physical space. Bamboshé was described to me as the true owner of the cabildo with Luís and his predecessors being the caretakers. Luís explained that Bamboshé had been consecrated by Basilio Rasco, and given a specific road or avatar name “like they used to do in *el campo*” [the countryside]. The “country” practice of identifying distinct qualities or roads of Shangó is a noticeable break from Havana-based Lukumi praxis:

Bamboshé is a *camino* of Shangó, in Havana and many places, including El Oriente (Santiago) they do not take out a road [*sacar un camino*] for Shangó, it is only in some places in *el campo* [the countryside] and Matanzas where roads for Shangó are determined. This one is Bamboshé, he is not the oldest nor the youngest Shangó, he is one in the middle. He dresses entirely in red, very fierce, hot tempered and powerful, and he is the one that carries an axe and swiftly delivers justice (interview Luís Martínez, 1 February 2012).



Figure 7.5 The cabildo's *fundamento*, Shangó Bamboshé, consecrated in 1898

The cabildo's Lukumi practice reflects regional orisha practices different from those found in Havana. These include the presence of a cabildo and its religious structures, but also the naming of specific avatars of deities such as Shangó and the guardian Bamboshé. Both of these are divergent from the more popular and well-known practices established in Havana, where practice is domesticated, with home altars and individual priests preside over *ilé orisha* in the absence of avatars for Shangó. Luís stated that the cabildo is a mix of influences from Matanzas and Havana practice, and the designation of *camino*s for Shangó is closer to Matanzas practice from where priests, and specifically ritual specialists [Obá Oriate] were historically sourced to help the cabildo. Although Lukumi cabildos were popular at the turn of the nineteenth century and the decades that followed, they are now scarce and the dominant Lukumi religious practice follows Havana protocols, with autonomous, household-located orisha lineages and initiations being the most popular and recognized. Luís waxed lyrical about the cabildo's past glory, yet he lamented the state of the religion today as becoming homogeneously associated with Havana style orisha worship:

People today do not understand the cabildo structure. They do not trust it. They want to pay for their initiation, they want their *santos* in their own home and that's it. Finished. You will hear people talking about receiving this *santo* or that *santo* to add to their collection, but do they know how to properly worship it? They don't understand cabildo initiation and orishas that can belong to the people. To make ebó, and everything that goes with it? I don't know. The cabildo you see here may be falling apart but it represents so much knowledge, so much community spirit that build these walls. It is a shame!



Figure 7.6 Luís Chis, Odomiwale's inherited Yemayá shrine



Figure 7.7 Rafael Martínez Moreno, Ofun Yobi's orishas within the cabildo

The individual orisha shrines that have been inherited by Luís also contain and convey intricate Afro-Chinese symbolisms. One example is the “Chinese Oshun” that was consecrated for Luís’s paternal grandmother, a “Chinese *mulata*” who was an initiate of Oshun. The tureen that contains Oshun’s consecrated stones sits in a porcelain basin encircled with brass implements (Oshun’s signature metal) that are of stylized Chinese origin. Luís offers the following explanation:

Oshun uses her weapons to defend her children; we say that she is small but powerful “*ella esta chiquitica pero poderosa*” and one of the most revered orishas of the entire pantheon because when she makes up her mind – that is it. Nothing can happen without her, she has to agree otherwise she is like this [he crosses his arms over his chest and closes his eyes] and no one, not even Olofin, can persuade her. [...] This Oshun was my maternal grandmother’s; it stayed with the cabildo after she died. She was initiated in the 1940s and these tools were made by a local Chinese metal worker. He made tools for all of the orishas. My grandmother told me that her Oshun was Chinese and that she takes this weapon, which is like those found in martial arts...so that she can protect her children. As far as my grandmother was concerned, Oshun was in China before she came to Cuba. I think she was trying to say is that there was solidarity between Chinese and African people that was so strong that they could not imagine a time when one was not a part of the other. Those tools are particular to this cabildo. I have not seen them in Matanzas or in Havana and most people don’t know about them. You know, there is a *camino* [path/ avatar] of Oshun that is Chinese? She is from the Yellow River, the same area that our ancestors were from. The *libretas* [handwritten books of knowledge and divination that circulate among orisha initiates] say that she has this type of weapon. She uses it to protect her children...to defend” (interview Luís Martínez, 1 February 2012).

The Chinese Oshun implement that Luís showed me are a tangible expression of the belief that the orishas, not the Catholic saint, is of Chinese origin and syncretized as such. Luís’ explanation of the syncretism and connection between Oshun, the Afro-Cuban deity described as the owner of fresh water and the Yellow River in particular was connected to its name: yellow being one of the colors associated with Oshun, and the river being her principal domain in nature. He was unaware until I pointed it out to him

that the majority of Chinese indentures were Hakka, from Shandong Province bordering the Yellow River (Martin 1939, 5).



Figure 7.8 Oshun shrine in the Casa de los Chinitos flanked by two stylized Chinese "weapons"

The Drums, the Statue, and the Tamarind Tree

The statue of Saint Barbara, itself imported from Europe at great expense, looms large over the assemblages of orisha accoutrements in the front room of the cabildo. Purchased by the cabildo in 1951, it was commissioned and made in Olot, Girona Province, Spain, a Catalan village renowned for its fine religious statuary ateliers that supplied Catholic churches all over the world with icons. The statue is larger than life-sized; situated on a pedestal it is exquisitely hand crafted with gilt and hand painted details on the robes. The Girona Saint Barbara replaced a much smaller and more modest statue that now resides in Luís's family home a few blocks from the cabildo.

Adorned with artificial flowers, rosaries and Afro-Cuban religious elements such as the *shaba*, a metal chain on which 21 miniature tools and implements are associated

with Ogún, the Girona statue is the first religious image visitors see when visiting the premises. The acquisition of the image coincided with a boom in Sagua industry and a time when many wealthy patrons financially supported the cabildo. The proceeds gained from officiating in these ceremonies, known as *ashedis*, were significant amounts, which Chis and Moreno re-invested in the cabildo. These investments included the Girona Saint Barbara and also sponsorship of the first set of consecrated Lukumi *batá* drums for the cabildo, the first of its kind in Sagua la Grande.

The saint statue is the only Catholic/Christian image to be found in the cabildo. To state that it is merely there to represent the colonial past, one that a cabildo had to rigidly comply with, is unrealistic as members were devoted to it, and treated it as a syncretized manifestation of Shangó. While conducting fieldwork on site, two longstanding members of the cabildo stopped by, as I understood was their weekly habit, and offered a prayer to both the statue and to the various orisha shrines. For them Santa Bárbara was as much part of their devotion, as it offered a focal point for speaking to Shangó, and they would address the statue accordingly. These visiting women had also prayed to the orishas housed in the tureens from which they had sought help through the mediation of divination and sacrifices in their recent past. Luís explained that Saint Barbara was the chosen icon for Shangó given the cabildo's legal status as a *cabildo de nación*. He stated that while his father and grandfather had been aware of the syncretisms of Shangó with the Chinese Sanfancón, they had not invested in a statue for the Daoist deity, primarily because of the lack of availability of a suitable image and secondly, because it was considered "sufficient" to have one syncretism through the Catholic image.

Both explicitly and implicitly, studies that invoke or infer syncretism have highlighted the nature of such syntheses in the contexts of alien dominance and as an instrument in colonialism (see Taussig 1980; Comaroff 1985; Scott 1985; and Ong 1987). These syncretic acts can be viewed as a form of resistance because “hegemonic practices are never simply absorbed wholesale through passive ‘acculturation’” (Shaw and Stewart 1994, 20). Syncretized elements undergo a process of transformation where meaning is revised and evaluated according to the dynamics and discourse in which it is received. Such meanings are disassembled, divorced, and reconstituted into something that is coherent and reinforces the adopted worldview.

The drums and the statue were two purchases that were significant for the cabildo for two very different but connected reasons. The purchase of the Girona statue was a means of raising the public profile of the cabildo. David Brown states that religious guilds such as these competed aesthetically with one another for power, recognition and earnings during the colonial period (Brown 2003a, 259). Cabildo power and prestige were demonstrated through the performance of public festivities; namely, through the procession of the cabildo’s patron saint statues on their Catholic feast day – the most elaborate and important day of the liturgical calendar for any cabildo.

Aside from the rooms that contained the various orisha shrines, the Saint Barbara statue and drums, Luís was keen to show me the land to the west of the property, a small grassed plot that was by a large tamarind tree. Luís had shown me photos of himself as a young boy (Figure 7.9); in each of them he was pictured with his father and orisha godfather standing in the garden with the tree in the background. Luís spoke vividly of the splendor of the cabildo in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s when he was a child

and the photos were taken. He explained that every year, up until 1959, his elders would offer Shangó *un torito*, a small bull, under the leaves of the tamarind tree dedicated to him:

That is his [Shangó's] favorite offering, but it is so hard and costly to do, my *abuelo* and father would do it annually, that gives you an idea how important this *cabildo* was. It all changed with the Revolution, people moved abroad...they forgot the *cabildo* and this is how it is left today. The exodus of people, really hit us hard in Sagua, and now, people in this area are looking to Havana for their initiations, they are not coming here, to the *cabildo*. They see it as a relic, as something from the past about to die out [...] I don't think Shangó will let this all go to ruin. Something has to happen. Who knows? Maybe we will be able to perform our sacrifice under the tree again someday.

