

**Tambor Reverberations:
Gender, Sexuality and Change in Cuban Batá Performance**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction for the requirements for the degree Doctor of

Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

by

Victoria Rosemary Jassey

Abstract

'Tambor' means drum in Spanish but in the Afro-Cuban religion called Regla de Ocha, the word can also refer to the ritual batá drum, a set of three batá drums, a rhythm played on the batá, and a religious ceremony that uses a batá ensemble. When the human hands strike the six skins of these sacred instruments, waves of vibrations move through space, time and matter. The energy contained within these pulses of sound as they travel through the air has the potential to unleash a chain of events that profoundly alter the social surroundings. This thesis explores the art, ritual and social practice of batá drumming and the impact *'Tambor Reverberations'* have on gender, sexuality, and religious and social change in the Cuban tradition. This study provides a current representation of ideologies and practices that underpin gender and sexuality taboos associated with these drums, and examines how shifting sacro-socio-political conventions have impacted female access to the batá drums.

The batá drumming tradition is central to ritual practice in Regla de Ocha, which has become ubiquitous in Cuba since the second half of the twentieth century and has diffused globally. The making, consecration, maintenance, and playing of sacred batá drums and the transmission of technical, spiritual, and musical knowledge from one generation to another remain the sole responsibility of members of a brotherhood comprising heterosexual men who have undergone initiation to a humanised drumming deity called Añá, who is believed to reside in the batá drum vessel. Women and gay men have historically been prohibited from playing or

coming into close proximity with consecrated batá drums. However, this thesis describes a series of key events over the past three decades which have engendered significant changes regarding female access to the batá's sacred music, leading to the proliferation of all-female secular batá groups in Cuba, and ultimately to women breaking the taboo by playing the consecrated batá in 2015.

The growing number of scholarly publications dedicated to the batá's musical aspects reflects the tradition's increasing popularity in Cuba and beyond. My thesis not only adds to this burgeoning body of literature but it addresses an under-researched area by offering the first in-depth study of gender and sexuality stratifications in batá performance and ritual. Drawing on nine months of field research during ten visits to Cuba over twelve years, my research includes the lived experiences of Añá cult members, female musicians who play batá, (to a lesser extent) gay men whose voices were previously unheard, and my own musical experiences in ritual and secular contexts in Britain and Cuba. Challenging previously held assumptions about batá and gender taboos, my research respondents' diverse narratives reveal the sensitivity of gaining access and permission to play batá, and the highly complex nature of prohibitions, tradition, and issues of gender and sexuality in the midst of changing contemporary landscapes. This study offers an historical and ethnomusicological contribution to batá studies specifically, and a scholarly discourse on gender and music practice generally.

The opening chapter provides an historical overview of gender and sexuality narratives about religious and secular batá performance in Cuba, while Chapter 2 analyses how myth, religious texts and ritual performance are used to construct social

parameters and hierarchies. In Chapter 3, I explore representations of gender through performance, ritualised embodiment, and the impact of an expanding Añá brotherhood. The chapter culminates with my ethnography and analysis of a transformative event, where three women were the first to defy the gender taboo by playing consecrated batá. Chapter 4 investigates the changing roles of women in Afro-Cuban music and religion generally and batá specifically, in the context of the communist state. In Chapter 5, I examine constructions of *hombría* (manhood), heteronormativity and masculinity within the Añá brotherhood, and how these relate to religious hierarchy, sexual behaviour and ritual functions in Santería. The Conclusion summarises current ideologies, practices and changes to gender and sexuality narratives in Cuban batá performance, and offers an analysis of the findings revealed within the study as a whole as well as areas for future research.

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Conventions

Numbering System

The numbering system I have adopted throughout this thesis has two categories:

Plates for photographs and Figures for diagrams. The first number corresponds to the chapter number followed by a full stop and a number that identifies the order of the item within the chapter. For example, Plate 4.5 is the fifth photograph in Chapter 4.

Appendices I-II can be found at the end of the thesis.

Language

This thesis uses English, Spanish, Yoruba, Lucumí and Kongo terminology. Lucumí (also spelled Lukumí) is a lexicon of words and phrases said to be derived from the Yoruba language, and is employed in sacred utterances and written texts in Cuba. As Lucumí does not have a standardised orthography, I have made choices regarding its written form. In keeping with its vernacular use in Cuba, as in Spanish I have chosen to pluralise Lucumí words with “s” or “es” (e.g., *tambores babalawos* or *akpónes*) with the one exception of *batá*, which is singular and plural in Lucumí. Kongo terms are used when discussing the central-African-derived spiritual practice Palo. Most Yoruba terms are written without diacritics in this thesis (unless quoted) as the language is not a research focus.

Apart from proper nouns (unless quoted), every instance of a foreign word is italicised apart from the word *batá*, as it is ubiquitous throughout the thesis. The

Cuban name given to initiated male batá drummers is *omo* Añá (child of Añá).

Following copyright convention (though not common in batá literature) and following my supervisor's choice, I have chosen to capitalise and not italicise the second part of the title as Añá is a proper noun. To assist with the reading of the main text, I have included the language or lexicon origin of foreign words in the glossary by adding the following abbreviations: (S) Spanish, (L) Lucumí, (Y) Yoruba, and (K) Kongo.

Where a word is an amalgamation of Spanish and Lucumí I use (S) (L) (e.g., *mesa de Añá*, table of Añá) or (L) (S) (e.g., *oru cantado*).

I employed the term Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) to refer specifically to the act of same-sex practice among men and its relation to batá sexuality narratives (McKenna 1996). Although still undergoing debate as to its usefulness following the Black Nationalist movement (e.g., Wirtz 2014:8; Perlman 2015), I capitalise 'Black' and 'White' as racial or cultural ascriptions to highlight the political sensitivity of writing about race.

