

RHYTHM & ROOTS
BLACK AND INSURGENT ECOLOGIES
OF ORISHA MUSIC

by

Chad Kehinde Graham

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Approved: _____
Monica A. Coleman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: _____
Kimberly D. Blockett, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Africana Studies

Approved: _____
Debora Hess Norris
Interim Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

Approved: _____
Louis F. Rossi, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and
Dean of the Graduate College

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Adupe (We give thanks)

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ABSTRACT

Lukumi people reconstructed their ritual music tradition from Yorùbáland in Cuba through the improvisation of their ecology or ecophilosophy. Although Cuba presented a set of environment conditions different from those of the Bight of Benin and Spanish colonists tried to impose a discordant relationship between them with the land, Yorùbá people developed a harmonic and improvisational relationship with the environment on their own terms. Through historical analysis, content analysis of orisha songs and material analysis of the accompanying instruments, this work considers what and who the environment was to orisha devotees. They reaffirmed their commitment to the natural world through the performance of their ritual music, in opposition to the terms of order that produced them to property, thus revealing a cyclical relationship between the material world and sound. That relationship was essential for the reconstitution of the instruments, rhythms and sounds which their ways of knowing required.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

Lukumi people reconstructed their ritual music tradition from Yorùbáland in Cuba through the improvisation of their ecology or ecophilosophy. Although Cuba presented a set of environment conditions different from those of the Bight of Benin and Spanish colonists tried to impose a discordant relationship between them with the land, Yorùbá people developed a harmonic and improvisational relationship with the environment on their own terms. That relationship was essential for the reconstitution of the instruments, rhythms and sounds which their ways of knowing required.

Significance of Study

This project lies at the crossroads of Africana Studies, Africana Religions, Material Culture Studies, and Environmental Studies. Historically in Africana Studies, analyses of history and culture tend to be directed at understanding social questions, with limited consideration for the natural world. Kwasi Densu writes “Without an ecological analysis within Africana studies, critiques of capitalism are limited to the realm of Western, radical political economy” and “human sociohistorical development is extracted

out of the earth's history and its ecological processes.¹ In the context of Africana Religions, ecology is ever present yet understated. Scholars often note the implementation of plants and herbs in shrine-work without explicating the ways of knowing that inform it. By examining the significance of nature in Yorùbá-rooted ways of knowing and the environmental conditions of Lukumi people in Cuba, this thesis argues that their environmental thought was essential to the recreation of their sacred music and the spiritual system at-large. Moreover, it presents an Africana ecological approach relevant to the field of Environmental Studies.

Africana Studies scholars within the academia have thought about African people's relationship to the environment in spurts over the last half century, and their intellectual genealogy considered it long before then. Nathan Hare's pioneering article, "Black Ecology," emerges from his critique of 1960s (white) American environmentalists. For Hare, the environmental movement framed the environment as the parts of nature that humans didn't inhabit — forests, bodies of water, etc. — and was void of African people's concerns. He states "blacks and the ecology movement currently stand in contradiction to each other" because the movement focuses on the "chemical and physical or esthetic conditions" of the natural environment.² His concept "Black Ecology" calls attention to the conditions of the environments in which Black folks live. The forces that threaten Black life are ever present in the built environment and the social order.

JT Roane and Justin Hosbey build on Hare's intervention over the course of multiple works through their framework, "Black Ecologies" (plural). Black Ecologies "provides a way of historicizing and analyzing the ongoing reality that Black

¹ Kwasi Densu, "Omenala: Toward an African-Centered Ecophilosophy and Political Ecology," *Journal of Black Studies* 49, no. 1 (Jan 1, 2018): 29-52, 33.

² Nathan Hare, "Black Ecology," *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 6 (April 1970), 2.

communities in the US South and in the wider African Diaspora are most susceptible to the effects of environmental injustice and “names the corpus of insurgent knowledge produced by these same communities...”³ Formally beginning with "Mapping Black Ecologies," but existing in earlier iterations of Roane’s work, he and Hosbey use audio, images, and digital mapping to demonstrate how Black people express an alternative epistemology when engaging with the natural world.⁴ Then, in "A Totally Different Form of Living," they draw on the histories of Black life in Tidewater Virginia and the Mississippi Delta, arguing that the waterways and wetlands were not just sights of Black harm, but sights of Black resistance too.⁵

Hare, Roane, and Hosbey examine Black relationships to the environment from the more recent past (20th and 21st centuries) and how they manifest as injustices which Black people overtly and covertly resist. The Lukumi people of Cuba aren’t associated with maroonage or a particular landmass that they utilized for resistance to colonialism. They rebirthed their spiritual tradition and its accompanying music in the relatively urban towns like Havana, Matanzas, and Regla. Nevertheless, the plantations and factories they were forced to work on and in represent attempts by the managerial class to create discord and hierarchical relationships between Lukumi people and their environment. Because the Lukumi did not accept their conditions lying down, their environment served as what Kathryn Benjamin Golden identifies as an “insurgent ecology,” “a place environmentally and topographically rich with opportunities and possibilities for resisting

³ J.T. Roane and Justin Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies," *Current Research in Digital History* 2 (August 23, 2019).

⁴ Roane and Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies."

⁵ Justin Hosbey and J.T. Roane, "A Totally Different Form of Living: On the Legacies of Displacement and Marronage as Black Ecologies," *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 1 (April 23, 2021): pp. 68-73.

slavery.”⁶ This project will consider how they asserted an alternative way of being with the natural world, which was invaluable to the Afro-Cuban improvisation of orisha music.

Orisha Music, as a subfield of Africana Religions, is balanced with emic and etic perspectives on the subject. Though generally not Cuban, the majority of the authors are, to some degree, orisha devotees of one form or another. Furthermore, of the male contributors in the field, many are initiated Àyan/Añá — the Yoruba & AfroCuban orisha of sound.

Intervening in a now seventy-year-old conversation on Yorùbá drums, Villepastour’s *Ancient Text Messages of the Yorùbá Bàtá Drum* sheds light on the drum’s speech surrogacy and the language which drummers use to animate this sacred instrument.⁷ Bàtá have been described as stammers, relatively less suitable for *talking*, and thus inferior to the more elaborative dùndún drum. However, Villepastour corrects this misunderstanding by analyzing how bàtá rhythms encode a specialized form of the Yorùbá language and revealing why they take the form that they do. In the process, she compares her analysis of bàtá to that of dùndún and finds that, though more intricate, it is on par with dùndún as a communicator. By critically engaging an approximately 500-year-old African musical tradition, this Villepastour helps to lay a foundation for studying what the bàtá and Orisha Music became in Cuba.

⁶ Kathryn Benjamin Golden, “Armed in the Great Swamp”: Fear, Maroon Insurrection, and the Insurgent Ecology of the Great Dismal Swamp,” *Journal of African American History*, (Winter 2021), 10.

⁷ Amanda Villepastour, *Ancient Text Messages of the Yorùbá Bàtá Drum: Cracking the Code* (Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

The 1992 publication of Amira and Cornelius's *The Music of Santería* marks a pivotal moment in the academic study of music in Yorùbá-rooted traditions.⁸ Building on the work of Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz, Amira and Cornelius authored the first book in the U.S. to provide an in-depth description of batá drumming. It even includes extensive transcriptions of significant rhythms - a feature that subsequent contributors to the subfield would mimic. Later works on orisha music range between autoethnography and content analysis.

The Añá brotherhood of drummers are the principal musical institution within the Lukumi tradition. Schweitzer offers insight into the fraternity's inner workings in *The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá*.⁹ While other works on Lukumi music focus on the music or individual drummers, Schweitzer's monograph explores how bonds between children of Añá collectively inform the performance of the music, based on his experience as a drummer and his travels to Cuba. He finds that, even as they serve the community and newer generations of drummers develop their own styles, the fraternity remains committed to pouring into its members as musicians and people. While Schweitzer contributes to knowledge on Añá as an institution of drummers, their relationship to the environment and the ecological dynamic of their material culture are not addressed.

Vaughan and Aldama discuss the significance of ecology to Orisha music more explicitly, but not extensively, in *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá*.¹⁰ As Aldama recounts his life and lineage as a drummer and practitioner in Havana, Vaughan provides the

⁸ John Amira and Steven Cornelius, *The Music of Santería: Traditional Rhythms of the Bata Drums* (Crown Point: White Cliffs Media Co, 1992).

⁹ Kenneth Schweitzer, *The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming: Aesthetics, Transmission, Bonding, and Creativity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

¹⁰ Umi Vaughan and Carlos Aldama, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá: Cuba, Diaspora, and the Drum* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

historical context, which features the African diaspora, the Cuban revolution, and the Mariel boatlift. This innovative work symbolizes the mouth-to-ear transmission of knowledge that is foundational to the apprenticeship model and their oral tradition. It additionally offers the most thorough treatment of "fundamental", the essence that animates consecrated batá drums and touches the whole of Lukumi culture. Ultimately, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá* is about orisha music from Aldama's vantage point, in his lifetime (1937 - present). He and Vaughan do well to link the master drummer's experiences to those of his AfroCuban forefathers in Añá. However, his knowledge and experiences aren't strategically connected to an understanding of Ayan - the orisha and the society of drummers, also Añá's antecedent - in Yorùbáland/Nigeria. Outlining Aldama and Añá's antecedents in the Bight of Benin, even rudimentarily, opens space for a greater understanding of how and what the musical fraternity reconstituted in Cuba.

The role that the natural environment plays for the drumming fraternity or their material culture and the connection between Ayan in Yorùbáland and Añá in Cuba are not addressed in-depth in the existing literature, if at all. Although these gaps are emblematic of Orisha Music as an academic subfield, they are not representative of what these scholar-practitioners know. Rather, they are indicative of how the knowledge about the tradition is transmitted in the academy, how scholars are disciplined to produce knowledge, and how scholar-practitioners choose to navigate those boundaries. This project will expressly link the orisha of drumming from the old world to that of the *new* one and highlight the ecological aspect of the material culture to draw out the ever-present significance - across time and space - of the natural environment to this musical tradition.

Though not academic texts, orisha songs books form a pillar of this project. First published in 1992, John Mason offers English translations of north of five hundred

Lukumi songs in *Orin Òrìsà*. As a scholar-practitioner-drummer, his intellectual work is buoyed by decades of deep study in a variety of geographic and ritual contexts. However, he juxtaposes his English translations with the Lukumi songs that he transliterated into Yorùbá. While they provide an important layer of meaning, they omit the feeling that comes from phonetic transcriptions of the songs. Lazaro Pedroso, a Cuban scholar-practitioner-drummer and contemporary of Mason's, presents transcriptions of Lukumi songs and their English and Spanish translations in *Edigbe* and *Obbedi* (2013). His work is anchored by his studying the Lukumi language itself and attempting to translate it. He also authored a companion dictionary of words commonly used in Lukumi songs — *Pataki*. Though the accuracy of his translations is worth considering, this thesis project privileges his transcripts of the songs because they capture the ways that orisha devotees pronounce and sing them.