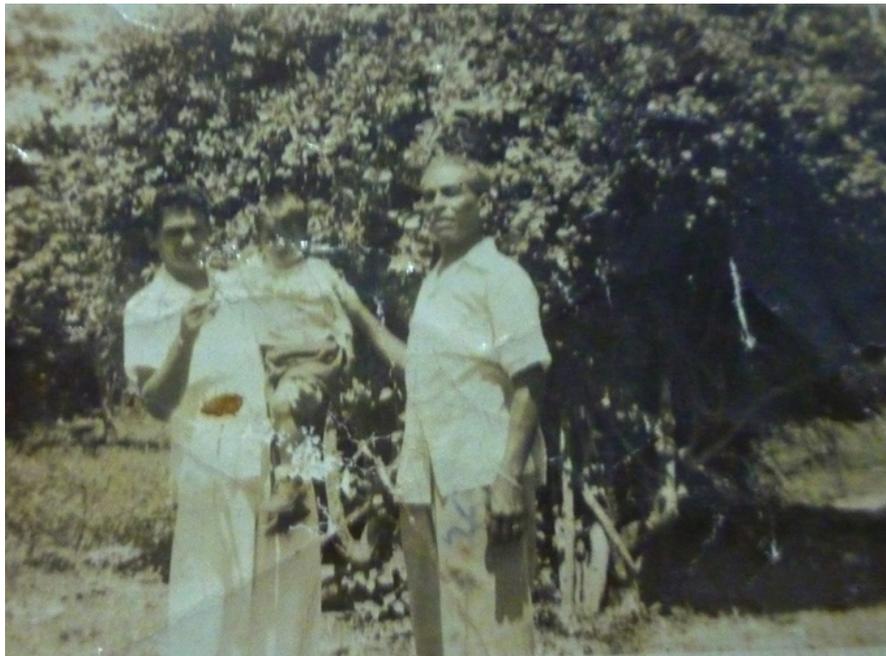


Figure 7.9 Luís Martínez in the arms of his father, Rafael Martínez Moreno and next to his godfather, Luís Chis in front of the *cabildo*'s tamarind tree c.1950

Luís explained that such a sacrifice was not possible under the current government, given the scarcity of cattle and the illegality of slaughtering them in particular; performing such a sacrifice would have had strict legal penalties. He wondered if the absence of performing this annual ceremony, an exceptionally elaborate sacrifice,

was perhaps the reason for the cabildo landing on hard times. It was the tamarind tree, and its associated sacrifices as instituted by the Chinese-Cuban caretakers that exemplified the resources available to the cabildo in the early part of the twentieth century and exactly those that were taken away with the change of government.



Figure 7.10 Luís Martínez standing between the tamarind tree and the cabildo

Securing a life-sized, exquisite saint statue hand crafted in Europe was a prestigious investment as it afforded the cabildo the ability to participate in public, Catholic aligned celebrations. The commissioning of a sacred set of Anya drums was to effect presentations of a different kind. A fundamental part of Lukumi ritual worship is the offering of Anya. Anya comprised a set of three *batá* drums. They are made by hand, and consecrated by a collective of babalawos and initiates “sworn to the drum”, birthed from one set of drums, forming a lineage of parent and child sets of *batá* akin to priesthood initiation.

The consecrated drum set is considered an orisha post-ritual, and must be cared for in such a manner by being given regular offerings. Their sacredness extends to protocols regarding their employment and handling. Anya is played solely by specially trained and initiated male drummers and never within secular arenas. Being “presented to the drums” is a ceremonial requirement of every new Lukumi orisha priest where Anya’s voice – the beat of the drum through designated rhythms and empowered by ritual and sacrifice – communicates to Olofin that a new priest has been made. It is at the completion of performing this ceremony, called being presented to the drums, that an olorisha is considered a confirmed or fully initiated priest (Schweitzer 2013, 28). With the presentation, the newly acquired status of the priest is communicated formally through the power of the drums, Anya. The presence of a set of consecrated Anya in the cabildo is considered important given that Shangó, the patron of the cabildo, is the owner of all drums, and Anya specifically. Luís recalls the arrival of the *batá*:

I was very young, but grew up seeing nothing but *osha* activity; people would come and go all hours of the day and night, there were *iyawó* being made here which drew people from Matanzas. We held *toques de fundamento* [Anya drumming/ performance] in the salon almost every other week. They were made by the *babalawo* and master drum maker, Miguel Alsina, and consecrated by the *olubató* [master of *batá*], Alfredo Calvo, Oba Tola. He was a big influence on our orisha ceremonies and one of the most knowledgeable priests ever to exist. Ever. And according to him, it was the first time that an Anya drum consecration had been made for Chinese-Cubans. I met many Chinese-Cubans and Chinese *mulatos* here in Sagua that were of my father’s generation and his godfather’s generation before him that had been waiting a very long time to be presented to the drums. They did not want to travel to another province to do that, they felt it was important to do it here, in their spiritual home, in the cabildo that they helped build and supported. The importance then for getting Anya was a fulfillment of a promise to make the cabildo more self-sufficient, so it wasn’t only a first for Anya, but also for *nosotros, los mulatos achinados* [us, the Chinese-*mulatos*] (interview Luís Martínez, 1 February 2012).

The arrival of the Anya drums marked a turning point in the autonomy of the cabildo. Luís Chis, the religious grandfather of current caretaker, Luís, also worked closely with priests from Matanzas and was initiated in the house of María del Pilar Gómez Pastrana. Pastrana is popularly remembered by Lukumi practitioners as Fermina Gómez, Osha Bi³⁴, herself a historically important figure, considered one of the matriarchs of the Lukumi religion in Cuba (Ferrer Castro and Alegre 2006). The arrival of the consecrated drums declared a higher state of autonomy and prestige as the cabildo was able to perform ceremonies in Sagua without having to resort to bringing in ritual specialists from the established enclaves of Havana and Matanzas.

By commissioning the consecrated set of Anya drums, the cabildo was able to further Afro-Cuban religious authority and exclusivity, gaining in particular, Lukumi religious capital. The drums form part of a specific and important focus for the cabildo's Lukumi religious activities that crosses divides of public and private performance. The cabildo's Lukumi religious authority was enhanced by affiliation with Matanzas, especially through the acquisition of the Anya drums from a recognized and respected drum lineage in that province. Havana *batá* are different from Matanzas *batá* both in their construction and their associated ritual performances and initiate presentation styles. The presence of Matanzas style Anya further delineated the cabildo's practices as being different from Havana's model of autonomous *ilé orisha*.

³⁴ Ferminita Gómez was a priestess of Yemayá who died 27 September 1950. Along with Monserrate González Obá Tero, her elder and priestess of Shangó, credited with establishing the worship of certain orishas such as Olokun to Cuba (Ferrer Castro and Acosta Alegre 2006) and for concretizing various Lukumi ritual protocols. The house in which Fermina lived until her passing is designated a cabildo by olorishas. It contains the inherited orishas and a unique ritual set of Olokun drums (documented by Fernando Ortiz) at 104 Salamanca Street, Matanzas City, and for the last forty years have been attended to by Antonio Pérez, "El Chinito," who is of mixed African and Chinese descent (interview with Antonio Pérez, 24 January 2012).



Figure 7.11 Saint Barbara statue from Girona with Anya drum on chair

These different facets of cabildo religious life and syncretisms speak of carefully orchestrated appropriations of material culture for the overall benefit of the orisha community that is now meekly sustained by the association. Both Sagua as a region and the cabildo in particular, are situated outside the purview of the Cuban government's focus on tourism development and associated political economies. The cabildo's communal style of orisha worship and whose initiations are conceptually different from the dominant Havana style have lead to fewer and fewer numbers knocking on the cabildo's door.

Havana, being the main port of call for tourists, has an inordinate number of autonomous, religious practitioners that are in contact with foreigners. The propensity of home-situated orisha practice facilitates contact and working with foreigners. Highly visible orisha structures that were not co-opted by the state would, my informants told me; prevent mixing with foreigners for fear of scrutiny and penalties by the authorities.

Matanzas, a similar stronghold of Afro-Cuban derived religion has Varadero close to it; a vastly developed tourist resort catering specifically to foreigners, and one whose landscape is rapidly changing to accommodate them as witnessed by its regional international airport. Along with the consistent emigration of Sagua citizens, including its Chinese descendants and the highly regulated political state, orisha practices in the region are today extremely low key, and marginal. Orisha worshipers prefer the sanctity of their own homes through individual Lukumi initiation, and to practice outside of the gaze of the state, than being a part of a highly visible cabildo.

Practitioners display and engage in a “*doble moral*”, a heightened awareness that is linked to the slave regime and Spanish colonialism, which does not guarantee any form of morality (Ayorinde 2004a, 172). Katrin Hansing expounds on the notion of double standards and the ability to deliver contesting opinions through the use of *la doble moral* [double morality] or “*la doble cara*” [two-faced], terms that Cubans use to describe taking contradictory private and public positions (Wirtz 2010, 414). The need for duality is premised on survival tactics that enable Cubans to successfully navigate between different discourses, namely one that is public and aligned with state politics, and another which may be critical of the state and reserved for spaces that are intimate and candid (Hansing 2006, 26). Kristina Wirtz notes that this is especially important in terms of economic survival. The impact of the Special Period has made “such double morality endemic, as Cubans of all backgrounds cope with severe economic hardships by “inventing” (their word) often morally dubious or illegal private, entrepreneurial activities to generate income in dollars” (Wirtz 2010, 414). By practicing their Afro-Cuban religion in the home, they are more able to effect a sensibility of *doble moral* than

to be publicly affiliated to a *cabildo*. While many of my interlocutors felt that the state has softened in its official stance on religion, they also felt that they had to tow the party line, especially when it came to being employed in the upper echelons of the government, where outward and visible signs of orisha religion were discouraged. On more than one occasion my respondents spoke of the need to actively hide their religious affiliation to their work superiors for fear of being ostracized and potentially be cast as untrustworthy.