Research Respondents

Many of the contributors to this thesis have emerged from and straddle multiple musical and religious categories. In order to inform the reader as to the type of knowledge respondents have contributed to this research, I have compiled a list (Appendix I) that identifies respondents, their key area of expertise, and the number of interviews given. For example, the appendix illustrates whether a batá drummer is also a drum owner and/or a *babalawo* (divining priest), and whether a female batá drummer is also a *santera* (Santería initiate), although not all respondents made their religious status explicit.

Abbreviation list

CFNC	Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba
EPH	Effeminate Penetrated Homosexuals
ISA	Instituto Superior de Arte
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
UMAP	Military Units to Aid Production
YA	Yoruba Association

Preface

Many of us come to our research topics through personal interest resulting from life experiences, as has very much been the case for me. I am a White, English mother of one, whose life has been shaped by a lifelong interest in drumming. My passion began in 1989 while living in West Africa and continued through my ten-year marriage to a Senegalese musician. These early experiences led to a performance career that has included acting, circus performance, and musical performance in theatre, cabaret and bands.

I was introduced to Afro-Cuban drumming in the UK through a series of workshops in the early 1990s, after which I began immersive study of batá drumming in 2003. My first experience of batá drums in a religious context was in London in 2004, where I met non-Cuban *santeros* (initiates), and witnessed the use of secular batá drums, singing and dancing to honour the deities of the Afro-Cuban religion, Regla de Ocha (popularly known as Santería), called *orichas*.¹ Batá captured my attention because I found its interlocking rhythmic melodies and songs profoundly beautiful and challenging to perform, and without initially questioning why, I immersed myself in learning the extensive repertoire of Santería's musical traditions.

The blurred boundaries between sacred and secular, and drumming access and prohibition in London during these formative experiences led me to investigate issues that surround gender and batá performance well before I began my academic

¹ I was not aware of any Cuban *santeros* in London at this time.

research.² It took about six years for the gender prohibitions of batá drumming to become explicit and exert social and musical impacts on me. As a beginner in this tradition, understanding the batá's gender taboos was somewhat confusing, as the strict boundary between sacred and secular batá performance was inconsistent within London's small religious community. Ritual protocols were reconstructed by a small group of London-based musicians, who at the time had only limited knowledge of the batá's ritual practice in Cuba. The UK community did not have an experienced senior religious initiate with many years of initiation or a musical master of ceremonies, such as an *omo* Añá (initiated drummer) or *akpón* (ritual lead singer), presiding over the ceremonies, as is the convention in Santería rituals in Cuba. Up until 2009, British ceremonies used non-consecrated batá called *aberikulá*.

In these early years, there were no consecrated drums available and London drummers permitted women to play *aberikulá* at religious ceremonies. It is the consecrated batá, believed to house the deity Añá in the drum vessels, which is considered incompatible with women and gay men. David Pattman, a British percussionist who was later initiated into the Añá cult in 2004, was one of the ritual drummers who encouraged the musical inclusion of women. Through years of dedication, experience and study of batá drumming, Pattman had gained the respect of drummers in Miami, Cuba and the UK batá communities. His justification for including and teaching female musicians came from a renowned *akpón* and batá drummer Amelia Pedroso (1946-2000), who visited the UK in 2000. Pedroso told Pattman that she had played *aberikulá* in religious ceremonies in Cuba and the USA, and as she was a respected ritual musician and his musical elder, Pattman accepted

² I use the term performance to encapsulate all aspects of participation within a musical event in both sacred and secular contexts.

her ritual authority, and encouraged women to play *aberikulá* during these London-based ceremonies (pers. comm., Pattman 12/12/2016). As a result, a few women (including myself) had the opportunity to play batá for ceremonies for several years.³

In 2009 Javier Campos, a distinguished Cuban religious elder and batá player came onto the UK scene and effectively put a stop to women playing in local ceremonies.⁴ He did this by informing UK male batá drummers that if they continued to play alongside women in religious settings he would exclude them from future opportunities of playing with him. At this time, I had just started a relationship with Pattman, and was present when he received this news via text message.⁵ Campos wielded substantial authority over the religious and batá community in the UK because he is a Cuban with expertise and an international reputation in both ritual and musical domains, and was living in Paris in close geographical proximity. In the absence of Cuban elders in the UK he became the go-to senior religious leader, ritual musical mentor, and religious godfather to many drummers and devotees in the UK during this period. Campos was also the first to bring a *fundamento* (consecrated batá set) to the UK, on 9th February 2009, making history not only by playing his *fundamento* in a ceremony, but conducting the first ever *omo* Añá initiation in the UK.⁶

Although I thought Campos's reasoning to exclude women from playing *aberikulá* must have been connected to the taboos that I had heard about surrounding the consecrated batá, no one in the small London community of female batá

³ To my knowledge, Amanda Villepastour, Hannah Bee and Lee Crisp were among a small pool of female musicians who had played in the early years of London ceremonies.

⁴ At the time, Campos has been living between France and Cuba for several years.

⁵ I discuss the research implications of my relationship with Pattman later in this preface.

⁶ These ceremonies took place in the house of Daniela De Armas, a British *santera* living in London.

drummers understood why Campos extended the *fundamento*'s prohibition to non-consecrated batá. Feeling confused and excluded, I was compelled to find out more about the tradition and its gender proscriptions. I did this initially through reading and tentatively asking questions of initiated UK drummers and drum owners in Cuba about the nature of the prohibition pertaining to *aberikulá* and rituals. Not until 2011, when I visited Cuba and talked to other *olúbatás* (master batá drummers and drum owners), such as Ángel Bolaños, Octavio Rodríguez and Irian 'Chinito' López, did I discover that not everyone agreed that it is profane for women to play *aberikulá* in religious settings. (I expand on this issue in Chapter 3).

I was acutely aware that batá drumming was not my inherited tradition and I was initially nervous that asking questions about women and batá might offend some ritual drummers. In addition, I was concerned that my informal investigation could lead to being excluded from other aspects of batá performance, such as being invited to *tambores* (drumming celebrations), or participating in secular performances or open sessions in the UK and Cuba. My concerns, however, were unfounded as I have yet to come across a Cuban ritual drummer who has indicated that they consider my questions or research to be inappropriate or contentious. However, this has not always been the case outside of Cuba, as I explain later in Chapter 1.