Research Methods & Methodologies

Ambitiously, this thesis considers the bonds that Lukumi practitioners, specifically the musicians, forged with the environment by situating them in long-view genealogies of African intellectual work. This includes material culture analysis of bata drums and content analysis of Lukumi songs related to plants and herbalism using my background as a scholar-practitioner and musician. Authors of the pre-existing literature primarily used ethnographic and other qualitative methods to research Afro-Cuban orisha music in the present and not-so-distant past. By trying to trace the improvisation of this ritual music and material culture from one historical context to another, this project "face[s] the challenge of placing differently archived traces of intellectual genealogies in conversation, conflict, and convergence with Western-oriented intellectual genealogies

and methodologies."¹¹ But with an expanded definition of "archive," the project attempts to evade the reinscription of those epistemological and ontological limitations. "[T]he long-view migrations of African people mark the ancient sources and future resources of African textual practices and...they can be recovered only by erasing the hierarchical distinction between oral and written texts..."¹² The trace amounts of Yorùbá language and religious inscriptions, and other forms of meaning-making in contemporary Lukumi religious practice present opportunities to theorize what is knowable and admissible about these societies.

This project employs a "long-view genealogy" of African history and culture. With this method, it connects Lukumi ecology and material culture to its antecedents in Yorùbáland/Nigeria to decenter the impact of enslavement and distinguish what they wanted to do, environmentally, from what they had to do.¹³ African history is one long series of improvisations. Sitting with Dizzy Gillespie's definition of improvisation - "a gathering together of all the evidence you have of how to resolve going from here to here" - this research considers how the Lukumi extended their knowledge of the natural world from 19th century Yorùbáland and the role that the environment played in them to resolving the material challenge of practicing their musical tradition once they were taken to Cuba.¹⁴ How they moved through the world in Africa deeply informed how they moved through the world in the Diaspora. This longview genealogy is essential to understanding the intellectual work that is Lukumi ecology and music with as few outside

¹¹ Greg Carr, "Translation, Recovery, and 'Ethnic' Archives of Africana: Inscribing Meaning beyond Otherness," *PMLA* 127, no. 2 (March 2012): pp. 360-364, 360.

¹² Carr, "Translation, Recovery, and 'Ethnic' Archives of Africana," 361.

¹³ Greg Carr, "What Black Studies is Not: Moving From Crisis to Liberation in Africana Intellectual Work," *Socialism and Democracy* 25, no. 1, (2011): pp: 178-191.

¹⁴ Interview with John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, in Charles Graham, *The Great Jazz Day*. DaCapo Press (2000), 114.

interpreters as possible. In both geo-historical contexts, these spheres of intellectual work have a symbiotic relationship. Stretching notions of "archive" and "text," the translation of Lukumi songs associated with herbalism and their application by practitioners and musicians, as well as the uses of plants, are critical sources on the matter. Examining such "texts" and practices can reveal the significance of ecology in the spiritual tradition as a whole and the relationships that musicians, in particular, cultivate with plants and herbs. Such relationships would have been foundational to the formation of the brotherhood of ritual drummers and the recreation of their instruments.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter will focus on Yorùbá environmental values to anchor and give the genealogy some sense of a beginning. Additionally, it will discuss the materiality of traditional Yorùbá musical instruments. The second chapter will outline the instrumentation of Lukumi orisha music in Cuba. Improvising in the environmental circumstances of colonial Cuba led to Afro-Cuban batá drums taking a distinct form. Chapter Three will highlight the importance of the musical rhythms, singing, and orisha songs. Not only is singing significant when the drums are being played, it's also part of the process of preparing them for ritual use. Specifically, this chapter will analyze orisha songs dedicated to Osain, the orisha and of herbalism and the personification of plants. These songs express a reverence for plants and herbs and a desire for a harmonious relationship with them that would've been fundamental to the improvisation of the instruments and the larger spiritual system.

Justification and Limitations

Within the academic field of Africana Religions, this research will contribute to understanding how Yorùbá-rooted traditions survived in the diaspora. The African

origins of Afro-Cuban spiritual and musical traditions are noted in pre-existing works in the field. This thesis will take that a step further by actually engaging those Yorùbá antecedents and focusing on how Yorùbá-rooted traditions survived in the diaspora via drummers and their use of the natural world. This research will further extend the work of the field by exploring the role of ecology in the development of Lukumi music specifically and Lukumi religion generally. Lastly, because this research will employ an Africana approach to the natural world, it traverses the field of Environmental Studies as well.

Although Yorùbá people were dispersed throughout the Caribbean and the Americas by the transatlantic slave trade, Ayan and the accompanying ritual music tradition did not resurface in other parts of the diaspora on the scale that they did in Cuba. Even Brazilian Candomblé, as vast of a Yorùbá diasporic tradition as there is, does not have “consecrated” batá drums. So had it not been for the island’s natural environment and the appreciation which Lukumi people had for it, their orisha music tradition would not be where or what it is today. This work intends to pull together the ecological aspects and the material culture of Orisha music in order to think about how it came to be.

The primary limitation of this project lies in the sources on Yorùbá religion and music. They provide contemporary or more recent descriptions of these traditions, which are then back mapped in order to synthesize what eighteenth and nineteenth century Yorùbá people believed or *knew* prior to Western encroachment and when they arrived on the shores of Havana. In other terms, the attempt to map out the genealogies herein are arguably just as horizontal as they are vertical. Many of the aforementioned scholars conducted their fieldwork in different locales but around the same time. And though this project is tacitly historical, it is restricted by the lack of access to — and in some cases by the non-existence of — conventionally archival materials on the subject. Nevertheless,

Rhythm and Roots conceptually outlines how Orisha Music got from *there* to *here* by privileging African repositories of memory, with Yorùbá language and culture being chief among them.

Chapter 2

ECOLOGIES FROM YORUBALAND TO CUBA

Yorùbá Ecophilosophy: Osain, Herbalists, Ecological values

The environmental thought embedded in Lukumi practice is best understood along the axis of Yorùbá and West African environmental thought. This system of thought for Yorùbá people in particular explicitly extends from their cosmogony.¹⁵ Kimberly K. Smith defines environmental thought as "a set of ideas concerning the relationship between humans and the natural environment, including the norms that ought to govern that relationship."¹⁶ The norms which groups of people establish and reinforce are manifestations of their understanding of the natural environment and how they value it.

For Yorùbá people and their kinfolk in the diaspora, this layered understanding grounds how they believe the world came to be. "The structure of the cosmos, the uni/multiverse, and all that exists within it, was a product of not just one action carried

¹⁵ Systems of thought or "ways of knowing" is an attempt to capture the systems groups of people develop to explain their existence and how they use those systems to address fundamental issues of living. Greg E. Carr, "Teaching and Studying the African(a) Experience: Definitions and Categories," in *Lessons in Africana Studies*, ed. Greg E. Carr (Philadelphia, PA: Songhai Press and the School District of Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 12-20, 15.

¹⁶ Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 3.

out by one Supreme Being or beings..."¹⁷ Creation was a multi-stepped, collaborative process. To paraphrase Yorùbá philosopher and babalawo Kola Abimbola, there is no single "Creator;" there are many.¹⁸ The consensus version of the Yorùbá creation story states that Olodumare (the high deity) sent either Obatala (one of the senior divinities) or Oduduwa (the progenitor of Yorùbá people) to create the world. Obatala or Oduduwa traveled to earth on a rope or chain, bringing some kind of bird, sand/soil, and a palm nut. One of these two living beings is normatively credited with creating the world as if it was an individual act in which the "non-living" and non-human beings were utilized. However, it's critical to recognize that the bird, rope/chain, soil, and palm nut are as much a part of the world being formed as Obatala or Oduduwa. The Yorùbá concept of "ashe" refers to the vital force within all beings and the ability to make *things* happen. Obatala/Oduduwa, the bird, rope/chain, soil, and palm nut each contributed their ashe in the making of the world. Furthermore, they *chose* to take part in the process. They didn't have to assist, but they did. Therefore, they were and are acknowledged as such. This cosmological relationship between humans and the natural world underpins Yorùbá environmental thought.

The differentiation or relationship between "human" and "non-human" beings is pivotal to understanding Yorùbá environmentalism as well as the epistemological terrain that Yorùbá people were forced into upon enslavement. Yorùbá philosopher John Bewaji addresses how, in Western knowledge systems, humans are the principal beings on earth

¹⁷ John Bewaji, "Yorùbá Values and the Environment," *Yorùbá Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (2018), 237-38.

¹⁸ A babalawo is a diviner and devotee initiated to Orunmila, the orisha of divination. Abimbola comes from a lineage of babalawos in Nigeria. Kola Abimbola, *Yorùbá Culture: A Philosophical Account*, (Birmingham, UK: Iroko Academic Publishers, 2006), 51.

while other creatures and non-human beings are relegated to being part of the natural environment.

Those classified as non-living are incapable of agency, sensation, or reason, according to the warped Western intellectual tradition. This remarkably false and meaningless bifurcation of beings into living and non-living enables humans, in this tradition, to privilege human beings and render, in rank anthropomorphic terms, the narrative of existences in purely utilitarian and instrumental terms. The extent to which living beings are able to derive benefits from non-living beings in their different interaction tropes between animals, plants, soil, water, and other living and non-living beings, it is to that extent that these others are to be valued.¹⁹

Lacking agency, "non-living" beings are primarily acknowledged and valued according to how humans can control them. This is simply not the case in Yorùbá-rooted value and knowledge systems. As such, "non-human" is a more appropriate designation for the animals, plants, and materials identified in the Yorùbá creation story; if a designation is needed at all. Everything in existence has value - beyond human utilization - because humans and non-humans alike extend from the same source and they all had a hand in the world coming into being.

For the Yorùbá, the planet, "Ile" or "Aye," as a unified whole is sacred. It is a divine creation that sustains all life. So much so that Aye itself is even personified as an orisha. Wande Abimbola, the Àwíṣẹ Awo Àgbàyé or the international spokesperson for Òrìṣà religion, remarks, "To think of the Earth as a place to be exploited is like stealing the precious things that belong to this òrìṣà."²⁰ *She* is meant to be cared for and appeased like any other sacred being within this spiritual tradition. Its "precious things," above and below ground, should be respected. W. Abimbola continues, "When most of the òrìṣà

¹⁹ Bẹwaji, "Yorùbá Values and the Environment," 237-38.

²⁰ Wande Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, **Press, year**, 68.

departed [the physical plane of existence], they entered the earth's crust."²¹ And because Yorùbá people traditionally buried/bury their family members deep below the soil or dirt in their homes, the earth is regarded as the resting place of the orisha and the ancestors.

As far as what's above ground, the palm nut's role in creation is only one reason why the Oil Palm tree (*Elaeis Guineensis*) is so vital within the Yorùbá spiritual tradition. "The tree that centers the world" and is found all over West Africa, it functions as a source of knowledge and a cosmic bridge.²² Babalawos use sixteen ritually prepared palm nuts as "ikin", their primary tool for divination. Orunmila or "Ifa," the orisha of divination and to whom babalawos are initiated, speaks through *his* messengers and the ikin themselves. This isn't the only form of divination. Practitioners have access to other orisha using alternative tools such as cowrie shells or kola nuts. But "[w]henver practitioners of traditional Yorùbá religion face a major problem, decision, action, crucial event in life, or simply would like some form of advice, Ifa divination is understood as the most authoritative and precise method of determining the best course of action."²³ This system of divination is so highly regarded that Ifa has become synonymous with the entire religious tradition. Via the specialists who use them, ikin allow devotees in the physical realm to access and communicate with the spiritual realm. Thus, the tree that they come from is "the bridge between heaven and earth because Orunmila and his divine message can only come to the world through this tree, and it is only by speaking to or through this tree that people are able to ask direct questions of him in heaven."²⁴ The oil

²¹ W. Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, 69.