On the issue of money, foreigners, and religion, Luís Martínez took a very dim view of urban orisha priests selling their services to foreigners to gain hard currency. Wirtz further writes that to understand the interactions of diverse cultural signs and symbols that relate to observable phenomenon, we must take as the starting point that there are often multiple meta-cultural interpretations in circulation for any given cultural phenomenon. It is therefore the social actor's job to mobilize and make use of various interpretations to make sense of persistence or transformations (Wirtz 2004, 410) in these phenomena.



Figure 7.12 Saint Barbara statue

According to Kempf (1994, 103), colonial and hegemonic powers became increasingly suspicious of local, hybridizing practices wherein national and religious symbols of institutions were being appropriated and imbued with people's own meanings. By taking the imposed iconography of the oppressor and incorporating it within a substantively different internal hierarchy and structure of meaning, the original message becomes transformed. Griswold et al., offer a useful analysis of materiality from an actor-network theory perspective that works through the interactions between the processes of emplacement, namely their physical position and cognitive location (Griswold et al., 2013). Three parts mediate the relationship: distance, legibility, and orientation. I find the tripartite approach pertinent here, especially with regard to distance, which I understand both as physical and as temporal. The objects of the *cabildo* and the structure itself were routinely described in relation to its past rather than its present. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2005) describes of her fieldwork tour of Liverpool with her interlocutor, the streets that were once important for black dockworkers in the 1950s had long since vanished and many of the pertinent physical structures no longer existed, yet their psychic presence was just as meaningful. The Casa de los Chinitos and other *cabildos* like it are a testament to regional Afro-Chinese identity making and the plurality of interdiasporic fertilizations over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The physical structure that enshrines the ways in which identity can be carried forward through its various forms of iconography indicate religious and social capital garnered by Afro-Cuban action and Afro-Chinese practice.

CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS

Contributions

My work offers new knowledge of diasporic interaction and its florescence as examined through a religious lens. I have relayed the particular and personal through lived ethnographic experiences and various qualitative techniques to provide broad understandings of Cuban sociocultural and sociopolitical frameworks. I also position the study within a wider compendium of Cuba's significant historicities; especially the late nineteenth and early twentieth century timeframe when the state was concerned with assimilating its ethnically diverse populations and fashioning a holistic Cuban identity. In so doing I make both substantive and analytical contributions, and have strengthened the available literature, wherein little had been previously published in English. The substantive contributions of the dissertation are discussed here, and the analytical offering – my framework of interdiasporic cross-fertilization – follows.

My dissertation examines the rise of Afro-Chinese syncretism and the contradictions of diaspora in contemporary Cuba, where Afro-Cuban and Chinese identities as well as their heritages combine and compete with Cuban racial politics, framed in a post-Soviet, and pro-Chinese era. Not just Chinese-Cubans, but Cuba's population at large are contending with harsh economic realities in what can be regarded as the post-Special Period, to denote its lasting effects. Afro-Cuban religiosity and local Lukumi practices contextualize these social-cultural factors and make visible the misunderstood and under-reported interdiasporic cross-fertilization that is a vibrant and discernable factor in contemporary lived religious practice.

Discussions of Cuba and Cubans, both within and outside of academia tend to become focused on specific and well-trodden political pathways. Through these often very motivated and sometimes heated discursive events, especially following the current or proposed plans by the socialist party for their people, one will likely hear words to the effect of “Cuba: change where absolutely nothing changes”. In the present work, I think through the ways that diasporas have not only met and mixed, but also the impact of transnationalism in opening new, tangible and symbolic pathways for the connection and circulation of goods, people and ideas. These pathways are fundamental for understanding cultural and religious practice. The latter is happening at lightening speed in a place where it is routinely said *nothing ever changes*. I can understand how many feel that Cuba has been at a standstill, and such an opinion is arrived upon through generations and decades of waiting for specific political change to occur. As such, it produces a feeling of indolence. However, if we adjust our focus to bring in other moments of Cuba’s historicity, then it is evident that Cuba has been an island marked by extreme and aggressive change. Moreover, interdiasporic intermeshing and transnationalism have been intrinsic driving forces for these processes from the start.

The ramifications of these changes are yet to be determined and fully realized, and the state is most probably ill-equipped to contain or exert control over them. The contemporary levels of globalization and transnational connections being experienced by Cubans, while appearing to be happening at a dizzying velocity, probably pale in comparison to the impetus of change one, two, three or and more centuries ago, when colonialism, slavery, indenture, rebellion, and revolution created deep grooves into the patina of the “pearl of the Antilles”.

It is within these broader frameworks that I pose the negotiation of Afro-Cuban religion with four distinct Chinese contributions: Chinese as a group of racialized subjects, Chinese religious beliefs, the cultural practice of the Chinese, and Chinese material objects. While operating in tandem, these four cultural inclusions can also operate in isolation, as exemplified in the changing economic climate when severe shortages have been experienced; these have resulted in a dearth of materials and a reliance on ideas, narratives and praxis. It is through these multi-textural presences that Afro-Chinese religion has developed, crisscrossing socioeconomic periods and historicities as well as hosting alternative understandings of identity, of both *Cubanidad* and *Sinalidad*.

Within the growing Afro-Chinese Lukumi belief system is a demonstration of a dual understanding and derivation of race and identity, which directly challenges assumptions about ancestry and identity premised on state racial ideology. These new derivations are responses to the hegemonic transculturating discourse that dominated Cuba's nation-making activities from the turn of the nineteenth century, which was a historical moment that manufactured *Cubanidad* from European blueprints and tightly controlled and policed African and Caribbean identities when convenient. In understanding these dynamics, the presence and contribution of the Chinese and other diasporas were historically muted, feared and unwelcome within Afro-Euro Cuba. The challenge for voice and presence is met here by invoking Chineseness or *Sinalidad* as an intrinsic part of *Cubanidad*, or perhaps one of a multiple *Cubanidades* (Hernández-Reguant 2009). My method for contestation is through the highly visible incursion of

Sinalidad in the brokering of Lukumi religious processes of interdiasporic cross-fertilization.

Existing strategic constructions of race and ethnicity are being challenged through a different understanding of religious inclusion and lineage making, wherein Afro-Chinese ancestors are routinely called upon through Lukumi ritual, *moyubá* [invocation], to play central and imperative roles in producing relationships that unite diasporas in the lives of olorisha. African and Chinese unions are not solely genetically mandated. Apart from secular constructions of identity and descent are the mobilizations of Lukumi understandings of kinship and descent that challenge these assumptions. Priests and practitioners are able to invoke and ritually embody *Sinalidad* through their Afro-Chinese ancestry, made present through the *moyubá* as indicated by Celia's narratives in Chapter V. Similarly, many olorisha can claim Africanness through religious ancestry and affiliation through religious ancestry by virtue of their initiation by Afro-Cuban elders. As El Chinito of Regla amply demonstrates, it is through his identification as a ritual descendant of Afro-Cuban Lukumi priestesses, and tempered through the symbolic and religious knowledge that they and others charged him with that he gains his foothold within the Lukumi religious sphere. Although there are few elders upon whom interdiasporic religious identity is premised upon does not detract from their importance. Through the *moyubá* and many other ritual actions, they continue to play central roles in their everyday lives. They are not only sources of intangible religious power – *ashé* by virtue of the orisha they passed on, but also the privileged ceremonial knowledge. These are sure forms of inherited Lukumi capital.

However this hegemonizing view of syncretism still looms large within academic discourse, reifying all observations of fusion, hybridity, and creolization in religious beliefs as being sourced in the same structural wellspring. We must identify such surreptitious attempts of reifying syncretism and tease out the theoretical strands to better understand and perceive the limits of thinking by pursuing such lines of enquiries. Lukumi religion has alternatively been viewed as something spontaneous and dynamic in its development, deemed an “unintended carryover of African religious knowledge” (Palmié 1995, 73), and as something rigid, static and unchanging. It is precisely the polarizing nature of this discourse of Afro-Cuban practices that has led to much contemporary questioning of the legitimacy of it being called a religion at all.

Lukumi priests, including those of Afro-Chinese descent, assign meaning through exercising agency, and by invoking and investing their practices with *Sinalidad* through objects, ancestors, and attendant Chinese rituals. My data show that interdiasporic cross-fertilization welcomes and ushers in Chinese syncretisms over European derived ones. The prominence of the four types of *Sinalidad* discussed in this dissertation, express Afro-Sino solidarities that are a consequence of their historically rooted proximities in Cuba’s social-racial imaginaries. There is also a practical relationship here, between the objects chosen/desired – of Chinese origin – that opens up the possibility of accumulating wealth, religious capital and social prestige. The seemingly aesthetic and poetic Orientalist touches to Afro-Cuban religion are actually critical responses to identity making processes and can be read as a direct challenge to the Cuban socialist project. Cuban priests, through concerted efforts of *Sinalidad*, are quietly accumulating wealth and thus acting in ways incongruent with state ideologies. Admittedly, this anti-

Revolutionary action is happening at a time in Cuba's history that is already marked by significant changes in official party positions in terms of private property, commerce, and small scale entrepreneurship, yet Afro-Cuban religiosity in particular, has not been officially factored in as a viable channel in which to exercise these new policy changes. What is more, it is happening within African and Chinese diasporic persons that have never been envisioned as the victors in or for socioeconomic change.