I have been privileged to visit Cuba ten times over the last twelve years, staying for periods between two weeks and five months. I have studied with several highly regarded ritual drummers and *akpónes* (listed in Appendix II). Reinforcing my extensive musical studies in Cuba, I have been active in the Afro-Cuban folkloric music scene in the UK since 2004, at which time I instigated and continue to direct a community arts organisation called Bombo Productions. This organisation mobilises artists within the genre to create and support a range of performance and educational

events around the UK, while affording me the opportunity fully to participate musically in secular settings. My hunger for knowledge about Cuban batá drumming led me to complete an MMus (Performance) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in 2013. In 2014, I was awarded a South-West-Wales Doctoral Scholarship, and commenced my PhD at The School of Music, Cardiff University.

After many years of involvement in the musical tradition, in October 2015 I underwent two preliminary initiatory steps into Santería in Cuba by receiving my *guerreros* (warrior *orichas*) and *ikofá* (hand of Orula, the deity of divination).⁷ In 2017, I completed a three-month research project called The Bearers of Sacred Sound, where I collected the oral histories of Miami ritual musicians, in collaboration with the Florida International University, which gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in batá and Santería communities within the city.⁸ My musical, religious, and intellectual knowledge has continued to deepen as I become geographically mobile and connect to individuals and communities in Cuba and around the world.

By reflecting on my sustained study of the batá canon, my time in Cuba researching and participating in the ritual and secular musical practice and my relationship to an initiated drummer, I have identified the ways in which I am implicated in my research. My prominent research method of participant-observation, which positions ethnographic description in the realm of experience (Spradley's 2009 [1980]), can be prone to biases that conflate the personal, professional, political and

⁷ *Los guerreros* ceremony involves receiving some accoutrements for the *orichas* Echú, Ogún, Oshosi and Osun (see Glossary). In the *ikofá* ceremony the initiate receives divination and counsel from the *oricha* Orula and receives a bracelet and small vessel.

⁸ Web link: <http://thebearersofsacredsound.weebly.com/>. Funded by South West Wales Doctoral Training Partnership and Florida International University.

cultural. In order to acknowledge the power asymmetry in relation to my disadvantaged Cuban research respondents, I have engaged with a method of critical reflection (George Marcus 1998:392; Pillows 2003:187) which challenges data as truths by interrogating my ethnographic experiences, writing, and positionality.⁹

In the opening Chapter of this thesis I provide an historical overview of the religious and secular forms of batá performance in Cuba, chart significant developments in female secular batá performance and its relationship to changing political landscapes, and introduce “The African chronotope” (Bakhtin 2010; Palmié 2013); a geographical, temporal frame used in claims of legitimacy and authenticity in contemporary Afro-Cuban ritual practice.

In Chapter 2, I describe ritual performance learned through repeated mimetic processes as a medium for communicating with the spiritual world, and as a platform for both constructing and reflecting social hierarchies. As gender conventions and taboos are enacted in batá performance, conflict and contradiction can become part of the sacro-political process within which ‘tradition’ is constructed, maintained, and imagined as timelessly preserved (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Brandon 1997; Wirtz 2003). I explore the interpretations of myths, religious texts and the African chronotope that underpin guardianship claims in the sacred batá tradition (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006). I look at the symbolism of menstrual blood as a vehicle for imparting implicit knowledge about social relations and power (Routon 2008b; Wirtz 2014). Finally, I investigate the agency of Nigerian-Ocha-Ifá practitioners in Santiago de Cuba, who are challenging gender subjectivities associated with consecrated batá.

⁹ My relative material wealth, mobility and access to technology and communications places me in a privileged position compared to the majority of musicians in the batá music tradition in Cuba.

In Chapter 3, I discuss processes of ritualised embodiment in Cuban batá, which serves to normalise gendered practice in sacred performance. I investigate how ritual reinterpretations have expanded membership of the drumming fraternity, leading some to critique and reform its practices. Finally, I present an ethnography of three women in Santiago de Cuba, who defied the gender taboo by playing consecrated batá. Ongoing research with the women revealed the social complexities and internal power struggles that operated within this particular sacro-socio-milieu.

In Chapter 4, my research investigates the changing roles of women in Santería generally and Afro-Cuban music specifically. I present a compressed history of women's secular batá performance in Cuba over the last thirty years, and discuss the significance of the *período especial* in the emancipation of female folkloric drummers.¹⁰ By interrogating common assumptions that female batá drummers are predominately gay, I explore the impact this rumoured sexuality has on their performance. I examine the contentious issue of women playing *aberikulá* in rituals, and outline a trajectory of modifications to female batá practice, which I consider against the backdrop of larger socio-political change nationally, and globally. Finally, I present two case studies of Cuban female ritual musicians who defy common stereotypes that situate all women's music making as universally subordinate to men (Otner 1974:67; Koskoff 2014:13).

In Chapter 5, I examine the impact of racial violence and colonial oppression on constructions of masculinity in Cuba and their relevance to the Añá fraternity. By examining social and ritual practices that embed concepts of *hombría* (manhood), heteronormativity and masculinity within the Añá brotherhood, I unpack the

¹⁰ The *período especial* (special period) in the 1990s was a time of significant hardship in Cuba following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 causing withdrawal of economic support.

relationship between Santería's religious hierarchy, expected sexual behaviour and ritual functions. Finally, I present a series of narratives from *olúbatás* and a gay *akpón*, which reveal an array of issues relating to male same-sex taboos in ritual music.

In the conclusion, I present a summary of findings pertaining to ideologies, practices, and changes to gender and sexuality narratives in the Cuban tradition. I offer an analysis of the repeating patterns emerging from my study as a whole, while highlighting gaps in batá studies and the potential for future research.