²² "Ayodeji Ogunnaike, "The Tree that Centers the World: The Palm Tree as Yorùbá Axis Mundi," *Africana Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (2019): pp. 43-57.

²³ Ogunnaike, "The Tree that Centers the World," 48.

²⁴ "Heaven Ogunnaike, 53.

palm tree is the prime example of how nature in general is situated within Yorùbá-rooted traditions.

The way of knowing that is the "Yorùbá spiritual tradition" is truncated when simply reduced to "religion." The devotion to Olodumare and the orisha encompasses every aspect of life. K. Abimbola proclaims, "òrìsà practice is a medicinal rather than a religious practice at its core."²⁵ In "The Sacred and the Profane: Wisdom and the Practice of Healing in Òrìsà Medicine" he outlines a third conceptual approach to medicine found in "òrìsà practice," countering the naturalistic and constructivist approaches in Western medicine. This approach is embedded within the everyday functions and customs of orisha devotees, but can be seen most visibly in the healing work that babalawos perform, diagnosing and treating their clients. He explains:

Implicit in the òrìsà culture of Africa and the òrìsà-derived cultures of the New World is a conception of medicine in which diagnoses and treatment are defined in a three-way relationship among the following:

1. natural beings and other natural beings.
2. natural beings and sacred beings.
3. sacred beings and other sacred beings.²⁶

Humans, animals, plants, and other organisms being the "natural beings" and orisha and ancestors as the "sacred beings," there is no existential division between these two sets of beings. The circumstances of one are intertwined with that of the other.

The specialists in Yorùbáland who commune with plants as a craft and a way of life, but aren't devoted to a particular orisha, are known as "onisegun." While they might contemporarily be referred to as alternative medical doctors, "onisegun" translates to

²⁵ Kola Abimbola, "The Sacred and the Profane: Wisdom and the Practice of Healing in òrìsà Medicine," *OMNES: The Journal of Multicultural Society* 11, no. 2 (2021), 123.

²⁶ Kola Abimbola, "The Sacred and the Profane", 2021, 130.

"masters of medicine."²⁷ These herbalists use their knowledge of all manner of ailments to diagnose health problems and prescribe the medicine ("oogun") to address them, hence their preferred title: "adahunse" - "the ones who can really do something."²⁸ They're the ones who make the remedies for their clients. There is a spiritual element to the craft of onisegun, but it is complementary to the material aspect of what they do.²⁹ Their medicine is holistic. "So, in their efforts to restore holistic balance in the patient, the onisegun will also be interested in finding the spiritual causes of illness (if there are any), just as much as s/he will be interested in restoring spiritual balance in the patient (if necessary)."³⁰

These sensibilities regarding the environment are crystalized in the broader devotion to the orisha Osain. Personified as male, Osain - spelled Òsányìn in Yorùbá - is the orisha of plants and medicine. *He* is the ultimate herbalist because he can activate the "ashe" or vital force within any and every leaf and root to heal people. The orisha of herbalism "reminds us that just as man was born in and went out of the forest; so must he return to the forest for rejuvenation and cure."³¹ Encompassing nature's restorative properties, this deity additionally corresponds to the reciprocal relationship that Yorùbá people believed humans should have with nature. One praise poem for Osain refers to

²⁷ Barry Hallen, *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse About Yorùbá Values*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 5.

²⁸ Hallen, *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful*, 102.

²⁹ Hallen is critical of what he considers the overemphasis on the supernatural in discourse on Yorùbá values. Though he finds that clients often attribute the potency of their prescribed medicine to some orisha, he emphasizes the knowledge and skill of the onisegun while attempting to not overstate the point. Hallen, 106-07.

³⁰ Abimbola, *Yorùbá Culture*, 79.

³¹ Gary Edwards and John Mason, *Black Gods: òrìsà Studies in the New World*, (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1998), 38.

him as "O gba won la tan, won dupe teniteni," "the one to whom people give unreserved thanks, after he saved them."³²

Osain's persona is present throughout Yorùbá lore. Unlike some other orisha, he is a primordial being, sent to the world after it was founded.³³ Osain was born in Ile-Ife and is Orunmila's younger brother. Known as "Elesije," "[i]t is believed that Osain-in brought his knowledge of herbs from heaven..."³⁴ He was an herbalist from birth; and he was born one-legged or with a lame leg, a paralyzed arm, and blind in one eye.³⁵ How he became disabled isn't described. K. Abimbola adds that, in Yorùbáland, all priests of Osain are practitioners of herbal medicine.³⁶ That devotion is embodied ritually and carried out physically. Their memory of Osain and his knowledge of plants and herbs form a not-easily-broken genealogy.

Enslavement and Exploitation in Cuba

The Spanish challenged Yorùbá people's capacity to maintain their relationship to Osain and the environment when they enslaved them and took them to Cuba. The Caribbean island had an abundance of palm trees, just not the ones they were accustomed to. Amidst the debates centered on Cuba's original vegetation, the consensus amongst botanists, geographers, and historians is that the vast majority of the island was covered by forests, consisting of a wide variety of trees, when the Spanish colonized it in 1510.³⁷ What nature produced in abundance was quickly perceived as resource capital. Timber

³² Awo Fa'lokun Fatunmbi, *Oríkì*, (Las Vegas: 2014), 179.

³³ These primordial beings are known as irúnmolè. They were the first group of orisha to come to the world. So while all irúnmolé are orisha, not all orisha are irúnmolé.

³⁴ Elesije means "King of Esie." Wande Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, 73.

³⁵ Wande Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, 73-75. Kola Abimbola, *Yorùbá Culture*, 125.

³⁶ K. Abimbola, *Yorùbá Culture*, 125.

³⁷ Monzote, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, 7-15.

from trees were the raw materials for building ships and the land underneath them was the overhead for the sugar industry.

August 30, 1815, King Ferdinand VII of Spain passed a royal edict eradicating all of the environmental regulations that hindered the growth of industrial agriculture. It gave private property owners the free-reign to cut down the trees on their land and use the newly cleared areas for harvesting sugar. The first point of the edict reads: "Are abolished and annulled in all their parts all the laws and ordinances on woodlands and fields for cultivation as they concern those owned by individuals..., and as a result owners are completely and absolutely free to do in them what suits them best."³⁸ Prior to that, the navy's Royal Forest Reserves had dominion over the forests. Only after the Royal Forest Reserves took the timber from a given area - which they used to build their ships and send back to Spain - could the plantation economies erect sugar mills and plant cash crops en masse.

The colony's increased propensity for land exploitation was coupled with the demand for labor extraction. "From the desire to render the natural world in exact terms came the assumption that 'the rhythm of human action' might also be so determined."³⁹ Spain's shifting policies around land use coincided with the fall of the Oyo empire in the 1830s, supplying the men, women, and children from the Bight of Benin whom colonists were all too ready to reduce to labor. The Yorùbá, Fon, and Ewe were already bound together by kinship; but the trauma of the Middle Passage and the subsequent harm they experienced once they arrived on the Cuban shores hardened them into Lukumi.⁴⁰

³⁸ Reinaldo Funes Monzote, *From Rainforest to Cane Field in Cuba*, 124.

³⁹ Joshua Myers, *Of Black Study*, (Las Vegas: Pluto Press, 2023), 24.

⁴⁰ Cuba's system of slavery categorized Africans into "naciones" or nations based on which region they were from. Those from the Bight of Benin became referred to as "Lukumi." These groupings had and continue to have a number of social, political, and

Cuba's burgeoning sugar industry was positioned to fill the void left by Haiti after its righteous revolution. To meet global demands of a market largely driven by Europe and the United States, planters and mill owners first had to enhance their equipment. They also had to become more efficient in the process. Technologically, machines like the vacuum boiler and the vacuum fan facilitated the Cuban sugar industry's development, but optimizing the industry's output heightened the demands on Cuba's unfree labor force. "The transformation of Cuban sugar production to industrial levels necessitated an intensification of the forms of brutality and methods of social regulation imposed onto the enslaved population."⁴¹ Every breath that these enslaved Africans took had to be properly accounted for, even when they were sleeping.

Over the course of the 19th century, enslaved Africans went from living in *bohios* or huts to being corralled in *barracones* or barracks.⁴² This shift was an attempt to imprison them within the built environment. Formerly enslaved Afro-Cuban Esteban Montejo describes the barracks on the Flor de Sagua plantation as being "in the form of two rows that faced each other, with a big door in the middle and a thick padlock that locked the slaves in at night. There were barracks made of wood and others made of cement with roofs. Both kinds had a dirt floor and were filthy as hell."⁴³ Montejo eventually fled that hellish environment, choosing to live as a maroon instead. The barracks were a minimalistic system of confinement that impacted their emotional,

religious ramifications. While some African cultural groups were categorized together despite having negative or no relationships with one another, the Lukumi had a preexisting relationship not forced on them by enslavement. George Brandon, *Santeria from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 10-11.

⁴¹ Ortiz-Minaya, "Unlocking the Spatial Code of the Plantation Landscape", 75.

⁴² Ortiz-Minaya, "Unlocking the Spatial Code of the Plantation Landscape", 72.

⁴³ Barnett, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 23.

mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. Caribbean sociologist Reynaldo Ortiz-Minaya adds:

The reconfiguration of the specific housing quarters for enslaved Africans not only altered their particular material conditions, but also their social relations and exchanges, within the negotiated relationship of power in the social space of the slave regime. The barracón, whether *de nave* or *de patio*, was a spatial mechanism not only to control the movement of African slaves, but also to regulate the level of work productivity along with the[ir] strategies and methods of resistance.⁴⁴

For the Lukumi specifically, these social relations, impacted by their altered built environment, included their relations with the environment. To the degree that these labor and living conditions were *successful*, they coerced captives to participate in the devastation of the Cuban landscape. The land on which they toiled was meant to be their prison and their graves. The plantocracy spatially tried to make enslavement all-consuming and freedom unimaginable. And, even as these anti-life environments were rooted to the mills and plantations, no place on the island was completely out of the colonial regime's reach.

Yet, away from the overseer's watchful eyes, in the spaces where they could properly care for one another, they remembered possibilities within nature and the power of *his* leaves. Only, Osain was not the preeminent orisha-herbalist when the tradition was initially (re)established in Cuba: Erinle was. In Yorùbáland, Erinle, or "Inle," is conceptualized as more of a hunter, but he is a "medicine man" too.⁴⁵ One of his praise names is "Ode Dudu," the black hunter.⁴⁶ Erinle used his knowledge of plants, medicine, and poison while hunting. However, the Lukumi of Cuba needed him to use them for healing. Anthropologist George Brandon interviewed Cuban practitioner Nicolas

⁴⁴ Ortiz-Minaya, "Unlocking the Spatial Code of the Plantation Landscape", 72.

⁴⁵ Wande Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, 75.

⁴⁶ W. Abimbola, 75.

Angelica on the origins of the two orisha associated with herbs. "Inle preceded Ozain in what was actually Ozain's work, being known till then as the greatest expert on herbs. Before all the [orisha priests] knew Ozain, Inle was the god of medicine, medications and all medical substances. When Ozain finally arrived on these shores, Inle had to take a second place with regard to herbs."⁴⁷ Osain's delayed arrival to the island and Erinle's entrenchment in the tradition at that time did not prevent practitioners from recognizing who "Elesije" is.