Similarly, Havana's Chinatown currently spotlighted by the Cuban government through a project of the neighborhood's regeneration highlights the schisms of use for the space as designated by the state. The state focus on Chinatown speaks little of the government's plans for the Barrio's mixed Chinese residents and workers, who are feeling increasingly alienated by the development geared to fostering tourism. In response to the state focus, existing structures that once helped Chinese indentured and labor migrants to become assimilated to life in colonial Cuba are reinventing themselves to be relevant to Cuba's Caribbean born Chinese-Cubans. Chinese associations in Chinatown are achieving this by offering avenues of transnational movement that were previously off-limits to most Cubans, but especially those subjected to past racist ideologies and invisibilized within the social order. Within these new spaces, Chinese-Cubans in the Barrio Chino are making connections with Afro-Cuban religions, becoming initiated, and initiating others that they connect with through these institutions. The connections that are forged between Cuba and China, and especially those mediated through the Barrio Chino, are being fostered by persons that are initiated as Lukumi olorisha and Ifá babalawo, already used to operating according to different and discreet codes of ethics and identifications relating to Chinese masonry and other secretive

societies. I have emphasized in my work the importance and relevance of the dynamics of interdiasporic cross-fertilization as a departure from the reified and asynchronous concepts of previous syncretism frameworks.

Theoretical Advancement: Interdiasporic Cross-Fertilization

My dissertation attempts to convey a manageable theoretical understanding of an otherwise abstruse rendering of syncretism across African and Chinese diasporas in Cuba, as condensed from my data of religious negotiations. I posit here an ongoing dialogue and cultural exchange observable through material culture, iconography, and divination narratives mediated through Afro-Chinese and Cuban-Chinese religious practice in Cuba. While I agree that syncretism can be glimpsed through its “products”, for example, deity correspondences across disparate iconographic frameworks or religious fields, I do not subscribe to the idea that the product sufficiently reveals the process. Examining the result does not necessarily determine the theoretical framework that explains the arrival of said outcome. I address the gloss of process-as-product by observing syncretism in motion, the dynamic interface that results in new ways of synthesizing different elements. I am removing syncretism from its amorphous and poorly understood and conceptually undefined realm, and centering it as the process of religious interaction specifically between diasporas.

In other studies that seek to tackle syncretism in the Caribbean, and especially within the Afro and Euro-Atlantic diasporic contexts, syncretism has been relegated to an undetermined and imprecise past. Syncretism has been rendered as something that has occurred solely at point of entry with the initial meeting of two different systems or fields

of thought and praxis. These produced occasions that reified these two systems into one conclusive and binding statement, enabled a conveniently static platform upon which much academic understanding was then constructed. The outcome of such an approach is evident in the extensive compilations and tabling of various cross-diasporic correspondences as indicated in Chapter III. Inherent in the longstanding paradigm is an idea of a latent post-syncretism stage or “syncretized” stasis; something is implied however never directly tackled. It can be rendered simple as “syncretism achieved,” yet how it is achieved and its impacts remain unanswered. The new resulting diasporic religiosity and its practices are thus cast as complete. If our own practical and quotidian experiences of living culture and religion are ones that constantly involve experiencing change, and the necessity of religious members and groups to react to change and new information is any indication, then it can be conjectured that diasporic religious syncretism is an enduring and recursive procedure.

Syncretism is also a messy and contested arena in which separate ideas, figures and rites are historically embedded, emotionally laden, and treasured as intangible spiritual heritages that connect the person to community, diaspora and homeland. Here we are likely to encounter hard won and well-buttressed beliefs, obstinate religious practices, objects and narratives open to polarizing interpretations, and important discussions couched in terms of legitimacy, orthodoxy, and indeed, sacrilege. Similarly one is likely to encounter the margins of such beliefs in agents and diasporas that hold equal weighting to experience and expertise. By focusing on diasporic cross-fertilization I am able to uncover how and why religiosity is negotiated through agency, resilience, and

resistance, resulting in some modulated forms of practices to survive and fluoresce despite very real adversity and oppression.

Thus the anthropological history of syncretism analysis is exclusively delineated along carefully constructed lines that extoll and map the objects, rather than the procedures, and continued development of it. None of the tensions, the disagreements, the controversies or the very acts of making, are present in its accompanying discourse, which is anathema to a renewed emphasis in anthropology that seeks disjuncture and differences by encountering “true fictions” in ethnography as alluded to by Marcus and Clifford (1986).

Syncretism has become ossified as an integral stage of the religious process in diaspora formation and little thought has been given to the results of the intimacies experienced interdiasporically. It is no wonder, then, that given these unsung facets of processual syncretism, that their products have been read in very distinct and rigid ways. The tabling of correspondences is really the performance of an archeology of syncretism; the metaphor can be furthered by thinking of the ethnographer as going into the field, unearthing fossils of correspondences and offering them up as fully formed examples of a completed religious evolutionary process.

With any longstanding and well-entrenched approach, there are observable benefits, which in my estimation, lie in the area of discussions of power, hegemony and structure that are necessarily invoked to understand, not how these came about, but why these came about. Social scientists, ethnologists and religious scholars working in Afro-Atlantic fields, learn by rote that subjugated persons preserved their cultural and religious capital from being erased by hegemonic and dominating Euro-Christian religion. The

subaltern religious survivalist strategy is viewed as grafting their “native” subversive deities and folkloric – or worse – pagan practices, to the sanctioned and sanctified operations of the Church. The conceptualization of Afro-Atlantic religious survivals has happened so forcefully that it itself is the dominant and hegemonic expression of religious contact available in academe. The products of syncretism are hard-won negotiations and much like any strident discussions, they undergo various stages of testing, undressing and redressing.

I pose a concept of syncretism that seeks to value religious interconnection and intra-connection. Processual syncretism is evident when two different diasporas coalesce or make deep contact, wherein both internal structures and external signifiers become significantly altered and *altared*, changes that are substantively differently from their previous, separate spheres of references. The outcome is much greater than the sum of its parts. In Chapter IV, I examined the powerful materiality of the Afro-Cuban world from different vantage points. I tackle syncretism by investigating one case of interdiasporic communication surrounding specific deities: the Chinese-Cuban deity, Sanfancón and his competing orisha counterparts: Shangó and Orunla. My decision to use the trio as the main interdiasporic cross-fertilization example relates to the prominence of these deities in Cuba irrespective of the ethnic and racial identities of Afro-Cuban religious practitioners – they escape such compartmentalization. In addition, these are arguably the most important figureheads within Afro-Cuban and Afro-Chinese religiosity on the island – their prominence is reflected in this dissertation by the sheer volume of data that examines these specific orisha. On the Chinese side, Sanfancón is the deity employed the most in cross-fertilizations as well as maintaining his own public and private worship on

the island. Sanfancón may be a deity that is more aligned politically and at home in a social economy and order that has many dealings with another socialist country, China. Sanfancón may be a better way of relating Afro-Cuban religion in a way that Catholic syncretism simply does not and maybe never has done in relation to politics and worldviews. Interdiasporic cross-fertilization is intimately united with the individual practices of those that make it. These practices occur in relation to the persons that make up the community and the diasporas that contribute narratives, myths, material objects, and experiences. If we are to believe that syncretism, as documented between the Catholic Church and Afro-Cuban practice, is a result of inequalities of power, and that it is a tacit response to an otherwise subversive confrontation between two religious schemas, then there would be little evidence for its continuance given the changes in both political and academic landscapes. Talking with my participants, the stress was on the inclusion of Chinese deities in their Afro-Cuban practices and the indifference or rejection of Catholic ones.

Through the data collected and described here, the aim both in this chapter and in this work as a whole is to examine what syncretism is, to highlight its problematic, and to offer a new understanding of syncretism by incorporating the ideas gained from examining these Afro-Chinese instances. I locate syncretism within a much larger field of operation, taking the tangible, and lived experiences gathered here that have allowed for both the product and process of syncretism to be made visible as a way of seeing how such processes are part of identity making, power structures, and cultural and transnational ties. It is a process that grew out of a need to reconcile membership and identity with the circumstances and the fields of experience and power in which Cubans

of different ethnicities and identities meet and operate. Fundamentally, the local, religious and spiritual practices have impacted and are impacted by forces, ideas, and people on both a local and global scale; claims to knowledge can and do indicate prevailing forces of embeddedness, transnational ties and ideas of belonging, and for purposes of hegemony, authenticity and dominance.

The above ethnographic data are rich in their descriptions of the ways which deities and ideas become entrained in religious worship. Sanfancón is the representation of the recovered and ethnic power of the Chinese, a deity that is worshipped by Cantonese migrants. Sanfancón's popularity in Cuba signals two things: the homogeneity of the Chinese that immigrated to the island, and secondly the attitudes to religion these Chinese brought with them, which in turn enabled dialogue and brokerage to take place between two distinct frames of religious knowledge. The centrality of Sanfancón to the lives of indentured Chinese and their descendants is observable in the lengths that immigrants have gone to in order to remember and situate his worship in Cuba. Rather than being labeled a Chinese deity, he is rendered as a Cuban deity, which his name amply reflects.

One of the biggest pitfalls within existing elicitations of syncretism is the absence of power and power relations. I am in agreement with André Droogers who posits that power is a fundamental notion to the understanding of syncretism (Droogers 2005, 217). Power is a vague term and can be conceptualized as "having the capacity to bring something about" (Morris 1987, 46). It can be viewed in terms of "empowerment" and disempowerment (Cheater 1999, 2). Michel Foucault offers some understanding of the dynamics of power: it is employed through a network of interactions; people are "in

the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target, they are always also the elements of its articulation...the points of application” (Foucault 1980, 89).