I now move to an investigation of the symbolic action of language, music, ritual, myth and metaphor (Koskoff 2014:43), and examine how power, value, gender and music are inexorably linked and embodied in cultural concepts.

Chapter One

Opening the Way:

Gender and Sexuality Narratives in Cuban Batá Performance

Issues of gender, sexuality and culture are profoundly imbricated concepts that have important material consequences for how we live (Lewis 2003). Cuba is a nation currently undergoing rapid change. This study documents a sacro-socio-political music within cultural transformations, and delivers new data relevant to gender, ethnomusicological, sociological, political, anthropological and historical scholarship. The batá drumming tradition and its gatekeepers are of fundamental importance to the cultural and religious identity of many contemporary Cubans (Miller 2003). This musical system, in both its religious and secular forms, has spread to all four corners of the globe over the last fifty years. The ‘*tambor* reverberations’ of the African-derived religious batá music tradition span centuries, continents and cultures, where survival and growth have been largely a result of its subtle and at times not-so-subtle cultural adaptability.

The batá’s musical tradition has rigid gendered protocols. Access to the sacred drumming has, until recently, been strictly limited to heterosexual men who have been initiated into the cult of Añá, the deity believed to reside inside the batá drum vessel. Taboos exist which prohibit women and gay men from coming into close proximity to or playing on consecrated batá drums. Gender, the prescribed roles of the sexes within society, remains a principal factor in the way society is conceptualised and organised.¹

¹ See later in this chapter for a fuller explanation of gender definitions.

By exploring issues of gender, sexuality, and change in sacred and secular Cuban batá performance, this study provides a contemporary body of research that nuances generalised assumptions and maps a trajectory of change. I investigate how societal categorisations are interpreted, implemented and modified over time and ask three central questions: What are the belief systems and ideologies behind gender and sexuality taboos in batá performance? How do they inform the social, musical, and spiritual organisation of ritual and secular musical practice? What are the driving and restraining forces that are impacting gender and sexuality narratives in Cuban traditional practices today?

In addressing the above questions, I have encountered several commonly held assumptions regarding gender in batá discourse. The most prevalent asserts menstruation as the main justification for why women are prohibited from playing *fundamento* (see Ortiz 1980:103 for one of the earliest published references to female batá prohibitions and menstruation). Among other common assumptions are: all initiated heterosexual *omo* Añás agree with the gender prohibitions; all initiated drummers want the cult to be a male-only space; a large percentage of women who play batá are lesbians (pers. comm., Frontela 19/08/2015, Havana; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:190); women do not have the physical strength to play batá in a religious ceremony (Hagedorn 2001:98; pers. comm., Campos 12/02/2012); women's batá performance is a subversive act which contests religious patriarchy (The Farber Foundation 2009; Castellanos 2014; Rodríguez 2014; pers. comm., Despaigne, 30/08/2014; Hagedorn 2015; Martí Noticias 2016); and gendered parameters are a continuation of an inherited tradition that is fixed and unchanging.

My enquiry unravels the “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973:5) woven around concepts of gender and sexuality and charts a series of important changes in

the contemporary Cuban batá tradition. I propose a revised discourse that provides greater epistemological knowledge regarding batá scholarship, the anthropology of music, and women's musical practice, an area that has often been neglected in ethnomusicology (Koskoff 1987; 2014).

Historical and Religious Background to Study

Cuba currently has a population of around eleven million.² At the turn of the twentieth century following Cuba's independence from over two centuries of colonial rule by the Spanish, British (for a brief time) in 1762 and American in 1902, the population was believed to be around 1.5 million (McGuire and Frankel 2005). The forced migration of Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade is composed of an estimated 779,000 disembarkations in Havana from West, Central and Southeast Africa between 1526-1867 (Eltis and Richardson 2010:230) and by the mid-1880s the Black population in Cuba was estimated to be "between 2 and 18 percentage points higher than the white population" (Clements 2009:77). It is therefore not surprising that Cuba became a fertile ground for African-derived spiritual traditions and their associated musical practices. Unlike the policies of other Caribbean islands and the southern states of America during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Spanish colonial authorities encouraged enslaved Africans to congregate in mutual aid societies called *cabildos*. It was here that African slaves from diverse language groups were able to gather on Sundays, where they collectively remembered, reassembled and preserved

² 'Cuba Population 2018 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)'. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cuba-population/> [Accessed 13/09/2017].

the spiritual, musical, and cultural practices of their homelands (Sublette 2007; Brown 2003).³

African-derived spiritual and musical practices involving instruments, songs and dance are numerous on the island and include: Palo, said to be from the Congo region in Central Africa; Arará from the Dahomey region (now Bénin); Iyesá from Yorubaland in southwest Nigeria; and Abakuá from the old Calabar region (now Cross River State) in southeast Nigeria.⁴ Regla de Ocha, Ocha, Santería or Lucumí, which Cubans commonly assume to be Yoruba *oricha* worship, became ubiquitous in Cuba and well-known beyond.⁵ Regla de Ocha and the associated divination cult of Ifá have possibly usurped other African-derived spiritual practices since the early twentieth century and have since spread to other regions including Latin America, North America, Europe, Australia, Russia and Japan.⁶

Throughout Cuba's history the Church and political rulers have restricted or entirely prohibited African-derived religious practices and drumming. This endured until the first few decades of the 20th century, when Afro-Cuban drumming and dancing were prohibited in public social areas, and religious rituals were largely clandestine (Moore 1997:40; De La Fuente 2011:293). It was not only the White political ruling parties that had a pejorative view on African-derived religions, but also middle-class Black people and their colonial institutions, such as the *sociedades de instrucción y recreo* (educational and recreational societies). They wanted to distance themselves from what, at the time, was considered primitive religious

³ See Brown (2003a) for a discussion of the importance of *cabildos* in Cuban Santería.

⁴ Palo is also referred to as La Regla de Palo (See Ochoa 2010: 9).

⁵ Recent research is questioning the historiography of the Yoruba connection with Regla de Ocha (see, for example, Palmié 2013).