There are two notable distinctions between how Osain is described in Africa and how he is described in the Afro-Cuban diaspora. In Lukumi, Osain was neither born an herbalist, nor was he born disabled. According to the odu Okana Ejila, as recited by Lukumi diviner Ocha'ni Lele, Osain was Osain permanently injured his leg while picking herbs for Orunmila, who was preparing a remedy for his client, Olodumare. Feeling somewhat responsible for what happened to Osain and sympathetic towards him for no longer being able to support himself financially, Orunmila gave Osain a goatskin bag "filled with packets of dried herbs" - "twenty-one for every ailment humans suffer" and "twenty-one for every sickness not yet born."⁴⁸

Osain is such a fixture within Lukumi practice that he is synonymous with one of the plant mixtures which orisha devotees cannot work without. Overseen by an osainista and/or an oriate (the ritual master of ceremonies), orisha priests use this mixture to cleanse themselves and the objects to handle their shrines.⁴⁹ The onisegun of Southwest

⁴⁷ George Brandon, *Santeria From Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories*, 137.

⁴⁸ Ocha'ni Lele, *Diloggun Tales of the Natural World: How the Moon Fooled the Sun and Other Santeria Stories* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 2011).

⁴⁹ "Osainista" refers to those within the religion who are adept at the work of Osain, understanding the personality of each plant used, knowing which plants are associated

Nigeria are likely the forerunners and/or distant cousins of osainistas in the Lukumi tradition. Osainistas don't operate in the same capacity as onisegun. Instead, they express their environmental thought and knowledge of plants in ceremonies.⁵⁰ So it is Osain that Lukumi devotees propitiate when making these concoctions, before addressing the orisha they make the osain for. No ceremony can occur if Osain's leaves are not present. In the spiritual tradition, "kosi ewe, kosi orisha" (No plants/leaves, no orisha) is a common phrase stated to acknowledge the primacy of plants in spiritual work. That orientation is just as significant, if not more, when it comes to the music and its accompanying instruments.

Lukumi Life and Knowledge

Though Lukumi people are indispensable to their ritual music, the question of how they reconstituted their ritual-music tradition could be easily misinterpreted if approached disciplinarily through the social sciences and/or the humanities. In "Sociology Hesitant," W.E.B. Du Bois outlined some of the fundamental (false) assumptions at the heart of the respective discipline, as he sought to reshape it for the better. For Du Bois, foundational sociologists - namely Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer - tried to completely "reduce human action to law, rule, and rhythm," based on their scientific study of society - a "mystical whole" whose units they didn't study discreetly.⁵¹ And even in this, they focused on what societies, as fixed and elevated forms of collective humanity, did, instead of how and why they did it. Had they more

with which orisha, and so forth. George Brandon, "The Uses of Plants in Healing in an Afro-Cuban Religion, Santeria," 60.

⁵⁰ George Brandon, "The Uses of Plants in Healing in an Afro-Cuban Religion, Santeria," *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (Sep 1991), 60.

⁵¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Sociology Hesitant", *boundary 2* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 39-40.

thoroughly examined the parts of the whole, they would've learned that life could not be perfectly distilled. "For the Great Assumption of real life is that in the deeds of men there lies along with rule and rhythm - along with physical law and biologic habit, a something incalculable."⁵² This is what he believed was missing from his field and discipline. The problem, however, is that the social sciences were:

...built on several articles of faith: One could not build knowledge on the unknown; the goal of science was to know as much as possible about the nature of human life; all metaphysical and theological matters were remanded to the premodern dustbin...and, finally, if we could only know that which we could see, the thinking went, this would mean also that observable human actions could be reduced to the exact discovery of these laws.⁵³

Nineteenth century sociologists and their intellectual progeny tried to explain away the unknowable or unobservable. That which went against this "faith" could not constitute knowledge.

Rather than evade or attempt to deny the incalculable, the Lukumi personified and deified *it*. They communed with it, structured living traditions and systems of thought around it. The persistence of Osain and the other orisha in Cuba are testaments to this. Unlike their oppressors and within the island's natural and built environments, Lukumi people conceived of a world beyond human understanding and paid homage to it. They did not engage nature on social scientific terms.

The Lukumi did not engage the world as humans - in the Western sense of the word - either; nor were they perceived as humans within the slave society. The conceptual dehumanization of Lukumi people in colonial Cuba and the ways in which their inhumanity was meted out parallels that of African people in the U.S. during the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992. After the event, representatives of LA's justice system

⁵² Du Bois, "Sociology Hesitant".

⁵³ Joshua Myers, *Of Black Study*, (Las Vegas: Pluto Press, 2023), 24.

habitually used "NHI" — "*no humans involved*" — in cases where the rights of jobless Black males were violated. In "No Humans Involved," essayist and scholar Sylvia Wynter questions how the city's public officials, not just the police, would "come to conceive of what it means to be both *human* and *North American* in the kinds of terms...within whose logic, the jobless and usually school drop-out/push-out category of young Black males can be *perceived*, and *therefore behaved towards*, only as the Lack of the human, the Corporeal Other to being North American."⁵⁴ Put differently, she excavates what it means to (not) be *human* and the significance of the acronym's deployment in the context of the rebellion. For those were the terms that created the circumstances which these people navigated and ultimately resisted.

The definition of the human on which the acronym rests was/is not temporally static and the representation of the human is naively misconstrued. This humanity that LA's poor Black people lacked was founded on the Bible's account of how all life came to be. The human was a "divinely created being," chosen by God to reign over the rest of creation.⁵⁵ But, in the nineteenth century, it shifted. The "new Narrative of Evolution," became its basis, whereby the human was an "evolutionarily selected being."⁵⁶ More important than the affirmative, being categorized as void of the divine and, later, evolutionary progress had major consequences for the people of Africa and her diaspora. This *new* human, Wynter posits, is inflated by the technocultural fallacy and supraculturalism. While the former overstates the degree to which human behaviors are motivated by the imperative to secure "the material basis of their existence," the latter "mistakes" "the representation-of-the-human-as-a-natural organism as if it were the

⁵⁴ Sylvia Wynter, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Knowledge on Trial*...43.

⁵⁵ Wynter 48.

⁵⁶ Wynter 48.

human-in-itself."⁵⁷ *Man* which emerged out of Western civilization became the unit of measurement and the measuring tool for what could constitute the human.

Neither African nor Black were valid forms in which the human could take shape. By Wynter's account, those who populated the "NHI" category were marked by their economic status. As un(der)employed, this "new poor" had undergone a changing relationship to Capital that began in the nineteenth century and continued on into the twentieth.⁵⁸ Their inability to sell their labor and/or the unwillingness of capitalists to exploit it were brought upon by technological shifts in the workplace that decreased the demand for it. And a century earlier, they, by and large, wouldn't have been able to sell their labor at all in the U.S. because they would've been enslaved. The same can be said for their *distant relatives* in Cuba.⁵⁹ In both locales, this class of people was the other and not human, they had the capacity to be possessed by those who were. Nature shared this in common with them. Plants, animals, and other life forms being non-human gave license for their exploitation.

Du Bois and Wynter lay out how Western interpretations of what it means to know and to be human - methodologically and historically - box out Lukumi ways of knowing, people, and ecologies, altogether. These are critical limitations within humanities and the social sciences. Yet, the persistence of these limitations are not cause to either correct those systems of knowledge or backdoor the aforementioned subjects into them. Attempting to prove the humanity of Lukumi people or verify their ways of

⁵⁷ Wynter 48-49.

⁵⁸ Wynter 63.

⁵⁹ On their collaborative album, *Distant Relatives*, vocalist Damian Marley and rapper Nas share their common experiences over a fusion of reggae and Hip Hop rhythms. Though from Kingston, Jamaica and Brooklyn, New York respectively, they touch on themes such colonialism that cut across Africa and the diaspora. Nas and Damian Marley, *Distant Relatives*, Universal Republic, 2010.

knowing would miss who/what they aspired to be on their own terms, as well as who/what the natural world is to them.

The surveillance, captivity, and violence of the plantation forced the Lukumi and other Africans in the Cuban slave society to seek refuge in the mountains, in the forest, and by the river, even if just for a moment. Their new-found resolve to seek out these places was married to intimate experiences with Africa's natural environments that clued them into what might be possible in Cuba. If Osain was in the plants of Yorùbáland, then maybe he could be in the ones on the island too. So in the woods, at the ocean, in their homes, and other places where orisha devotees could gather in secret, they communed with the material and spiritual world, in ways which their collective oppressors could not predict and which might not be traceable within Cuba's normative archives.

Chapter 3

WOOD THAT SPEAKS: MATERIALITY & THE ORISHA OF DRUMMING

Añá across the Waters

Àyàn, the orisha of drumming in Yorùbáland, became known as Añá in Cuba. Due to the way Cuba's geography differed from that of Southwest Nigeria, Lukumi people had to adapt their knowledge of and familiarity with the natural environment. There are two main types of musical ensembles or groups of instruments that accompany Lukumi Orisha Music. The first, guiro, consists of three shekeres, a conga, and a guataca (hoe blade played like a bell). Shekeres are hollowed out gourds with beads strung around them. They're common throughout West Africa. So Yorùbá people knew how to grow them and turn them into musical instruments when they arrived in Cuba. Batá are the second and more common musical ensemble used for ceremonies. The batá ensemble consists of three double-sided drums which are shaped the same, but at different sizes - the okonkolo (smallest drum with the highest note), the iyá (the "mother" and the largest drum with lowest note), and the itotele (middle drum with a note in between the other two). Each set of batá drums used for ceremonies is carved from a single tree trunk. The aforementioned bata are made of wood, metal, goat skin, and rope. Subsequently, the drummers must also know how to care for and tune their instruments.

According to Yorùbá oral tradition, Àyàn is an ancestor and an orisha. Many drums were introduced to the region by Àyàn Àgalú.⁶⁰ As the originator of the instruments, he is likewise recognized as the progenitor of lineages devoted to the orisha Àyàn. As a result, "every member of a traditional drummer's family, especially the Bàtá and Dùndún drummers, carry the prefix Ayan in his or her name to denote the tutelary divinity of the family."⁶¹ This practice migrated across the water too.

The legend of Añábi and Atanda is foundational to the history of Yorùbá-rooted music in the diaspora. As the story goes, Añábi, also known as Juan el Cojo, was a diviner, herbalist, and drummer, born in Africa and enslaved in Regla, Cuba in the early 19th century. One day while in the barracks, he heard other enslaved Lukumi playing orisha music. But, to his surprise, they weren't playing any drums that resembled what they had back home. Inspired to fill this void in his community, he collaborated with Atanda (Filomeno Garcia), a enslaved wood-carver and drummer in his own right, and together they birthed the island's first set of batá drums in approximately 1830.⁶² This occasion required them to draw on a wealth of artisanal, musical, and botanical knowledge. The two "drummers" had to be able to cure leather, pick herbs, and sculpt wood. Most importantly, accomplishing this feat required a preexisting relationship with and ritual knowledge of Añá. Añábi and Atanda came from lineages in Yorùbáland connected with Ayan - as the orisha of drumming was and is referred to in modern day Nigeria. That ritual knowledge which they tapped into was as spiritual and esoteric as it was material. They had to infuse the drums *with* Añá. Therefore, understanding the

⁶⁰ Ademola Adegbite, "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 1988): 17.