Thomas Tweed argues that, to make sense of the religious life of diasporic people movement, relation, and position need to be addressed in the theoretical framework. Spatial metaphor is thus a key component, whether it is witnessed in the actual traversing of spatial geography (and time), the use of movement in ritual, or metaphorically, it is these shifts and dynamics – to extend the trope further – that help form religious diasporic topographies. Tweed’s theory of diasporic religion emphasizes the metaphors of crossing and dwelling, as “things in motion including ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, and messages, technologies and techniques” (Tweed 2006, 22) thereby situating them culturally as well as corporally.

I bring to the discussion the relation of interdiasporic cross-fertilization to the wider socio-political and connected issues: critical economies of tourism, diasporic impact outside of Cuba, and the cross-national and international adoption of Afro-Chinese religiosity encountered. I see the process of syncretism occurring through “*adoption*” – a neologism that describes the entwined processes of both adopting new ideas and adapting them, I propose a lens of examining and using this concept in the form of interdiasporic cross-fertilization. I approach the framework by first situating syncretism and its tangled components into a workable, relevant framework that captures and details the meeting and ongoing negotiation of religion as positioned between two diasporas. Interdiasporic cross-fertilization is a departure from existing syncretism discussions that have sought to set the discourse direction in relation to hegemonic, top-

down or bottom up instances, isolating ethnic and cultural contact, and the significant cross-relations that occur.

Interdiasporic cross-fertilization gives prominence to the lived and actual experiences of Afro-Cubans and Chinese-Cubans that have shaped and continue to shape Lukumi and Ifá discourses. I am interested in the ways that contemporary Afro-Chinese syncretisms demonstrate an awareness and negotiation of racial and ethnic difference as well as the many inflections of political economies of tourism explored earlier in the text that can explain why there are competing trajectories of correspondence. As Kevin M. Delgado posits, the unique economic circumstances created as a result of the Special Period reconfigured the religious environment in Cuba and ushered in a period that “greatly increases the likelihood of change and innovation within Santería”. Delgado specifically contends that the changes are not a result of national repression or motivated by secularization, but are contingent on foreign patronage by religious practitioners, whose presence on the island is facilitated through tourism; they see Afro-Cuban religion as a positive one in which to invest (Delgado 2009, 53).

With the growing global presence of orisha worship and more and more people travelling to Cuba from abroad for initiations and knowledge, both olorisha and babalawo are forging relationships with foreigners and building transnational ties with practitioners. Cuban priests are forming informal inflows of both money and commodities, thus claims to syncretism with deities outside of the purview of the Catholic Church that represent their members, are becoming more pronounced. As I have indicated, both Lukumi olorisha and Ifá priests are claiming Sanfancón as their own, which indicates the

governmentally approved role that China is playing in the current Cuban political climate.

The different adoptions of syncretism can be located within an intellectually circumscribed and politicized agenda, moving between local, national, and transnational arenas. Interdiasporic connections and the relationship of Cuba's diasporic people to homogenizing and privileging discourse of *Cubanidad*, demand systematic research to discern their impact on a range of activities that are occurring in Cuba. Such research contests blanket prescriptions of syncretism, and require the examination of power dynamics that act as the engine for these processes to occur, and the tracks by which we are able to make the processes visible.

Interdiasporic cross-fertilization is a way of understanding intergroup contact and how it is mediated by and through religion and belief. Seemingly disparate and misunderstood elements and identities lose their foreignness and become familiar in every sense of the word. The lives and voices that grace these pages attest to an ongoing, cross-cultural discursive enterprise that reconciles and makes relevant the traces of ancestors, progenies and deities into life-affirming engagements.

Areas for Continued Research

I preface the last section by stating my agreement with Anna Tsing's observation that ethnographies by nature are messy, disjointed things, and like novels, tend to overburden the reader with copious detail, much of it extraneous to the central argument. Rather than condemning the structure as outmoded, and an oppressive cache of data, I concur; it is best to view this veritable anthropological sacrament as a "source of analytic

heterogeneity and promise that simultaneously draws readers into projects of cultural comparison, regional cultural history and local/global positionings (Tsing 2007, 232). I hope that the reader may be able to extract from these words and copious details the ways in which an interdiasporic cross-fertilization awareness and approach can be applied to other geographical and cultural areas globally. Perhaps a few smoldering sparks may be lit by this focus on process and the particulars will lead to the production of further texts that seek to understand exactly what happens when two diasporas meet and mingle.

Writing my dissertation has made me acutely aware of what still requires attention. A logical extension for the project would be to follow Chinese-Cuban migrants to the US and even China to explore how religiosity has developed in those countries following an Afro-Cuban sojourn. I have noticed the significant absence of the voice of the Chinese-Cuban females in the text. Significantly fewer Chinese women historically migrated to Cuba, which perhaps is a good reason in itself to trace their experiences and their impact in the country. I am eager to explore, in greater depth and with further research, sexuality and associated identifications of Chinese-Cubans in the Afro-Cuban religious sphere. The small amount that I have included here is but a place-holder for future work, the data for which is already accumulating and upon which I am ruminating. The thought of contributing more to this arena is an exciting prospect.

Throughout my fieldwork, anecdotes were relayed to me about the mythic beauty of *la mulata china*, the Chinese *mulata*, described as a creature so rare and exotic that many of my respondents needed a moment to recover from just thinking about such things. I wish to explore and capture some of this Cuban magic in a future project. Finally, a thorough examination of the growing fictional literature that features Chinese-Cuban protagonists

begs for a multidisciplinary analysis, one that is starting to bridge the Cuban diaspora and making an appearance in the U.S.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I GLOSSARY OF TERMS

List of non-English words and a short definition of them as used in the dissertation.

Abakuá – the Efik / Ekpe religious fraternal association in Cuba associated with cross-river Ejagham and Calabar derived rites.

abure – Lukumi for “brother” or “sister,” as determined through initiation.

achelenu – ceremony of the tongue given to orisha priests that allows their orisha to speak during possession.

adimu – non-animal sacrifice offerings given to the orishas, such as cooked food.

adimu orisha – satellite or auxiliary deities that relate to fundamental or initiation orisha such as Obatalá, Yemayá, Oshun, Shangó, and Oyá. Adimu orisha are consecrated for orisha worshippers.

Afrequeté Dosú – a Fon praise name for Yemayá of Arará/Dahomean origin.

agogo – bell/musical instrument used to call and salute the orisha.

ahijado – godchild, refers to an orisha initiate or affiliate of an *ilé orisha*.

ajélè – Alafin appointed governors of the Atlantic trade route, often Shangó priests.

ajiaco – Cuban stew made of Carib/Taíno, African, European and Chinese ingredients. Used by Fernando Ortiz as a metaphor for transculturation, ethnic and cultural mixing.

Alafin / Aláàfin – Yorùbá title of the ruler/king of Òyó. Shangó is deemed the fourth apotheosized Alafin of Òyó.

amarillos – “yellows” a Cuban census racial classification for the Chinese.

Aña – set of consecrated Lukumi batá drums, also spelled Anya and Àyàn.

Arará – religious descendants of enslaved Fon, Mahi, Adja, Evhe, and other groups of the former Kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin), and present day Togo.

arikú babawá – Lukumi phrase “may we not see death” to mean, may we live to old age.

asedio – harassment charge.

ashedi – money given as payment for ritual offering, ceremony or initiation.

asiáticos – Asians.

Asowano –praise name of the deity/orisha of disease and healing. See Babalu Aye.

awan – ceremony of cleansing and healing specific to Asowano/Babalu Aye.

awo Ifá – priest of Ifá, babalawo.

Ayaguna – a *camino* or path/persona of Obatalá.

babalawo – a (male) priest of the deity Orunla/Orunmila. Specialist in Ifá divination.

babalorishá – “father of orisha”. initiatory godfather, an olorisha that has initiated one or more persons to the orisha priesthood.

Babalu Aye – praise name of the deity/orisha of disease and healing. See Asowano.

batá – trio of drums used in Lukumi worship and celebrations. When consecrated, they are referred to as “Aña”, or “Àyàn” referring to the orisha that resides within the largest drum.

bazar – bazaar.

Biagwe – Lukumi divination using four pieces of coconut.

bilongo – bundles / bound assemblages of medicine constructed for a specific purpose in Palo /Kongo derived religiosity.

blanqueamiento – Cuban statist ideology aimed at “whitening” the population.

bloqueo – the Unites States economic embargo imposed on Cuba.

bohío – hut.

botánica – retail store that caters to Afro-diasporic religious communities.

boveda – ritual apparatus and altar used in spiritism.

brujería – witchcraft, sorcery that is often but not exclusively seen as negative.

cabildo de nación- Spanish legislated guild or mutual assistance society for free and enslaved Africans in Cuba.

caldo – soup.

Californianos - Californians

camino – road or path, refers to avatars of specific orishas.

campo - countryside.

Carabalí – Abakuá or Efik ethnonym.

cargar – to charge or to load.

carro de diez pesos – ten Cuban peso taxi, a shared taxi that follows a predetermined route.

casino – club or society for Spanish migrants in Cuba.

centro – spiritism center, a group of spirit mediums that meet regularly usually in someone's home to hold “*misas*” spiritism séances.

Changó – see Shangó.

charada china – Chinese charade, a numerological sequence and dream interpretation system used for gambling.