⁶ See Marcuzzi (2005a) and Villepastour (2015:5-9) for discussion of batá domination over other styles in Cuba.

practice (Moore 1997:39). However, minstrelsy became popular in Cuba and played a significant role in “the domestic and international popularization of Afro-Cuban syncretic musics” (Moore 1997:40). The communist government that replaced the military dictatorship of the Batista regime in 1959 also considered African-derived religions to be primitive and potentially dangerous to society, which led to the banning of some Santería ceremonies in the mid-1960s (ibid 292-293). De La Fuente (2011:291) explains that in this decade “[t]he assumption of Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the government [...] contributed to a climate of religious intolerance.”

Later, in 1971, the Cuban Congress changed their revolutionary policy on religion, regarding “freedom of belief as an individual right” (Craham 1985:333). Although the ban on some Santería rituals was lifted during the early 1970s, practitioners were required to obtain permission from the local police (De La Fuente 2011:294). Following an epidemiological study by the Ministry of Health in the early 1980s, participation in Afro-Cuban religions was still considered “pathological behavior,” a stance De La Fuente indicates had clear racial implications (295). At the time most of Santería’s followers were Black or *mulato*;⁷ identity markers such as race and sexuality should therefore be considered not only within the context of the racist and sexist constructs associated with slavery, colonialism and imperialism, but also communism in Cuba (Allen 2011:60).⁸

Post-revolutionary institutionalisation of Afro-Cuban culture began in 1961 when the Department of Folklore of the Teatro Nacional and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore were founded in Havana. A former student of Cuban

⁷ *Mulato/a* is a colloquial term indicating mixed African and European heritage.

⁸ See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion on race and racism in Cuba.

ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, Argeliers León, was appointed to be the first director of both institutions, and facilitated the secularisation of religious performance through the founding of the national music ensemble, the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (CFNC) (Hagedorn 2001:139-140). Their stage performances provided a window into aspects of Santería ritual practice that had previously remained private. Hagedorn explains that León's original vision was for the above institutions to be "vehicles for scholarly research and public education through theatrical presentation," with a purpose of demystifying the artistic form and addressing some of Cuba's racism. Hagedorn points out that initially these performances were considered "charming and exotic," and were received with "bemused interest and scholarly objectivity" by White non-religious audiences, who did not consider Regla de Ocha a serious religion (147). By elevating the aesthetic aspects of religious practice deemed acceptable and desirable by White non-religious audiences, processes of state-mediated exoticisation and folklorisation of tradition began to take shape in the form of folkloric performances. Since the founding of the CFNC, folkloric groups have proliferated in almost every large town and city throughout Cuba. Without a doubt, over time the state's involvement in the secularisation of aspects of Santería rituals has led to a greater acceptance of Afro-Cuban religious practices, as stage ensembles and their educational projects have played significant roles in the burgeoning of local and international Santería communities over the past four decades.

The development and manifestation of Regla de Ocha as a religious practice in Cuba has a long and complex history, which has been well documented so I offer only a summary.⁹ The cosmology identifies Olodumare (also called Olorun) as an

⁹ Useful introductory literature about Cuban Regla de Ocha includes: Palmié (2002, 2013); Brown (2003a); Marcuzzi (2005a); and Brandon (1997).

‘Almighty God’ overseeing a pantheon of *orichas* (also spelled *orishas*) understood to be divine intermediaries.¹⁰ Practitioners, who go through an initiation process into the priesthood lasting a week, refer to themselves as *santeros* (singular feminine *santera*), *olorichas*, or as ‘having Ocha’ or ‘having *santo*’.¹¹ A central theological component in *oricha* worship is the belief in a “morally neutral force” (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:36) called *aché*, which can be translated into English as ‘life force’ or ‘sacred potential’ (Verger 1963; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006). During initiation, devotees are symbolically re-born, and as the initiation treats the head as a receptacle of the deity, initiates are said to be ‘crowned’, while their main *oricha* is understood to ‘rule the head’ as well as guide and protect them. In this initiation into the priesthood, *santeros* also receive several other *orichas* in material form in closed vessels and begin to learn how to consult the *orichas* through various divination methods, including throwing and interpreting four pieces of coconut (*obi*) or using the sixteen cowrie shells (*dilogun* or *los caracoles*) received during their initiation.

1 An associated cult of Regla de Ocha is Ifá, whose priests (*babalawos*) employ a divination system that primarily employs sixteen palm nuts (*ikines*) or a divining chain and is widely considered to be the highest form of divination.¹² Of great relevance to my batá study is the fact that until the early 2000s, the Ifá priesthood in Cuba was limited to heterosexual males. However, growing shifts in

¹⁰ For a more in-depth discussion on the development of *orisa* worship in Nigeria see Drewal et al. (1989); Drewal (1992); Peel (2000; 2015); Olupona (2016).

¹¹ The association between Catholicism and *oricha* practice is complex and is often simplistically attributed to syncretism (Trotman 1976; Marcuzzi 2005). Use of the word *santos* (saints) for the *orichas* does not conflate the two distinct kinds of deities.

¹² Many devotees are initiated into both Ifá and Regla de Ocha and most Ocha houses employ *babalawos* to do divinations and slaughter sacrificial animals. See Brown (2003) for a more in-depth description of Cuban Ifá practice.

Cuban Ifá practice have resulted in the community separating into two strands. Ifá-*Criollo*, the more conservative of the two, is rooted in practices that evolved in Yoruba slave communities from the eighteenth century on. Aspiring to religious authenticity, the post-1990s strand, Ifá *nigeriano* (Nigerian-style Ifá) sources divination texts, musical content, and ritual protocols from transnational dialogues with contemporary Nigerian Ifá priests and their international interlocutors. The introduction of novel practices in the Cuban context, such as the initiation of women into the Ifá priesthood (called *iyanifás*), and more recently women playing consecrated batá (see Chapter 2 and 3), marks the most significant polemic break from traditional Cuban Ifá. The “Re-Yorubization” of some spiritual practices has profoundly restructured gendered subjectivities and the boundaries of *oricha* worship in contemporary Cuba (Meadows 2017:x). The information presented in this study provides a generalised sacro-socio landscape for changing gender relations in the religion and by extension, batá performance.