⁶¹ Adegbite, "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion," 17-18.

⁶² John Mason, *Orin òrìsà: Songs for Selected Heads*, Second ed. (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1997), 13.

spiritual and material dynamics of this divinity, set by its historical precedents in Africa, is imperative to considering how the musical tradition was reconstituted in Cuba.

Añá, the Orisha

There are several metaphysical layers to Añá. On both sides of the Atlantic, historically and presently, Añá is simultaneously approached as an ancestor, an orisha, and a collective of ancestral and living drummers.⁶³ As an orisha, *he* is the personification of drumming and sound in general. In Yorùbáland, *Ayan* is associated with ritual drums, not just batá. So he is embedded in all traditional Yorùbá ritual drums. Universally, he has songs that his *children* sing to him, protocol when being approached, taboos, and the same types of characteristics as the other orisha. Añá's role is "to connect these forces [of nature and of human life] through drum music. Through sound and the human endeavors to organize it - music, dance, and language - [Añá] drumming adds to the media through which *ara aye* (earth dwellers) and *ara orun* (dwellers of heaven) may communicate and commune."⁶⁴ In some sense, this orisha uniquely exists to serve others.

In the Lukumi context, Añá's uniqueness correlates to membership. Añá only accepts heterosexual men but any and every heterosexual man is not accepted.⁶⁵ Even then, drummers are supposed to be men of good character. They shouldn't be brutes or male chauvinists. Drummers are not just initiated to Añá, having their hands ritually

⁶³ Akinsola A. Akiwowo and David Font-Navarette, "Metaphysical Dimensions of the òrìsà of Drumming", *The Yorùbá God of Drumming: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Wood that Talks*, ed. Amanda Villepastour, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2015), 36.

⁶⁴ Akiwowo and Font-Navarette, "Metaphysical Dimensions of the òrìsà of Drumming," 37.

⁶⁵ Vaughan and Aldama, "Carlos Aldama's Life in Bata," 29.

washed: they are sworn in (juramento).⁶⁶ They take an oath and are bound to the orisha, the drum, and the society of drummers.

Añá is primordial and ancestral. Members of his collective all consider themselves descendants of the same deified drummer and drum-maker. This translates to initiated drummers employing kinship terms to refer to one another. The main difference between the West African and the Lukumi iterations is that, in West Africa, Ayan encompasses entire families and lineages.⁶⁷ Though, all male, Ayan drummers were and are born into the tradition. Thus, the Yorùbá kinship terms they use include mother (“iya”) and can be specific enough as to note whether one is a senior sibling (“egbon”) or junior sibling (“aburo”). Whereas in the Afro-Cuban variant, drummers come to Añá out of a calling or interest in the music. So their familial lexicon is limited to male kinship terms in English and/or Spanish, such as godfather (“padrino”) and brother (“hermano”). “Although the kinship among omo [Añá] in the diaspora is focused more closely on relationships formalized through initiate and occupation than the consanguinity that determines membership in West African Ayan families, the initiation of omo Añá in the diaspora can be understood to establish analogous bonds between initiates and ancestral drummers that is the birthright of Ayan families in West Africa.”⁶⁸ As such, regardless of birth or initiation into this collective, blood was shed. That could be the blood from when ritual drummers are born or from the animals sacrificed when they are sworn in. Not even

⁶⁶ Schweitzer, *The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming: Aesthetics, Transmission, Bonding, and Creativity*, 50.

⁶⁷ Akiwowo and Font-Navarette, 43.

⁶⁸ “Omo” means “child” in Yoruba. In this context, it is used to refer to those initiated to an orisha. Omo Añá are therefore the children of the orisha of drumming. Akiwowo and Font-Navarette, 43.

the Middle Passage could rupture a drummer's relationship to this orisha and thus the brotherhood.

Añá, the Drum

As the orisha of drumming, Añá can refer to the divinity inside of "consecrated" drums or the drums themselves. In the case of the latter, Añá is the single most important piece of material culture in the ritual music tradition. A Yorùbá praise poem identifies Ayan as "the wood that speaks."⁶⁹ Yorùbá ritual drums, West African or otherwise, are the material manifestation of the orisha. They are the vessels that he inhabits to communicate with orisha and human-beings alike. As previously stated, Añá only takes the form of batá drums. But, in traditional Yorùbá traditions, Ayan can be inside of batá, dundun, gudugudu, omele, and other drums.

Physically assembling Lukumi batá, is only the first step in the process of creating a set of consecrated drums. To be played in ceremony, they must also receive Añá, the orisha of sound. Here, an array of ritual expertise is needed to give birth to a new set of Añá drums or batá fundamento. "To consecrate Añá you need a santero [orisha priest], babalawo, osainista, and a palero [Palo Mayombe initiate]. You have to have the four most important elements: animal, which is the drum skins, mineral in the metal chaworó bells and the small ring that goes on all the drums, vegetal in the wooden bodies of the drums, and human, the drummers themselves."⁷⁰ The human-beings collaborate with the non-human beings to produce an entity that, though also non-human, is not inanimate. They collectively give (re)birth to Añá by using the ashe and materials from an older set

⁶⁹ Akiwowo and Font-Navarrete, 38.

⁷⁰ Palo Mayombe is an Afro-Cuban improvisation of spiritual traditions from West Central Africa. It is the Kongo or Bantu parallel to Lukumi. Vaughan and Aldama, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá*, 28-29.

of batá fundamento to imbue Añá into a new set. Every batá fundamento is made possible by the authority of the *ones* that came before it.

The presence of Osain the orisha and osain the herbal mixture are critical to the creation and the maintenance of batá fundamento because they are used to cleanse or feed the drums. "Songs for Osain are especially sacred to Añá, because Añá and Osain work hand in hand. Drummers can be called omo alaña (children of Añá) or hijos de Osain (sons of Osain). Añá is related mostly to Osain. Of course Añá is related to Changó too, which is logical because Changó is the king of the drums. But Osain works closest with Añá."⁷¹ Añá and Osain, the orisha, work together so it makes sense that Añábi, one of the progenitors of Afro-Cuban batá, was an herbalist as well. These two orisha are extended family ("ebi") in the way that Añá is to drummers and drum-makers. Osain allows Añá to manifest in a physical form. Omo alaña playing the drums they make and care for has a special significance that is then heightened when accompanied with singing.

The use of rope on batá is tangential yet representative of the musical tradition's improvisation. Historically in Yorùbáland and Cuba, up until the recent present, rope was not used to mount drums. The skins were fixed to the shells using *awo*. In Africa these are "bi-tensorial strips made from goat, deer, or antelope skins fastened and pulled tightly over them in a transversal way so that they are obliged to adhere to the body and so to increase their bi-tension."⁷² Strips of cowhide are used in the Afro-Cuban iteration, but the process is relatively similar. When applied, they are constantly dampened then stretched around the shell, so that when they dry, the drum is secure. This process also tunes them. Due to increases in humidity, especially in the diaspora, the skins absorb the

⁷¹ Vaughan and Aldama.

⁷² The name of the stripes is pronounced "ah-waw," not to be confused with *awo* ("ah-woah"), which refers to Ifa initiates, particularly babalawos. Adegbite, "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion," 16.

moisture in the air and the awo is liable to flex, thus loosening the drums and affecting their notes. The opposite happens when they are in a colder climate. To mitigate these changes in tension, as well as to fasten the drums with something more durable and easier to manipulate, rope began being used.

In Africa and in the Western hemisphere, Añá's material versatility and adaptability testify to the drum's endurance across time and space. On the continent, it was and is often made with African teak wood or satinwood, but drum-makers have a number of options to choose from.⁷³ Likewise, in Cuba, cedar is one of the more common choices, but mahogany and almond are applicable for batá. Añá's lack of specificity regarding which trees may be used suggests that the tree's physical properties, the musicality function of the drums, as well as the ritual process necessary to prepare them for ceremonial usage are more important than whatever spiritual significance a particular species of tree may have. For example, wood carvers and drum makers have to factor in how porous or soft the wood is because that will ultimately affect how the drums will sound.

As central as wood and leaves are in the materiality of orisha music, there is another key component — metal. If trees, plants and herbs are Earth's precious belongings above ground, then metals are *her* precious things from below her surface. Añá's relationship to Aye and other orisha, with regard to metal, was unbroken over the course slavery and colonialism.

Materially, iron played a major role in the social and political ordering of a number of West African societies. "Small states and larger polities (Mande, Ife, Oyo,

⁷³ John Ayansola Abiodun Ogunleye with K. Noel Amherd, "My Life in the Bush of Drums: Ayan in Ijebu-Remo," *The Yorùbá God of Drumming: Transatlantic Perspective on the Wood that Talks*, ed. Amanda Villepastour (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2015), 96n21.

Benin, Hausa, Dahomey, Bassari, and Asante) exerted control over iron production and trade, using the complex interplay of iron-working's memory and meaning to successfully forge statecraft before and during the Atlantic era."⁷⁴ The techniques and processes for producing iron were just as important as the precious metal's applications, particularly in Yorùbáland. Therefore, wherever the forges and smithies were, there Ogun was. Ogun, a hunter in Africa and a warrior in Cuba, is the orisha of iron. *He* is a blacksmith. Some of his tools are for war, while others are for agriculture. "Ogun was in the chains of slavery and the cutless of resistance."⁷⁵ That's why, in the diaspora, he's usually represented swinging a machete, the ideal tool for cutting down sugar cane and leading insurrection on plantations. More acutely, Ogun symbolizes the human capacity to overcome obstacles, be they physical or spiritual, and the power to decisively transform one's circumstances. Due to the long-standing affiliation of Ogun with Àyan/Añá, "...ethnohistorical narratives repeatedly situate the batá drum on the battlefield."⁷⁶ It was custom for Yorùbá drummers to accompany soldiers to war.

Ogun and Àyan/Añá were on the battlefield together, in spirit and in the material world. Though Afro-Cuban batá don't play a role in physical warfare today, the echoes of the orisha of sound's relationship to Ogun and their combat history are visible when batá fundamento are fully *dressed*. During ceremonies, the sacred drums are each wrapped in a "bante," an intricately designed "apron" or "loincloth" covered in beads and cowrie shells. "The commonplace use of the *bante* in Cuba is likely indicative of how common

⁷⁴ Candice Goucher, "Rituals of Iron in the Black Atlantic," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 109.

⁷⁵ Goucher, "Rituals of Iron in the Black Atlantic," 115.

⁷⁶ Michael Marcuzzi, "Ring-Around-the-Rosie Atlantic: Transatlantic Uses of Rings Among Bata Drummers, Caravan Guards, and Muslim Insurgents," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 30.

this accessory of the bata ensemble was in Yorùbáland prior to the transatlantic separation when the portable bata ensembles moved about as material emissaries of the Oyo Kingship."⁷⁷ On the continent, bante were metal plates or sheets with designs shaped into them, draped on the body of the drums, as well as around the waist of soldiers. This custom of wearing a bante into battle is referenced in the odu Odigbe:

Let the sounds of the [supporting] *omele* drum go on;
The fighting day has come to pass.
Bata also added its provocative voice;
We are in the open field.
We don't put on trousers without putting on a bante;
We are in the open field.⁷⁸

In this sense, batá had armor of their own. These drums being dressed with metal plates underscores how valued they were and suggests that they were considered to be more than mere objects. They were and are sacred beings. Contemporarily, because of the varied social context of Afro-Cuban batá, a bante acts as a uniform or kind of paraphernalia, often indicating the particular name of that set of batá, references to its lineage, and more. Their material substance makes them unfit for the front lines. But due to its genealogy, a bante is also an insignia gesturing to batá's military history or experience.