Chiffá – see charada.

Chinofobia – sinophobia.

cofradía - Spanish religious fraternity.

collar de mazo – large, multi-strand beaded necklace.

confianza – trust.

conjunto – band, musical group.

consulta – a divination session.

contratados – indentured, contractual workers.

Coyumbe – Palo/Bakongo deity, also called “Siete Rayos”.

criollo – creole. Cuban born person.

cuarto de santo – the room where Lukumi initiations are carried out and where orisha shrines are kept.

cubanidad – Cubanity or Cubanness, the idea of being socially or culturally Cuban. An identity marker.

cuello – neck.

culíe – colloquial Spanish for Chinese indentured worker.

Dadá – orisha, Shangó's brother.

derecho – “right” refers to the monetary payment given to priests to perform or participate in a Lukumi ceremony.

dilogún – from *merindinlogun* [“sixteen”] referring to the sixteen-cowrie shell oracular system used by olorishas to determine *odu*.

diplobabalawo– an Ifá priest that is affiliated with or works for the Cuban government in this capacity.

diplosantero – an orisha priest that is affiliated with or works for the Cuban government in this capacity.

doble moral – double moral standard/positionality. Also called *doble-cara*.

ebó – ritual offering, often prescribed in *odu*/divination to remedy a situation.

Edan – brass implement used in the worship of the orisha Oshun.

egun – ancestors, can denote departed religious or family departed and is also used in Cuba to denote spirit guides.

Ejiogbe / Ogbe - one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

ekuelé – (Yorùbá: *òpèlè*) Ifá divination chain.

eledé – pig.

eleke – beads or beaded necklaces.

Espiritismo – spiritism, based on nineteenth century French/European mediumistic development.

estera – woven straw mat.

ewé – plants, herbs or vegetal matter used in Lukumi rituals.

extranjero – foreigner.

fulano – “someone”.

fundamento – “foundation”, the often secret or hidden *ashé*-laden, consecrated objects of the orisha.

Gangá – Cuban ethnonym denoting descendants of the Malinké / Mandinka of the Gambia, Guinea, or Sierra Leone.

guagua – bus.

guan dao - 偃月刀 halberd used by Guan Gong.

Guan Gong / Yu / Guan Di – apotheosized Han Dynasty warlord. Worshipped in Taoism, Buddhism and Chinese ancestral rites.

guangzhong yaozhu – to bring glory to the ancestors.

Guomindang / Kuomintang – the Chinese National People's Party.

há (Fongbe: Já) – scepter or broom made from the dried, palm ribs. Bound with cloth and beads. Ritually charged with medicine to sweep sickness and disease from the body.

herramientas – “tools” used here to refer to metal and wooden stylized implements such as swords, shields, axes, and arrows, often in miniature used to adorn the shrines of orishas.

Huaqiao - 华侨 Overseas Chinese immigrant (born in China).

Huáyì - 华裔 Overseas Chinese, someone of Chinese descent.

huiguan – Chinese mutual aid association.

ibae – “we give praise”, a Lukumi phrase said after mentioning a deceased olorisha.

Ifá – a metonym for Orunla/ Orunmila, the process of divination that results in *odu* being cast.

igbodu – Lukumi ritual initiation chamber.

ikin – palm kernels, sixteen of which are used by babalawo for divination.

Ikú – death, or the personified spirit of death.

ilé – House, both physical structure and members of a house/religious family.

inche Osain – Lukumi for “work of Osain”. Osain is an orisha of herbalism, medicine and witchcraft, small emblems and talismans are made for a variety of purposes under the guidance of specific orishas.

ingenio azucarero– sugar mill/refinery.

invento – an invention/ creation.

iré – blessings, benedictions.

iré ewé – literally, a blessing of leaves, referring to winning the lottery and receiving bank notes (green leaves).

Irete - one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

itá – a divination session, usually refers to elaborate divinations as performed during olorisha initiation and when receiving *adimu* orisha.

itutu – Lukumi funereal ceremonies conducted for olorisha.

Iwori - one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

iyalorishá – “father of orisha”, initiatory godfather, an olorisha that has initiated one or more persons to the orisha priesthood.

iyanifá – female equivalent to the male-only babalawo priesthood.

iyawó – “bride of the orisha” a new Lukumi priest who dresses entirely in white for one year and seven days following initiation.

jiaobei – Chinese / Daoist form of divination using two wooden blocks.

jinetero/a – “jockey”, vernacular term for Cuban men and women who are professional escorts or sex workers with tourists / foreigners.

lanchita – small ferry.

lerí – head, often refers to a person’s spiritual head, the site of initiation and connection to orisha.

libreta – book for writing divination advice gained in *itá* and also publicly or privately published divination training manual.

limpieza – a spiritual cleansing prescribed in Afro-Cuban and spiritist religious practice.

logia – lodge.

Lukumi – the name of Afro-Cuban religion or orisha worship. Alternative spelling: Lucumí.

madrina – “godmother” used here to indicate Lukumi religious kinship term given to the female initiator/mentor/instructor.

Malecón - Havana’s sea wall/ esplanade.

mambí – guerilla Cuban independence freedom fighter against Spain.

meji – Yorùbá/Lukumi word for “double”. Used in reference to divination *odu*.

mi’jo – a contraction of “*mi hijo*” “my son” a common Cuban endearment.

misa espiritual – spiritual mass or séance, also called reunions.

mocha – machete used to cut sugar cane.

moforibále – “I place my head to the ground”, the act of prostration to elders and orisha shrines.

mojo –citrus and garlic marinade.

moyubá –“I give praise” Lukumi invocatory prayer.

Ñañigo – Abakuá member.

Ñañiguismo – relating to the activities of the *Abakuá*.

novela – television soap opera.

oba oriaté – religious title for senior Lukumi olorisha, the master of ceremonies and religious protocol for Lukumi rites and initiations.

Obara / Bara – one of sixteen *odu* or divination chapters.

Obatalá – orisha, male deity of intelligence, justice and creation.

Oché – one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

odo / odón – wooden mortar, belonging to Shangó, used ritually as a seat during the initiations of new priests.

odu – divination sign or chapter.

Oduduwá – apotheosized progenitor of the Yorùbá. An orisha of the Lukumi religion.

ofrenda – religious material offering.

Ogbe / Ejiogbe- one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

Ogún –an orisha or Lukumi deity of battle, iron and war.

Ogundamasa (Ogunda–Osa) composite *odu*/ divination chapter. One of the 256 *odu* combinations.

oju orisha – orisha shrine or altar literally “face of the god”

Okana – one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

Olodumare – Lukumi/ Yorùbá idea of supreme God. Envisioned as remote and whose emissaries are the orisha.

Olofin – Supreme deity, God, in Lukumi religion.

olorisha – orisha priest “one who has orisha”.

omá - knowledge wisdom, intellect.

omo – Yorùbá/Lukumi word for “child”.

oní - “one who has” a prefix to denote a priest of certain orisha. I.e., ‘oní Shangó,’ [priest of Shangó] literally, “*one who has Shangó*”.

òpòn Ifá – wooden divining tray used by babalawo.

oriki – praise poem/prayer.

orisha - Lukumi deity.

orukó – Lukumi for “name”, referring to the name received during Lukumi priesthood initiation.

Orunla [Orunmila, Orula] – orisha of divination, patron of babalawo / Ifá diviners.

Osa - one of sixteen *odu* or divination signs/chapters.

Osain - orisha of plants, medicine and religious consecration.

osha – a contraction of “*oricha*” an alternative spelling to “*orisha*” can refer to both the orisha and the initiation of orisha priests.

oshé – axe, one of the principle emblems of Shangó denoting justice, penetration and mounting by possession of the deity.

Oshun [Ochun, Òsun]–an orisha or Lukumi deity of fresh waters and survival.

otá – “stone” refers specifically to the stones consecrated to “seat” an orisha, becoming the tangible manifestation of the orisha’s *ashé* received through initiation.

owó – money, prosperity.

Oyá – orisha, deity of the marketplace, transformation and atmospheric phenomena.

Oyiyi Oba – a consecrated image of a stylized Chinese Buddha used by babalawos.

oyubona – second godfather or godmother to an initiate. In charge of caring for the initiate during the initiation process.

padrino – “godfather” used here to indicate Lukumi religious kinship term given to the male initiator/mentor/instructor.

pañuelo – decorated piece/panel of cloth used to decorate orisha and their shrines.

pastelito – pastry.

patakin/es – “important” divinatory narratives of the orisha.

pinaldo – Lukumi confirmatory and status elevating ceremony for priests, centered on the receiving of a consecrated knife.

potiche – lidded vase shaped vessel used to house emblems of the orisha. See also *sopera* and *tinaja*.

prenda – vessel of material substances consecrated and dedicated to a specific Palo deity.

Qing Ming – 清明节 Chinese ancestor veneration festival.

refresco – soft drink.

resguardo – an amulet or talisman prepared for the enquirer by a babalawo or Santero according to divination.

San Lázaro – Saint Lazarus, Catholic saint syncretized with Babalu Aye.

Sandianhui - 三點會 “Three Dots Society” name for the Chinese triad brotherhood/secret society.

Sanfancón - Chinese-Cuban deity, diasporic Cuban name for Guan Gong. Also spelled “San Fan Con,” and “San Fancon.”

Sanhehui - 三合會 “Three Harmonies Society” name for the Chinese triad brotherhood/secret society.