The Place and Role of Batá Drumming in Ritual

At the heart of *oricha* ritual practice are the powerful batá drums (Plate 1.2-3). Oricha music in Cuba is related to that in Yorubaland in modern-day Nigeria. Evidence suggests that the African batá tradition dates back to the fifteenth century, when it became institutionalised and popularised in the old Oyo Kingdom (Thieme 1970:260; Euba 1990:38).

The interlocking rhythms performed on the three double-sided, hourglass-shaped drums, together with call-response praise songs, are believed to communicate directly with the pantheon of *orichas*, whose belief system was taken to Cuba during

the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Consecrated batá (*fundamento*) come in sets of four and consist of the *iyá* (largest drum), *okónkolo* (smallest drum), the *itótele* and the *elekoto* (a ritual drum that is rarely played in specific ceremonies) (see Plate 1.1). Añá, understood to be the god of the batá drums in Cuba, is an *oricha* believed to dwell inside the sealed membranophones. It is understood that through drumming performance, Añá can speak for all *orichas* and transform musical sound into *aché* (spiritual energy or life force). Musical rituals using consecrated batá are essential for the initiation of *santeros*. Devotees, regardless of their gender or sexuality, are presented to Añá in a musical ceremony as part of their initiation. Thereafter, when initiates attend a drumming ritual using consecrated batá, the event is called a *tambor* or *tambor de fundamento*.¹³ These rituals most often take place in people's homes where an altar is constructed and where a space is made so that a congregation can gather to sing and dance while drummers play. A typical *tambor* is made up of the following sections:

1. *Oru seco*. Facing the altar, usually in a small room, the drummers play rhythms for each *oricha* in the Cuban pantheon. This section is often played without members of the congregation present.
2. *Oru cantado*. This section is in the main space where the congregation has gathered. Rhythms and songs are played for all major *orichas*. Initiates are required to salute Añá by momentarily dancing in front of the drums, laying their forehead on (and sometimes kissing) each of the three consecrated batá

¹³ I have also heard the term *tambor* used when using non-consecrated batá although this type of ceremony is usually referred to as *un aberikulá*.

drums while they are played, and then to pay a *derecho* (a monetary offering) to the drummers.¹⁴

3. The middle section of a *tambor* can vary. It will often involve the congregation singing and dancing for different *oricha*, and a person or persons becoming possessed by an *oricha*. Other ritual can take place during this section, such as the ‘presentation’ of an initiate to the drum and an *ebó* ceremony.¹⁵
4. *El cierre* - the closing section of a *tambor* is formed of two sections. First, is the *Oru a Egun*; a sequence of rhythms played for the *orichas* associated with the ancestors. When this section begins, a bucket of water is placed in front of the drummers. It is believed that all the negative energy in the ritual space enters the water. During the last rhythm - played for the *oricha* Yemayá - a *santera* whose tutelary is also Yemayá takes the bucket of water outside the house and throws the water away, all the while the drummers continue playing through this drum-only sequence. Once the bucket is brought back and placed in front of the drummers, the second and final part of the closing ceremony, a set of songs and rhythms, announces the end of the *tambor*.

¹⁴ Some devotees are also required to prostrate themselves in front of the consecrated set before saluting each of the drums individually.

¹⁵ Brown (2003:368) defines an *ebó* as “Protective, defensive, cleansing offerings, sacrifices, or ‘works’ which are prepared by specialists, in order to transform situations.”



Plate 1:1: Consecrated batá, (from left) okónkolo, iyá, itótele and elektotó. (Photo taken by Vicky Jassey 7/05/17)



Plate 1:2: Two sets of *fundamento*, one old and one new in the *cuarto de Añá* (Añá room) at Irian López's house, Havana. (Photo taken by Vicky Jassey 23/06/2015)¹⁶

¹⁶ This photo was taken during the final stage of the batá consecration process. López gave me permission to film and take photographs, which involved an *oru seco* being played on both the old and new sets at the same time. The

Sacred batá music also calls the *orichas* to the corporeal plane, where it is believed they possess the bodies of chosen initiates and have the power to facilitate wellbeing, counsel and spiritual cleansing to the congregation (see Vélez 2000; Vaughan 2012; and Schweitzer 2013). *Tambores de fundamento* are also used to perform an *ebó*, a ritual offering prescribed through divination to a designated *oricha*, who may in return provide health and wellbeing. Aside from these spiritual attributes, a musical ritual using *fundamento* can bring social prestige to the host of a *tambor* and purpose and unity to the religious community as a whole.

The oral histories collected by the Cuban ethnographer, Fernando Ortiz, identified that the batá drum tradition, together with its extensive specialised drum, song and dance canon and its technical, spiritual and herbal ritual knowledge, were not fully intact when it arrived in Cuba. Instead the tradition was reconstructed and “disseminated through the urban *cabildo* networks of Havana, Regla, and Matanzas, and transmitted intergenerationally through descending ritual lineages of drummers” (Brown 2003:64). According to Ortiz’s account, the first set of consecrated batá was sounded in a Havana *Lucumí* cabildo named *Alakisa* circa 1830 (Ortiz 1952b).

The batá drums and their music have a deep and profound connection to the esoteric realm, which affects access rules and prohibitions.¹⁷ The Yoruba *oricha* of thunder and lightning Changó, a deified king of the Oyo Empire, represents male virility and is believed to be the spiritual owner of the batá drums. In Cuba, unlike in Nigeria where Ayan is a spiritual independent deity, Añá is part of an “*oricha*

footage was taken from outside of the room. Even so for many batá drummers the filming of any part of a ceremony that takes place in the *cuarto de Añá* would be unacceptable.