Afro-Cuban batá fundamento have another form of paraphernalia: the chaworo. Chaworo are belts with brass bells strung to them that are only placed on the iya drum. The larger of the two belts (also called the chaworo) goes on the enu (the larger end of each batá) and the smaller of the belts (chawori) goes on the chacha (the smaller end of each drum). "Although brass is the emblematic metal of Oshun devotion, the use of the bells is fundamentally a protection against witchcraft and other forms of spiritually

⁷⁷ Marcuzzi, "Ring-Around-the-Rosie Atlantic," 31.

⁷⁸ Marcuzzi, 31-32.

destabilizing forces that could affect the drums' potency in ritual settings."⁷⁹ So in addition to adding another layer to the music when the iyá is struck, chaworo - as a pair - also a line of defense when batá fundamento and drummers are engaged in spiritual warfare. Their functions are equal parts music and tactical.

As the vessels where Añá dwells, batá scheduled for ritual use are structurally the same as the ones meant for practice or folkloric use, save for one small feature - a metal ring on the outside of the chacha. A kusanrin (Yorùbáland) or agoya (Cuba) is fixed to every drum in a set of batá fundamento, not just the iyá. Each ring is "the external marker that the drums are consecrated..."⁸⁰ Añá is never allowed to touch the floor. So from a practical standpoint, these drums are hung up using the kusanrin/agoya. Historically and presently in Yorùbáland, other paraphernalia can be attached to batá, but they may be "(i) removed from the drums between performances, (ii) applied only in particular regions and not others, (iii) sporadic in their application, or (iv) out of favour completely in certain locales."⁸¹ Anecdotally, in the Bight of Benin and across the waters, the kusanrin/agoya is considered to be an earring and associated with the orisha Oshun.⁸² The rings don't have an overtly spiritual purpose compared to bante and chaworo. However, because they are permanently affixed to the drums and constants within the genealogy of batá, they are no less significant. Chaworo can be placed on unconsecrated batá and used during folkloric performances, by uninitiated drummers. Bante don't share that commonality with chaworo; they're only for ceremonial use. But the agoya's exclusivity and fixedness make it an irreplaceable part of consecrated batá.

⁷⁹ Marcuzzi, 33.

⁸⁰ Marcuzzi, 33.

⁸¹ Marcuzzi.

⁸² Marcuzzi.

Añá at-Work

Sacred drums played and continue to play a pivotal role in orisha devotion. So much so that, in Yorùbáland, batá are not the universal drums of the spiritual tradition. With some overlap, each orisha was associated with its own drum or ensemble of drums. For example, batá originally belonged to Èsù before becoming the favorite drum of Shango, ìgbìn drums are for Obatala, ìpèsè drums for Òrúnmìla, and Ògìdan for Ògun.⁸³ Dùndún ensembles have their own origins and particular associations, but are played for a number of divinities. Unlike many of the other sacred drums noted, the dùndún can't be traced back to a single orisha, because they did not originate in that part of West Africa.⁸⁴ Yet, the willingness to substitute and incorporate various drums in and out of orisha devotion over time anticipated the tradition's capacity for material improvisation in Cuba. No matter what form Yorùbá drums took, the work could still be done.

Ayan and the other orisha embody duality just as much as Ogun does. Therefore, without contradiction, drums have connections with combat and healing. In the odu Oyékundi, Esu suffered from "ogbogbo," an ailment "somewhat akin to adrenal fatigue with depression."⁸⁵ His diviner or *primary care physician*, also named Oyékundi, advised him to take an herbal remedy and to placate the Ori or head of his friend Bàtá. After Èsù did this, Bàtá sang a song in praise of Esu:

Èsù,	Èsù
Àgbàgì,	The tough and rugged on,
Anínla ká 'Lùú;	The Big One throughout the city;
O ti rúbo,	You have performed the sacrifice,
Oyékundi;	Oyékundi;

⁸³ Adegbite, "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion," 20.

⁸⁴ The dùndún is suggested to have been brought to Yorùbáland by Hausa people and other African muslims who migrated from the Savannah belt. Adegbite, 17 & 20.

⁸⁵ Kola Abimbola, "The Sacred and the Profane: Wisdom and the Practice of Healing in òrìsà Medicine," 133–35.

Oyé.	Avoided.
O rúbo,	You performed sacrifice,
Oyéékundi;	Oyéékundi;
Oyé.	Avoided.
O ti rúbo,	You have performed the sacrifice,
Oyéékundi;	Oyéékundi;
Oyé.	Avoided. ⁸⁶

While the odu alludes to the historic relationship between Èsu and Bàtá, the song more specifically affirms Èsù's obedience and speaks his improved health into existence. Indeed, Bàtá's singing worked immediately. Èsù regained his strength and began dancing around the neighborhood with his friend, celebrating his recovery. The resolution in Oyéékundi is an illustration of how and where sacred drums most commonly appear in Yorùbá society.

Drums continue to be the backbone of ceremonies and yearly festivals held in honor of the orisha. They and drummers fulfill their role by rhythmically saluting the respective divinity and compel the community to gather together for song and dance. That community is both material and immaterial. These sacred instruments "enable the devotees of the òrìsà to bridge the gap between the visible and invisible worlds" and "provide the medium through which the worshippers are in constant ecstatic communication with their òrìsà."⁸⁷ Whether they're batá or dùndún drums, these Yorùbáland ensembles parade around, communicating the prayers, praise, and pleas of devotees to the orisha. And the orisha respond in kind by their presence known through spiritual possession. Batá were the only Yorùbá drums to survive the Middle Passage; yet, their role as a form of ritual technology endured.

After European enslavers forced Yorùbá people to migrate across the Atlantic Ocean, drummers made the transition from standing while playing to sitting. As

⁸⁶ Abimbola, "The Sacred and the Profane," 134.

⁸⁷ Adegbite, "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion," 24.

previously stated, batá drummers and drums took part in military campaigns, in addition to accompanying royal caravans, traveling from place to place. This need for mobility lessened as the Lukumi spiritual tradition took shape in Cuba. However, even as the drums became relatively stationary, the work of Añá did not change.

Slavery and colonialism surveilled the spiritual movements of Afro-Cubans, similar to how they limited them socio-economically. The freedom of movement which Yorùbá people were accustomed to outdoors became more restricted under Cuba's system of “cabildos” — jointly religious and mutual aid societies that were based on the region and ethnic group in Africa that people came from. “Cabildos were institutions of social control that ultimately facilitated African cultural continuity,” but they specifically functioned to organize, receive, orient, and regulate Africans who were brought to the island.”⁸⁸ Under the guise of Catholic saints, the colonial government dictated when orisha devotees were allowed to hold their processions and festivals. However, public forms of Lukumi worship were largely confined to homes and other private spaces. Unlike in Africa, there were no permanent orisha temples in the open for devotees to worship at. Such places had to be created on-demand, indoors. That was the role of orisha musicians in Cuba and it is what they continue to do wherever they are. Song leaders and drummers manipulate the energy of and alter the physical space of religious gatherings.⁸⁹ Gatherings where consecrated batá are being played are known as “wemileres,” “tambors,” or “fundamentos.” They're held either to honor the orisha of an initiate or to appease an orisha in return for deeds done. Restoring someone's health falls within the line of work that orisha perform for their devotees.

⁸⁸ Vaughan and Aldama, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá*,” 20.

⁸⁹ Lisa Osunleti Beckley-Roberts, “‘Standing on Holy Ground’: The Creation of Sacred Space through Music in the African American Lukumi Religion,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 3 (2012): 413–14.

Regardless of the occasion, the role of batá fundamento is consistent. Heralded omo alaña Carlos Aldama states that “When Añá takes to the streets it is para contraversiar (to find conflict, raise hell) with the dancers, the singers, and to attract conflict with this commotion...So when Añá goes out, it is to struggle (luchar), to make war (guerrar).”⁹⁰ On the surface, Aldama is referring to enticing or agitating other orisha to possess worshippers who may not exactly want to *participate*, but it's deeper than that. Despite the reality that one specific person may be the reason for the fundamento, there's enough healing for the entire community present. Spiritually cleaning the community often involves coming into contact with the forces that plague it. That is why the drums are still dressed with a bante and chaworo. So, while Añá (the drums) is compelling attendees to sing and dance, Añá (the orisha) is also fighting on their behalf.

The historical and material connections between Añá and war; the medicinal function that batá performs; and the Yorùbá-rooted conception of healing, highlighted by the integrated existence of natural and sacred beings; inextricably link orisha music to Black and insurgent ecology in Afro-Cuba. Upon their reconstitution on the island, batá fundamento began serving as prescriptive instruments for Lukumi resistance and communal wellness, from the eras of slavery and colonialism to the present. Añá's presence in the spiritual realm is tethered to the material realm. That inseparability makes Añá always an ancestor, an orisha, and a drum, all the time. And because those dimensions could not be disconnected, not even by the transatlantic slave trade, neither could Añá's relationship to other aspects of Lukumi lifeways. That's what allows the music to be as potent as it is.

⁹⁰ Vaughan and Aldama, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Bata*, 28.

Chapter 4

WITHOUT A SONG: OF BLACK SOUND AND ORIKI

Encoding Sound

Yorùbá language — in its fullness — is key to unearthing the relationship between ecology and orisha music. Prior to Western imperialism and colonialism, Yorùbá was strictly an oral language. To this day, the script and other conventions used to teach Yorùbá are in or based on English. Therefore, sound has a special significance in Yorùbá-rooted traditions compared to ones with their own writing systems. According to Ademola Adegbite, “There are three types of sounds in Yorùbá. These are the sound of spoken word (*iro oro*), musical sound (*iro orin*), and noise (*iro ariwo*) which may be produced by man, animal, nature, and so forth. Traditional Yorùbá musicians organize these categories and durational values to produce Yorùbá music.”⁹¹ The perception and organization of these types of sounds mirror one another. Spoken word and musical sound each make use of the three recognized tone levels in Yorùbá — high, middle, and low — in order to convey and distinguish meaning. This is why Adegbite goes on to state that “It is generally believed that for music to be fully appreciated, it must

⁹¹ By musical sound, Adegbite is specifically referring to that which comes from instruments. Thus, Yorùbá music is generally made up of all three types of sound. Hereafter, “musical sound” is used instead of “rhythms” which will identify a specific form of musical sound emanating from *bàtá*. Adegbite, “The Concept of Sound in Traditional African Religious Music,” *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (Sep. 1991): 47-48.

communicate.”⁹² More broadly yet pointedly, sound is deployed with the expectation that, when sent out, something should be sent back; there should be a response. This skill and will to deploy language in such a targeted way was valuable to enslaved Yorùbá people in the 19th century and their colonized descendants.