Santería - colloquial name of Afro-Cuban religion or orisha worship.

santero/a – colloquial term for an “olorisha” or male or female orisha initiate.

santo – “saint” that can refer to the orisha (*un santo*), or the initiation process (*hacer santo*, to make saint).

Santurismo – an elision of *Santería* and *turismo* (tourism) denoted foreigners that travel to Cuba for Afro-Cuban religious purposes.

Shangó - an orisha or Lukumi deity of justice, thunder and royalty. Derived from the Yorùbá, *Ẓàngó*. Hispanicized spelling is *Changó*.

shaba – ritual metal chain with 21 miniature tools of Ogún attached to it.

Sinalidad – a term I introduce in the vein of *cubanidad*, to indicate an idea of Chineseness or of being and relating to Chinese-Cubans.

Sònpònnò – Yorùbá name for the deity/orisha of disease and healing. See *Asowano* and *Babalú Aye*.

sopera – ceramic soup tureen or casserole vessel used to house emblems of the orisha. See also *potiche* and *tinaja*.

tablero de Ifá – wooden divining tray used by babalawo. Yorùbá - *òpòn Ifá*.

tefa – the act of marking *odu* during Ifá divination.

terreiro – Brazilian orisha complex / compound.

tinaja – covered vessel used to house emblems of the orisha. See also *potiche* and *sopera*.

tong – 堂 Chinese association / guildhall.

toque de fundamento – Anya drum performance/celebration.

torito – little bull.

travestis – gay men who pass as women.

vara – a unit of measurement employed for sugar cane length (1 *vara* = 0.848 meters).

visita – a “visit” to drop by announced.

vocero – spokesperson.

Yemayá - an orisha or Lukumi deity of water, motherhood and fertility.

Yewá – riverine orisha of purity, beauty and morality.

Yutong – the popular name for the Cuban coaches manufactured by the Zhengzhou Yutong Group. Referring to their immense size, “*yutong*” is a vernacular term in Cuba that refers to large quantities.

APPENDIX II

Cuban Organizations and Archival Sources Consulted

Name	Description
<p><i>Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana</i> Office of the Historian of the City of Havana</p>	<p>Previously the Grupo Promotor del Barrio Chino de la Habana. This government organization manages numerous museums, “casas,” cultural projects, clubs and sub organizations. Responsible for the maintenance of Cuba’s Chinatown, the Chinese cemeteries and Chinese Cultural associations that are active today, their records contain historical and current demographic data on the Chinese of Cuba.</p>
<p><i>La Casa de Artes y Tradiciones Chinas,</i> The House of Chinese Arts and Traditions, Calle Salud, Havana</p>	<p>Part of the Oficina del Historiador, La Casa is a center and stage for conferences, exhibits, classes and workshops.</p>
<p><i>La Casa de Altos Estudios Fernando Ortiz</i> The Fernando Ortiz House of Higher Studies, Havana</p>	<p><i>Cátedra de Estudios sobre la Inmigración China en Cuba</i> (School of Studies on Chinese Migration in Cuba) is an affiliation between the University of Havana and the Cuban Government established in 1978 to document Chinese migration to Cuba.</p>
<p><i>Archivo del Museo de Regla</i> Regla, Havana</p>	<p>The Archives of the Museum of Regla contains birth, death and marriage data and other documents on several important priests and practitioners. The director of the Museum of Regla, Pedro Cosme Baños, has written on the Chinese in Regla (1998).</p>
<p><i>Fondo Fernando Ortiz,</i> Biblioteca del Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística, Havana</p>	<p>Fernando Ortiz’s personal records. His publications and library.</p>
<p><i>Archivo de la Iglesia de Sagua La Grande</i> The Archives of the Church of Sagua La Grande</p>	<p>Contains nineteenth century parish records of births, deaths and marriages.</p>
<p><i>Archivo del Museo Histórico de la Ciudad de Sagua La Grande</i> Archives of the historical Museum of the City of Sagua La Grande</p>	<p>This archive contains records of the activities of <i>Cabildos de Nación</i> founded in Sagua La Grande.</p>

Archives and Collections Consulted Outside of Cuba

Name	Description
The Cuban Heritage Collection , University of Miami	Primary and secondary material on Cuba and its diaspora. Texts, periodicals, newspapers, images, recordings and ephemera on the Chinese of Cuba were consulted during the course of two fellowships held here.
The Rothschild Archive , NM Rothschild & Sons, London, United Kingdom	Rothschild's holdings contain significant correspondence between the London, Spain and New York operations of the Bank with Cuban plantation owners during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
The Barings Archive , London, United Kingdom	Contains archive material of merchant banks and their global correspondents. Detailed records of Havana and Matanzas sugar plantations are kept here, including letters and circulars.
Southampton City Archives , Southampton, United Kingdom	A specialist repository on data regarding the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade with some information relating to Cuba.
Church Mission Society (CMS) Archives , Cadbury Library, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom	The single largest collection of Christian missionary items ranging from 1799 - 1959. This archive contains detailed ethnographic information on West African and Caribbean religious practices.
West Indiana & Special Collections , The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago	A repository for work on Chinese indenture and West African religious practices in the Caribbean and Latin America.

APPENDIX III

Chinese-Cuban prayers to Guanyin, and Guan Gong/ Sanfancón

Oracion A La Kuan Yin

Oh, tú, amoroso, graciosa, misericordiosa, azucena sencilla: tiende tus miradas puras, blancas de compasión y piedad, a las solicitudes de quienes tanto te amamos. Danos tu consuelo, nenúfar de oro.

Llévanos a los campos tiernos de inefable piedad. Ven a nosotros, espiga y flor, a la hora de la hiel. Ven a nosotros, suave pétalo y corola, a la hora azul de la miel y la alegría. Tu eres alba y sin macula, lirio, estandarte de amor, sol de sabiduría, vencedora de las sombras. Estrella de paciencia, resplandor de los ciclos infinitos, reconquistadora del dolor recóndito, acacia odorífera, rocío balsámico, esclarecedora de las alma, amanecer sereno, lluvia apacible, que humedeces los oídos, paralizas la mano resentida, y que en los corazones enfrías las discordias.

Consejera piadosa, componedora de proceso, llévanos a Ti, Madre de las Mercedes, del amor por el amor, de la Consolación y de la Paz, condúcenos por el camino de las venturas y la Altagracia.

Tú que traes al campo de batalla la virtud del Bienquerer, O, Kuan che Yin, sonrío en la luz, dame puesto en tu loto y en tu barco, que hienden el dolor y la muerte. A ti, Kuan-Yin, navegante que escuchas los acentos de los mundos y los rumores de los Cielos, hago llegar mis invocaciones.

Guíame al mar de perfumes, del amor y bienestar!
Que terminen los periplos del inacabable morir! j Que en la sonda honda, en tu onda de rosas, nos elevamos a tu rezago jOh, Kuan-Yin, amorosa, graciosa, misericordiosa, sencilla azucena, astrolabio de las almas, a ti me dirijo, en la aflicción de mis avatares imponentes.



SAN - FAN - CON

ORACION

¡Oh! Poderoso Santo de toda la China. Supremo Emperador del Celeste Imperio, a Ti; acudo, para que alejes este mal que aqueja a mi persona, por medio de esta Oración que invoca tu nombre SAN - FAN - CON. Pon en mi camino el bienestar de mi cuerpo y de mi alma. Para poder ser tan generoso como Tú. Aleja de mí mis enemigos que pudieren causarme daño y todo aquel que mal me deseara no llegue a mí. Tú que ganaste todas las batallas, ayúdame a ganar esta la mía.

Librame de Prisiones, de malas lenguas, de hechicerías y maleficios y para lo cual me encomiendo a ti y a tus dos ayudantes. Para no verme herido ni atropellado, ni mi sangre derramada. Ayúdame Milagroso San-Fan-Con a derrumbar las murallas que no me dejan avanzar. Que si mal me desearan, se vuelva hacia atrás; que mis enemigos no tengan ojos para verme; lengua para maldecirme; ni manos para hacerme mal.

Usese tres velitas de sándalo, leyendo la oración cada vez que se enciende una y póngase en alto las tres velitas juntas.

APPENDIX IV

1. Spanish Version of Shangó the Narrative By Silvino Baró as Recorded by Lydia Cabrera.

Changó paseó toda el África. Fue hasta China, Allí hizo de las suyas. Los chinos lo cogieron y lo pusieron en capilla para matarlo. Cuando fueron a buscarlo para la ejecución había desaparecido. Pero lo retrataron cuando lo cogieron, y ése es el Moreno que se ve en medio de tantos chinos en las estampas que tienen los chinos en sus casas. De China volvió a África. Era tan bravo y atrevido. [...] Era el orisha más valeroso del mundo. Tanto miedo le tenían y tanto lo respetaban que nunca cerraba las puertas de su casa, seguro que nadie se atrevería a entrar a ella ni a robarle nada.

Source: Lydia Cabrera papers CHC0339 Box 24 of 75.

2. Spanish and English *Odu* Narrative of Sanfancón

Sanfancón – Spanish version

En una ocasión que tenía mucho dinero, Changó decidió salir a recorrer el mundo. Así que llamó a su hermano Dadá para que le administrara su castillo durante el tiempo de ausencia, montó en su caballo blanco y se marchó. Pasó por muchos países y tanto caminó que llegó hasta un lugar donde ya no habían negros. Los hombres eran más pequeños, amarillos y con los ojos rasgados, pero eran amables y serviciales, así que siguió andando entre ellos.