¹⁷ See Vincent ([Villepastour] 2006:104 -115) for a comprehensive description of the relationship between *oricha* and batá.

complex” which includes Egun (the ancestors), Osáin (the *oricha* of herbs and medicine) and Orula (the *oricha* of divination) (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:107).

Organology

Historically consecrated batá drums were made from wood and animal hide.

Nowadays, most *fundamento* are made using rope, as it holds its tension more effectively as well as having added durability. There are strict protocols about how consecrated batá should be handled and moved: for example, they should always be carried in bags and should never touch the floor apart from during certain ritual procedures when they are sometimes placed on a mat. When not in use they are hung on the wall. Each of the drums and their accessories, like the *aro*, a single metal ring attached close to the *boca* (S) or *enu* (L) (mouth) of the larger membrane of each drum and *choworos* (the brass bells attached to the *iya*), has corresponding associations with *orichas*.¹⁸ The smaller heads of the batá are called the *chachá*.

During each drumming ritual, two string of *chaworó*; the *chaworo* and *chawori* are attached to the *iyá*. Each drum is then covered with a *bandele*, *bandel* or *banté* which reflect the drum owner’s and the batá’s ritual path (as seen in Plate 1.3).

¹⁸ See Vincent [Villepastour] for a diagram showing the association between batá and the *oricha* (2006 Fig 3:1:105).



Plate 1:3: *Chaworós* (bells) and *bandele* (beaded apron).
Juan Raymat's *fundamento*, Miami (Photo by Vicky
Jassey 3/04/17)

Consecrated batá or *fundamento* are 'born' from an older consecrated set during a weeklong secret ceremony performed strictly by heterosexual men initiated to the cult of Añá, an *oricha* believed to be manifest and contained in a consecrated packet inside the drum vessels. The consecration process culminates in a public "transmission" ceremony on the seventh day where an older consecrated set of batá is played to give "voice" to a new set. The sacrificial blood of animals is of significance to *oricha* worship and Añá. The live blood of animals is believed to contain *aché* (life force) and the transfer of animal blood to the *orichas* is said to "feed" the spirit, activate their potential, and keep them alive (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:86). Añá is

fed blood when a new set is consecrated and in key moments throughout the drums' life.

The Añá Brotherhood

Omo Añás (literally “children of Añá”) are heterosexual males who have been initiated or “sworn” (*jurado*) into the cult of Añá. They are considered by some to be the only people permitted to play consecrated batá (see Chapter 5). The title *olúbatá*, according to two sources (Vélez 2000:49; Schweitzer 2013:211), refers to a master batá drummer, meaning an *omo Añá* who has spent many years in the tradition, owns a *fundamento* and knows the entire musical canon, drum-making craft and consecration processes. According to Felipe Villamil (Vélez 2000:50-49), an *aláña* (also called an *olúañá*) is someone who owns a set of *fundamento* but is not necessarily a drummer. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to draw on these definitions during this study.

Santería, while being proscriptive and stratified, lacks a central governing authority which controls religious practices and beliefs (Vélez 2000:16). The transmission of ritual knowledge is undertaken by initiated priests who frequently assume authority through years of advanced ritual involvement. The Añá brotherhood has its own unique initiation, which stands apart from other *oricha* initiations and similarly imparts knowledge and secrets through apprentice-type interactions, where novices assume a subordinate position to their religious elders.¹⁹ *Omo Añás* are responsible for the making, consecration, and maintenance of the sacred drums, and

¹⁹ See Hagedorn (2001:215-219) and Vincent ([Villegastour] 2006:118) for descriptions of *oricha* initiations, including those into Añá.

for the playing and transmission of musical knowledge, which is passed from one generation of drummers to another.²⁰

Omo Añás are also responsible for protecting the consecrated batá from “contamination” from “inappropriate contact” with women or gay men (Schweitzer 2013:62). Not only are women and gay men excluded from playing Añá, but even their physical presence near this *oricha* is considered profane and dangerous. As there appears to be a lack of evidence to support that such a taboo existed in Yorubaland, these proscriptions appear to be one of many significant changes that took place in the African diaspora (Marcuzzi 2005b:465; Villepastour 2015a:157).²¹ However, salient to religious practices is the “dynamic interplay of heterogeneity” (Meadows 2017:210) where tenets of embodied religious practice become open to interpretations causing them to vary in either distinct or nuanced form.

Creating and Maintaining Tradition

Scholars have presented numerous and competing theories about how religious practices and their associated gender constructs manifest or become modified in the diaspora, such as collective memory (Brandon 1997), diffusionism (Boas 1911),

²⁰ Ritual batá drummers are not necessarily initiated into Regla de Ocha when they are “sworn” or initiated into the cult of Añá. Irian López explained that he expects ritual drummers who work with his consecrated drums to have made two preliminary steps into the religion by receiving *mano de Orula* (hand of Orula, also called *awo faca*), and ritually receiving *los guerreros* (the warriors), comprising the three *orichas* Echu, Ogún and Oshosi in material form (pers. comm., Havana 7/6/2017). However, I have been present on numerous occasions when López has allowed foreign drummers, who have not made these religious steps into the religion, the opportunity to play his consecrated batá in *tambores*.

²¹ In Yoruba culture there are taboos associated with menstruation, which are connected to female proscriptions in Cuba (Chapter 2). However, discourse about homosexuality in *oricha* practice in Yorubaland is not explicit (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006). Villepastour explains that in Yoruba societies homosexuality “is neither understood nor acknowledged and therefore “does not exist” (Vincent (2006:189). I discuss issues relating to homosexuality and Añá in Chapter 4.

hybridity (Gilroy 1993; Bhaba 2012), creolisation (Bernabé et al. 1990; Mintz and Price 1976), syncretism (Herskovits 1941), and transculturation (Waterman 1952; Ortiz 1995 [1940]) in different social, demographic, and economic systems. Conflict and contradiction within diasporic religions become part of a normative process whereby traditions are constructed and maintained over time, and become embodied in on-going patterns of ritual symbolism and sacro-politics (Brandon 1997; Wirtz 2003).