“Oríkì” is one of the highest forms of how sound is deployed in Yorùbá culture. It conventionally refers to poetry recited in praise of someone. They are not simply spoken: oríkì are chanted. And that someone can be a living person, an ancestor, or a divinity. However, Rowland Abiodun, a Yorùbá scholar of African Art, expands this definition to encompass “all verbal and visual invocations qualify as oríkì in Yorùbá culture.”⁹³ He continues “oríkì affirm the identity of almost everything in existence. Thus, oríkì extend beyond our traditional categories of two- and three-dimensional arts and color. They include architectural space, dress, music, dance, the performed word, mime, ritual, food, and smell, engaging virtually all the senses.”⁹⁴ In the context of the spiritual tradition, Orisha music more than qualifies as “oríkì.” The musical sound from the drums and songs from the people *speak* directly to the orisha and the heads of initiated devotees. Whether they’re consecrated or not, batá drums are oríkì because they are affirmations to and for the orisha Añá, even when they’re not being played.

The use of oríkì is an art form that epitomizes the ways in which Orisha devotees honor their built and natural environments. “More important, oríkì energize, prepare, and summon their subject into action. Put differently, Yorùbá art, like most African art forms, is more like an active ‘verb’ than a static ‘noun.’”⁹⁵ As oríkì, orisha music activates the

⁹² Adegbite, “The Concept of Sound in Traditional African Religious Music”, 48.

⁹³ Rowland Abiodun, *Yorùbá Art and Language: Seeking the African in African Art*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

⁹⁴ Abiodun, *Yorùbá Art and Language*.

⁹⁵ Abiodun, *Yorùbá Art and Language*.

life force of its subject and bears witness to the connection between human beings and the subjects they encounter. In the case of Bàtá singing in Oyékundi, the song or oríkì activated the ashe of the prescribed herbal remedy and was itself a direct cause of Esu's recovery.

Oríkì and orisha music are more than just collections of sound in the Yorùbá sense. They are “black sound,” “the ground of constitutive differences upon and through which cultural meanings are inscribed, contested, worked out, and reactivated.”⁹⁶ And they reverberate in Africa and echo in her diaspora, unfolding into multiple meaning-making practices. The musical sounds, singing and songs within Orisha music marks textual and creative practices of the Lukumi tradition. Singing remains a sacred activity, while the musical sounds and songs are sacred texts. They are tools devotees use to call forth their own ashe and that of their divinities or other beings. They're also how devotees imbue objects with that ashe, be it a musical instrument or a pot.

The Musical Sounds of Bata

Yorùbá bàtá's musical sounds are textual compositions that may be truncated, extended, or improvised. They express layers of meaning that are not just symbolic, but can be felt, heard, and understood. Moreover, when Àyan drummers, specifically alubàtá (bàtá drummers) are organizing and coordinating sounds into music, they're also communicating in a coded language known as enà. Code-talking is common in Yorùbá culture, as many craft traditions and professions use a code-talking system to keep secrets and exclude outsiders. Alubàtá possess an enà of their own. Enà bàtá is unique in that its “vocabulary is comprised of drum vocables, that is, the non-semantic syllables that communicate drum strokes on the bàtá. These syllables take on semantic meaning when

⁹⁶ Reed, *Sound works: Race, Sound, and Poetry in Production*, 8.

they are mapped from Yorùbá.”⁹⁷ And because it is an encoding of sounds from bàtá, mixed with Yorùbá syllables and words, enà bàtá can be articulated on the drum.

As stated earlier, bàtá served particular functions in Yorùbá societies, prior to European encroachment. Àyan drummers used them to facilitate rituals and to accompany armies during times of war. Amanda Villepastour proposes that “enà bàtá originated through the need for bàtá drummers to transmit musical information, so it initially developed as an oral notation to serve a pedagogical need...Alubàtá may have appropriated their drum *enà* for a coded ritual language as it was a ‘ready-made’ code and was available to adapt as a ritual language.”⁹⁸ This is consistent with how bàtá drummers sustain their tradition. They're responsible for birthing new bàtá, performing maintenance on the drums, and initiating new members. Further, enà bàtá would've been useful on the battlefield, allowing spoken or drummed messages to be communicated without being intercepted.

Bàtá speak through the iya drum. Though oríkì was previously broadened to frame the whole and particular elements of Orisha Music, from a technical standpoint, it also refers to the praise poetry that is typically chanted, but can be drummed as well. In the context of the spiritual tradition, the drums speak using oríkì, òwe (proverbs), and ìlù òrìsà (orisha rhythms). Oríkì and òwe can be played as a form of direct speech on the iya, without the rest of the ensemble accompanying it, or be played over the ìlù òrìsà and/or other dances rhythms.⁹⁹ “These rhythms are played to communicate directly with the òrìsà, who are said to recognize their own rhythms and to hear the texts being played.”¹⁰⁰ Àyan devotees maintained this skill and, in return, it sustained them. Villepastour goes on

⁹⁷ Villepastour, *Ancient Text Messages of the Yorùbá Bàtá Drum*, 91.

⁹⁸ Villepastour, 92.

⁹⁹ Villepastour, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Villepastour, 43.

to state that “If enà bàtá was the available code to exclude outsiders, then perhaps war and the preservation of cult secrets provided the impetus for expanding its function beyond musical pedagogy.”¹⁰¹ It is also feasible then, that this encrypted language would've allowed for the preservation of bàtá’s musical repertoire and the Àyan ritual knowledge in the diaspora, even under the duress of enslavement and colonialism.

The musical sounds of AfroCuban batá perform a similar function as their ancestors from Yorùbáland and their distant cousins in present day Nigeria, but without as vast of a repertoire. Commonly referred to as toques, Lukumi orisha rhythms are primary manifestations of Yorùbá concepts of sound, in Cuba, due to the musical and ritual knowledge which the Àyan/Añá brotherhood held onto. They are also influenced by Spanish Flamenco, Son, and Rumba. The latter two are African-rooted musical traditions that developed in Cuba, alongside Orisha Music. Some rhythms are for specific Orisha, while others are generic and can be used for multiple orisha. Drummers subtly change the feeling of the generic toques to fit the orisha they're playing for. Within each toque, the person playing the iya drum is able to play various *conversations*. Some are signals back and forth with the itotele player; others are with the orisha whom that toque is for.

In the context of wemileres or tambors, the playing of toques are highly organized during three parts of the ceremony — the *oro igbodu*, the *oro cantado*, and the *ciere*. The *oro igbodu* or *oro seco* (Spanish for “dry”) is the opening part of every wemilere. It's “dry” because there is no singing or dancing allowed. The drummers are directly saluting the throne (room) — the decorated space where orisha shrines are set up. This arrangement of toques features rhythms for each orisha, plus a few more. The order of the

¹⁰¹ Villepastour, 93.

toques changes depending on whether the drums are from a Havana lineage or Matanzas and the specific lineage of the drummers. However, there's a general order across lineages. Next is the oro cantado (Spanish for “sung”). This is the oro when the drums and drummers salute the initiated devotees present and when they in-turn sing and dance to salute the drums. As is the case in the orisha tradition of the distant past and in modern day Nigeria, it is the combination of the toques, the singing, and the dancing that entices the orisha to possess their devotees. The order of the orisha sung and played for mirrors the oro igbodu and is also subject to lineage. Here's one example of the order for the oro cantado in a Havana lineage:

Eshu/Elegba, Ogun, Ochosi, Erinle, Babaluaye, Osain, Dada, Korikoto/Ogue, Orisha Oko, Ibeji, Aganju, Shango, Obatala, Yewa, Oba, Oya, Yemaya, Orunmila, and Oshun.

In this order, the *male* orisha are first, then the *female*, with the exception of Orunmila. And within that, the orisha are grouped based on the relationship they have to one another. For example, the warriors — Elegba, Ogun, and Ochosi — are first; Erinle, Babaluaye, and Osain are all healers; and Orunmila and Oshun have *deep* ties, hence Orunmila not being with the other *males*. The order of the oro is systematically adjusted depending on which orisha the wemilere is in honor of. That honored orisha is moved to the end and sung and played for after all of the others. But an exception is made for Elegba. *He* would be sung and played for at the beginning and the end. Once this portion is done, any and every orisha may be sung, played and danced for depending on whatever direction the Akpon sees the need to go in. As the Spanish word for “close,” the *ciere* or *ciere Olokun* marks the end of wemilere. Specific songs are sung over specific toques when the batá are from Havana, but only a set of toques are played on Matanzas batá.

Singing and Orisha Songs

Like the drumming, singing serves a critical function within the ecologies of the Lukumi spiritual tradition. This happens in every Lukumi ceremony. Drums aren't present at everything, but almost every Lukumi ceremony involves singing. In Lukumi and many other African spiritual traditions, it takes the form of call-and-response. And when instruments are present, there's an interplay between the song leader and the musicians. There's a back-and-forth as the songs interact with the sounds of the instruments that creates a pulse in the room. The musical sounds, whether from a batá ensemble or a guiro ensemble, are a form of praise all on their own. So is the dancing of practitioners while the musicians play. Combined, the singing, musical sounds, and dancing are designed to praise the orisha and summon them into physical being - possession.

When making the herbal mixture osain and omiero (another herbal bath), the voices of devotees are the only instruments necessary. They sing in a capella, with toque melodies and timing in their hearts. As the chief herbalist, Osain is the primary orisha invoked during this activity. Singing to Osain speaks to his character and deeds, acknowledges the agency of his herbs, and calls on them to participate in the spiritual work. This takes place when singing to or for other orisha but the ecological or environmental component is most evident when working with omiero and osain. The knowledge of how and when to sing remains imperative to this ecological relationship. And the songs themselves reinforce that.

As already stated, Lukumi songs are in a Spanish-inflected form of Yorùbá, also known as Lukumi. In many cases, there are Spanish words in the songs, like one for Ìbejì, the orisha of twins.

C/R: Sondo jimagua, sondo alare a ure

C/R: Sondo (i)beji, beji sondo beji sondo (2x)¹⁰²

“Jimagua” is the Spanish word for “twins”, which is “ibeji” in Yorùbá. In Spanish and the majority of other languages, the words or designations for “twins” don't simultaneously apply to the deification of two children born from the same birth. But, in this example and other Lukumi songs, the Spanish word is positioned around and given context by the Yorùbá-derived words.

As far as structure, orisha songs are more like call-and-response phrases or sentences, such as the two above. Phrases or sentences about a particular orisha are sung over the same toque are known as tratados. Furthermore, songs in tratados are usually connected by a theme or common words about an orisha as well. Here is an example from a toque for Obatala, referred to as *Toque de Obbanla* or *Wadu*:

C:	loroké babba loroké loba	He will arrive from the sky, the father, he will arrive from the sky to this kingdom
R:	babba loroké akatioke loroké loba babba loroké	The father will arrive in this kingdom. The father will arrive from the sky
C/R:	iyá lagba (lawa) orisha o, iya lagba (lawa) akatioke, iyá lagba (lawa) orisha o, iya lagba (lawa) akatioke tani foyu erobba, Obbatala orisha o, awa nilé orisha o iyá lagba (lawa) akatioke	She is the eldest mother of the orishas She is the eldest mother in the sky She is the eldest mother of the orishas She is the eldest mother in the sky Why do you close your eyes to us? Obbatala, orisha Orisha of our house You are the eldest mother in the sky ¹⁰³

¹⁰² This is a personal transcription of the song, which I don't have a translation for. “C” identifies the “call” and “R” identifies the “response.” Here, the call and response are identical, but that's not always the case.

¹⁰³ Lazaro Pedroso, *Obbedi*, 2013, 41-42.