Sucedió que en las afueras de una ciudad a la que llegó había un hermoso palacio, con plantas y flores muy bellas. Estaba extasiado admirándolas, cuando siente un gran tumulto, voces que piden ayuda y se abre la puerta del palacio de donde salen unos hombres de muy mal aspecto llevando a una muchacha que grita desesperadamente, mientras su padre, un hombre ya mayor, pide auxilio, pues le han matado a todos sus sirvientes. Changó saca su hacha y se lanza en su caballo en persecución de los secuestradores, a quienes vence rápidamente, retornando con la muchacha al palacio, donde la entrega a su padre. El anciano queda tan agradecido, que le se la otorga como esposa a Changó, quien gustoso acepta.

Por un tiempo todo estuvo bien, hasta que el dios de los rayos sintió deseos de volver a su castillo, por supuesto, llevando consigo a la nueva esposa. Cuando lo manifestó no le dijeron nada, pero el padre y la hija decidieron hacer algo para que Changó no los separara. Primero se la dieron a su caballo blanco y luego, después de la cena se la brindan a Changó, como una bebida muy fina y especial. Éste la prueba, pero, como es adivino, se da cuenta del maleficio. Entonces castiga a los traidores y cuando va en busca de su caballo para marcharse, se encuentra que éste ha quedado petrificado. Furioso, quema el castillo y parte montado en otro caballo muy hermoso que tenía el viejo chino.

Sin embargo, como había probado el brebaje, su apariencia cambió, tomando la apariencia de un chino y su hacha se convirtió en un sable. Cuando llegó a su castillo

nadie podía reconocerlo, pero como él insistía en que era Changó, buscaron a Orunla, quien confirmó que ése era Changó, pero que había sido víctima de un maleficio. Entonces indicó lo que debían hacer para volverlo a su forma normal y así ocurrió, dejando la forma de Sanfancón (chino), para volver a tener la de Alafin (rey) que era.”
Narrated by Marcos Portillo Dominguez in Molner (nd)

Sanfancón – English version

On one occasion when he had a lot of money, Shangó decided to go out and roam the world. So he called his brother Dadá so that he could manage his castle during his travels. He mounted his white horse and he set out on his journey. He traversed many countries and went so far, that he arrived at a place where there were no black people. The men was small, yellow, and with slit-eyes, but they were agreeable and helpful, so he decided to stay amongst them.

It so happened that on the outskirts of the city, which he came to, there was a beautiful palace with beautiful plants and flowers. He was filled with ecstasy admiring them when he heard a great disturbance, voices that pleaded for help. The door of the palace opened and out came several disheveled men carrying a young woman yelling desperately while her father, of advanced age pleaded for someone to help because they had killed all of his servants. Shangó drew his axe and mounted his horse in persecution of the kidnappers, whom he rapidly vanquished, returning the girl to the palace, handing the girl to her father. The old man was so grateful that he gave his daughter to Shangó as a wife, who gladly accepted.

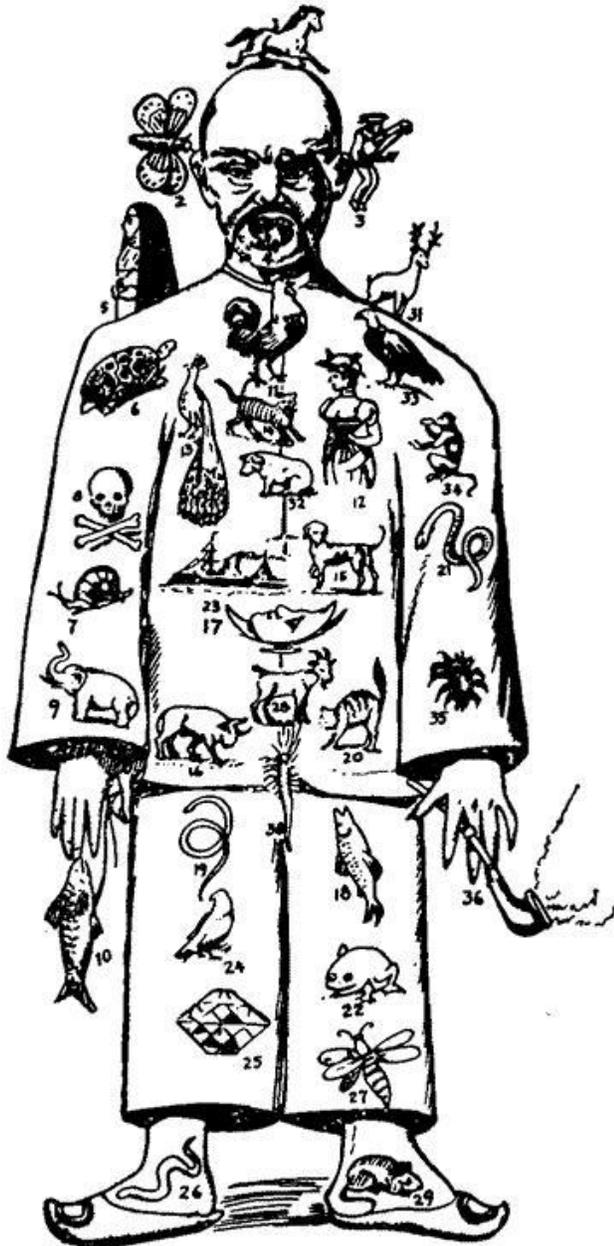
For a while everything was peaceful, until the god of thunder (Shangó) desired to return to his own castle, surely taking his new bride with him. When he mentioned his intentions, the Chinese didn't oppose him, but the father and the daughter hatched a plan in order that Shangó would not separate them. They prepared a potion so that Shangó could never leave the palace. First they gave it to his white horse to drink and then after dinner, they offered it to Shangó as a very fine and special drink. Shangó tasted it, but since he was a diviner, he realized it was hexed. Then Shangó punishes the traitors and when he goes in search of his horse to leave, he finds it petrified. Furious, Shangó burns the palace and he leaves mounted on a very handsome steed that the old Chinese man owned.

However, since he had tasted the potion, his appearance began to change, transforming him into a Chinese man and his axe became a sable. When he arrived at his castle, no one recognized but since he insisted he was Shangó, they went in search of Orunla who confirmed that it was in fact Shangó, and that he had been a victim of witchcraft. Orunla indicated what had to be done to return him to his natural form, and so it transpired, leaving the form of Sanfancón (Chinese man) in order to return to the form of the Alafin (king) that he was.

Marcos Portillo Dominguez, in Moliner, Israel Patakines volume 3 Del Ciclo “Shangó”
nd. 5.

APPENDIX V

La Charada China



THE CHARADE CHINESE

- 1 — horse
- 2 — butterfly
- 3 — sailor
- 4 — mouth
- 5 — nun
- 6 — turtle
- 7 — snail
- 8 — dead
- 9 — elephant
- 10 — big fish
- 11 — rooster
- 12 — whore
- 13 — peacock
- 14 — tiger cat
- 15 — dog
- 16 — bull
- 17 — moon
- 18 — small fish
- 19 — worm
- 20 — fine cat
- 21 — snake
- 22 — toad
- 23 — steamboat
- 24 — dove
- 25 — stone
- 26 — eel
- 27 — wasp
- 28 — goat
- 29 — mouse
- 30 — shrimp
- 31 — deer
- 32 — pig
- 33 — vulture
- 34 — monkey
- 35 — spider
- 36 — pipe

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- Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "A Different Kind of Sweetness: Yemayá in Afro-Cuban Religion". In *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, And Creativity In The Latina/o And Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*, edited by Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola. New York: SUNY.
- Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "Beguiling Eshu: Motion and Commotion in London". In *Esu: Yoruba God, Power, and the Imaginative Frontiers*, edited by Toyin Falola. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.

Tsang, Martin, A. 2013 "Between China and Africa: Cuba and the Making of the Afro-Chinese". Invited Presentation made to the Founders and donors of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami. January 7.

Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "Religious Routes, Roots and Offshoots: Yorùbá-Cantonese Religious Expression and Commerce in Cuba and North America". At the 2013 Africa Conference at the University of Texas at Austin, March 29-31.

Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "San-Fan-Con, the Potent Chinese 'Saint' and his Journey to Africa via Cuba". At the conference for Free and Forced Migration, Diaspora and Identity Formation: The Legacy of Slavery and Indentured Labour in Historical and Contemporary Context. Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Paramaribo. June 6-10.

Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "The Dragon and the Cayman: Afro-Chinese Religion and Myth Making in Cuba". At the Ninth Annual Conference on Cuban and Cuban-American Studies "Dispersed Peoples: The Cuban and Other Diasporas". The Cuban Research Institute of Florida International University, Miami. May 23-25.

Tsang, Martin, A. 2013. "Virtual Ashé: The Cyber Cartographies of Afro-Cuban Orisha Worship". At the Annual Meeting for the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, Maryland. November 23-26.

AWARDS

2013 Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange Fellowship.

2013 John and Anita Broad Fellowship Award for Research in Trinidad and Tobago.

2013 Florida International University Dissertation Year Fellowship.

2013 Horniman Museum Collecting Initiative. Stipend awarded for commissioning and collecting Afro-Chinese artifacts in Cuba for the Horniman Museum (London, UK)

2012 Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Graduate Post-Prospectus Fellowship.

2012 Florida International University Dissertation Evidence Acquisition Fellowship.

2011 Emslie Horniman Anthropological Scholarship Fund (Royal Anthropological Institute, UK.) for fieldwork. Also awarded the Sutasoma Award.

2010 Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Graduate Pre-prospectus Fellowship.

2010 Tinker Field Research Grant awarded for pilot field research in Cuba.