Besides being about Obatala and set to the same toque, both songs from this tratado use “akatioke” to allude to Obatala being a father/mother in the sky.¹⁰⁴

Orisha songs and the broader tratados that they are part of reference the accolades, character traits, and other details about the orisha they correspond to, that come from odu. There are different types of songs that Akpon or song leaders can use to evoke orisha. Lazaro Pedroso describes songs as being (re)affirmations, allegories or metaphors, stories, supplications, and/or puyas (songs of agitation).¹⁰⁵ Many songs fall into more than one category and are one piece to the puzzle that is a tratado. Akpons are responsible for committing hundreds of songs to memory. But with the powers of improvisation, repetition, and situational awareness, akpons are able to coordinate the various musical sounds and conduct the energy in the room to achieve the collective goal of paying homage to the orisha.

Suyeres are another tool that orisha musicians have in their repertoire. The closest concept to oríkì or òwe in the AfroCuban manifestation of this tradition, *suyeres* are lengthier stories or supplications for the orisha, that are typically deployed right before or at the beginning of a tratado, but may be sung at the end. They don't have a set rhythm or time signature. However, they are often rendered over a toque. This *suyeres* for Yemaya often sung over *Toque Alaaro*:

C:	Awoyo ota ala ilu wa	Awoyo may your stones and your cloak reach this village.
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¹⁰⁴ Mason transliterates the Lukumi word “akatioke” into Yorùbá as “Oba tí òkè,” meaning “king who is a mountain. Both translations allude to Obatala being high up, which corresponds with how *he* is characterized throughout Yorùbá-rooted traditions around the world. John Mason, *Orin Òrìsà: Songs for Selected Heads*, 1997, 277.

¹⁰⁵ Puyas are powerful tools when used appropriately and delivered skillfully. Song leaders deploy them situationally, when other efforts to evoke an orisha have failed. And when they work, akpons are prepared to apologize through song as well. Pedroso, *Edigbe*.

	iyami yetu yetu kue kueye	My mother, may this be fresh and calm, may this be fresh and calm. We invoke you so that you will be here.
	Yemayá ye ile yelodo	Yemayá, this is your house, your world, and your kingdom.
	iyale omi iyale ayabba omi o	Mother of the waters, mother and queen of the waters.
R:	Okuo iyale iya ilumá o	We greet the mother with fervor, mother of this village, so you will continue to be present.
	iyale omiyale ayabba omi o	Mother of the waters, mother and queen of the waters. ¹⁰⁶

While it is more of a prayer or poem, there's still a response. That is just one stanza: there are a few more, each one bookended by the same response. This *suyeres* praises Yemaya and fervently beseeches *her* to be present in the room and in the lives of her children. Lazaro Pedroso stresses that “The past, present and future will be in agreement at the moment that the songs are sung.”¹⁰⁷ A *suyeres* or *tratado* about Yemaya — or any other *orisha* — can be a “thank you for what you've already done” and a “thank you for what you're doing right now.” Stories about her having saved a village will always be relevant. So every time *orisha* songs are sung, they have a renewed energy and offer the opportunity for healing in the present and future.

Because Osain isn't an *orisha* who Lukumi devotees are directly initiated to, his repertoire of songs and *tratados* are not sung in-depth or at-length during *wemileres* or other drumming ceremonies, but they are no less evocative.

C/R:	a e Osain mariwo (2x) Mariwode a Osain mariwo mariwode	Osain moves (2x) He reigns because he moves Osain reigns because he moves
C:	Osain barawa	Osain is on earth with us

¹⁰⁶ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 137.

¹⁰⁷ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 43.

	Osain ile	Osain is present in this house
R:	Osain barawa	Osain is on earth with us
C:	Osain ile	Osain is present in this house
R:	Osain barawa	Osain in on earth with us ¹⁰⁸

Affirmed in the call of the second song and underscored by its response, this *tratado* acknowledges that the world is Osain and it is Osain's. He is always already everywhere. Therefore, he can be anywhere in space and time — sixteenth century Yorùbáland, nineteenth century Cuba, and/or twenty first century Brooklyn.

Osain is the orisha most associated with the environment, but he is not the only one. Babaluaye is another; he is the orisha of smallpox and other diseases. Erinle (or Inle) and Orisha Oko relate to the natural environment in their own ways.

Erinle is the orisha of fishing, hunting, and medicine. He uses his knowledge of bushcraft to trap his prey and heal himself. As such, he is associated with orisha such as Yemaya (the mother of fish), Ochosi (the archer), and Osain. His wife, Abata (the pond) is referenced in some of his songs too.

C/R:	E o inle o inle o inle ayaya o inle	Inle Inle Inle you are here with your wife, Inle
C:	O inle kere agonlona (2x) Agolona kere ma de o	Inle is small but allow us to pass by your road (of being healthy?)
R:	O inle kere agolona	Allow us to pass by your road, he is small but he continues to reign ¹⁰⁹

The first song is meant to acknowledge Erinle and his wife's presence. Just as in the creation story, nature is always around us and present in human affairs, whether recognized or not. In the second song, Erinle is being given respect for his healing prowess. The size of plants doesn't make them any less significant than humans. As such,

¹⁰⁸ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁹ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 71-72.

everyone needs Erinle for a healthy journey through life. This song honors Erinle for that fact. When they sing this, orisha devotees are declaring how critical the ability to harness the medicinal properties of plants is to human survival.

Orisha Oko is specifically associated with farming and agriculture. He's the husband of Agana Eri, who is associated with the ocean. Songs for Orisha Oko are about the land's potential to provide food or swallow people up, how harvests are affected by the wind, and the knowledge of how to get a good yield of crops.¹¹⁰ This following song alludes to how expansive Orisha Oko is:

C/R:	Yobba lemi sirere o (2x),	It is good fortune (2x),
	orisha oko	Orisha Oko
	Yobba lemi sirere ko ko aro	We are satisfied in your kingdom,
		because of your presence that is
		good fortune ¹¹¹

This song is a reaffirmation. Singing it is meant to show gratitude for the harvests that come from Orisha Oko. Wherever he is, the land is fertile for all of nature to enjoy and thus humans have the capacity to sustain themselves. Agriculture requires an immense amount of hard labor. Orisha Oko is the determination that Yorùbá people would not have survived (in the ways that they did) without. But regardless of how humans make use of plants and crops, these Orisha Oko and Erinle, along with Osain, demand adoration because they are expressions of Olodumare.

One of the major challenges within the musical tradition, and arguably the entire Lukumi spiritual tradition, is language. Creolized Yorùbá, also known as Lukumi, is on the verge of extinction, as a spoken language. It is the language that prayers and songs are in, however, devotees don't know the literal meanings, and thus aren't able to converse in

¹¹⁰ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 74.

¹¹¹ Pedroso, *Edigbe*, 77.

it. As such, omo añà and non-drummers alike don't know what is explicitly being expressed in the toques. However, Lukumi drummers were able to re-compose their musical repertoire and are still able to communicate feeling and intention through musical sound because their enà was not completely lost. That enà was rooted in their natural and built environments.

The musical and vocal sounds of Orisha Music express a profound reverence for and connection to Osain, Erinle, and Orisha Oko, in addition to the other orisha. And not only does this ritual music appease them, it produces results and induces them to show up in a material way, through possession. This facility with sound was more than likely deployed when orisha musicians rebuilt their tradition.

CONCLUSION

Though a conclusion, this chapter is a reminder that *Rhythm and Roots* is but a brief moment in the long arc of African people attempting to recover their memory and that the work is far from finished. This chapter is also a synopsis of this project's key findings in relation to the thesis statement and commentary on its value to Africana Studies and other relevant fields. Likewise, it presents overarching limitations of this study and recommendations for future research, in the hopes that other works will do what *Rhythm and Roots* could not.

This project aimed to investigate how Lukumi ritual music was reformed by interrogating the environmental conditions of nineteenth century Cuba and the underlying ecology of the broader Lukumi tradition, with respect to Yorùbá language and culture. It gave an overview of Yorùbá ways of knowing with respect to nature and historical backdrop of Cuba to suggest what Lukumi people brought with them and what they were up against. This was followed by an examination of Àyan/Añá as a spiritual-material phenomenon and the ritual music that this orisha works through.

The results indicate that there was and remains a reciprocal or interdependent relationship between nature and sound in Lukumi ways of knowing. The children of Añá conscripted the island's natural environment into the process of extending their tradition and the environment complied. Taking stock of Yorùbá ecological values and the ritual and artisanal knowledge germane to Orisha Music suggests how the ritual music took the

form that it did in Cuba, but also reveals that its reformation was not inevitable. As far as what has been documented, Àyan didn't resurface in Puerto Rico, Trinidad, or Brazil. Orisha devotees and musicians in Cuba had to eloquently petition Osain to aid them. Whether that was through spoken or musical sounds, they did it and it worked. Rekindling this relationship between sound and nature allowed the Lukumi to turn their terrain into a tool for resistance to enslavement and colonialism.

Rhythm and Roots used the Yorùbá language to mesh historical and conceptual understandings of Orisha Music to map out the role of the environment in its AfroCuban reconstitution. It brought scholars without portfolio or academic licensure into conversation with scholarship from across various academic fields to draw out the ecological element of a subject that isn't self-evidently environmental. Most importantly, it attempted to dispel the illusion that one cannot truly know a subject through one dimension or one method of inquiry alone. The rudimentary blend of the environmental, language, material, and music demonstrated that they already relied on one another and were intertwined. And by placing Yorùbá language and culture side-by-side with that of Lukumi, this project dismissed the notion that slavery made African people forget who they were, this modeling an Africana Studies approach to understanding other Africa ways of knowing and forms of cultural meaning-making in the diaspora.

Because *Rhythm and Roots* is ambitious, it falls short in a few ways. It's limited by a lack of primary sources and language proficiency in Yorùbá. Due to a lack of time and resources, this project is not informed by first-hand field research in Nigeria and did not consult normative archival sources in Nigeria and Cuba. And because it did not express a proficiency in Yorùbá, it relied on translations from others, offered basic interpretations of the suyeres and songs, and potentially understated what orisha musicians know about their own tradition. Furthermore, there is no roadmap to or step-

by-step tutorial for how Àyan became Añá. It likely occurred over a long period of time, which crescendoed when Atanda and Añábi birthed their batá fundamento. That knowledge is lost to time. However, even if a document did exist, there are still some things it wouldn't and couldn't capture.

Those who wish to carry this project forward must take the Yorùbá and Lukumi languages seriously. If mined effectively, there are concepts in Yorùbá that could enhance future scholarship on Yorùbá-rooted traditions and displace the influence of Christianity on the study of Africana Religions, such as how “consecrated” identifies objects imbued with the essence of divinities. Using Yorùbá to inform the understanding of Lukumi terms should be an ongoing practice. However, one is not a slang version of the other. So studying Lukumi would allow it to be understood on its own terms. And because it's endangered, scholarly and institutional investment in the language could contribute to its eventual resurgence. Additionally, this thesis makes evident the need for increased scholarship on Osain and Africana herbalism.

Through careful study, *Rhythm and Roots* demonstrates that enslavement and colonialism did not completely erase African memory. The Atlantic Ocean symbolizes a bridge for re-composition and improvisation, not a break that caused amnesia. Cuba's natural environment gave Yorùbá/Lukumi people new brushes and colors to paint with. The environment and their persistent ways of knowing made a way for them to tap back into themselves, and, thus, perform the work of Black and Insurgent Ecologies.

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