Repeated religious actions form a social process defined by Bourdieu (1972) as '*habitus*', interpreted by Turino (1990:400) as the 'internalized, common-sense ways of being and perceptions of the world that serve as the basis for individual and group practice' (see also Klein in Villepastour 2015). Drawing on Bourdieu's theory, Judith Butler (1988:521-523) posits that gender is similarly embodied through a series of performative acts, which are repeated, renewed, revised, consolidated, and naturalised through time. Gender reality, Butler explains, 'is created through sustained social performances' (528).

It seems evident that often more conservative practices become established in the diasporic context.²² This can be due to a displaced community's need to hold on to

²² According to available literature (Marcuzzi 2005; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006), my own research and personal experiences, it appears that the further away the batá tradition moves from its Cuban homeland the more conservative attitudes can become towards female access. For example, in the parallel Yoruba tradition of the batá, researchers have not published any evidence to suggest that women or homosexual men are prohibited from touching or coming into contact with batá drums (e.g., Marcuzzi 2005:464; Villepastour 2015a:157). In the Cuban diaspora, however, any contact is forbidden, apart from that made when ritually saluting the drums. In the Cuban diaspora in the USA, as a woman I was prohibited from playing *aberikulá* with a 'sworn' ritual drummer, further extending the prohibition to cover batá drumming generally. According to several female batá drummers from the USA (e.g., pers. comm Sayre 9/08/2016; Basha 23/09/2018) excluding women from secular drumming was common, leaving one with the impression that male drummers in the USA are more conservative than their counterparts in Cuba. Likewise, in the USA, UK and France, I have witnessed male batá drummers being prevented from playing consecrated batá in *tambores* because they are not *omo Añá* or had not had their hands ritually washed (a smaller and cheaper ritual than full initiation to Añá). Whilst it is ultimately up to the discretion

a sense of homeland or ‘purity’, which resists ‘contamination’ from outside cultural influences. Traditional practices can, therefore, be perceived of as fixed rather than part of an on-going process of change. Where diasporic communities are marginalised because of the colour of their skin or religion, this process is compounded. Askew (2002) suggests that through performance we can understand individual and national modes of identity and hegemonic processes by considering the communicated message. Music is a locus for maintaining existing practices or policing newly emerging cultural growth or traditions, thus exerting a profound effect on women’s access to ritual or musical activities. Understanding the tension between gender, music, and religion may provide one explanation for gender asymmetry in music making in Santería, and its associated secular performance domains.

Although the batá drumming tradition is derived from Yoruba culture, a series of innovative rituals and practices have led to the Cuban tradition being distinctly different from that of the current parallel Yoruba tradition in Nigeria. However, many of these innovations are now perceived as fixed traditions that have come from Africa (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006). The interpretation and implementation of menstrual taboos within the batá tradition in Cuba provides one such example.²³

Sapir (1963:365) notes that tradition “emphasizes the historic background of custom.” Although it is beyond the remit of this thesis to attempt to untangle the complex interconnectivity between tradition and custom, what is relevant is how innovative ritualised practices emerge and are authenticated through perceived connections to a time and place. Although applied to public ritualised ceremonies of

of the drum owner as to who is allowed to play their batá, I have found attitudes in Cuba are often more relaxed, allowing novice uninitiated male drummers access to playing consecrated batá (see Chapter 3).

²³ See Chapter 2.

the British monarchy, Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1992) invented tradition model is well suited to explain this process. Invented traditions include both

'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period- a matter of a few years perhaps- and establishing themselves with great rapidity. (1)

Hobsbawm and Ranger explain how traditions can be invented or constructed through repeated social performances that become imagined as timelessly preserved traditions.

In the batá tradition practices are reproduced by respected gatekeepers, whose rules are of a "ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior" and attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (1).

Within the Cuba drumming realm, geographical as well as temporal markers are also embedded into constructions of tradition (Bakhtin 2010; Palmié 2013). Invented traditions are a response to "the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it" (2).

Along a continuum of practice, in his comprehensive study of Santería, Brown (2003:163) explains, "it is often difficult to distinguish new groups whose innovations claim traditional status from established old guards, and whose asserted original "traditions" are "traditionalized" innovations." My study is a continued investigation of more recent changes in 2015, which conform to the invented tradition model that is currently shaping contemporary batá practice in Cuba.

Institutions and the Rise of Female Batá Players

One such modification to the status quo was the introduction of *aberikulá* (non-consecrated) batá performance to the public in May 1936, organised by Fernando Ortiz and classified as an “ethnographic conference” (cited in Hagedorn 2001:141).²⁴ This event and the subsequent performances that followed were, according to Ortiz, dedicated to helping “whites and blacks know and recognize each other reciprocally in Cuba, and to feel jointly responsible for the historical force that they integrate” (cited in Hagedorn 2001:191). The introduction of secular batá performance led to a porosity between sacred and secular that would go on to have far-reaching implications for the notions of fixed tradition and prohibitions limiting female access to playing batá drums. As Hagedorn (2001:238-239) summarises:

The rules of engagement governing folkloric performance were born on that day in May, as was the ability to convey sacred memory through secular manifestation [...] But this process of simultaneous translation helped blur the boundaries between sacred and secular.

Another significant development to gender narratives within the batá tradition took place in 1979, when the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (ISA) was opened. It was here that batá drumming was formally institutionalised and also where, possibly for the first time, White people, women and foreigners were taught how to play batá drums.²⁵

²⁴ Ortiz referred to this performance as an “ethnographic conference with a schematic exposition of the liturgical character, instruments, music, chants, and dances of the sacred music of the Yoruba negros” (cited in Hagedorn 2001:169)

²⁵ Although Regla de Ocha is practised by a wide demographic, ritual musicians in Cuba remain predominantly Black males. The first “White” man was sworn into the Añá fraternity in 1985 (Schweitzer 2013).

Justo Pelladito (pers. comm., 4/08/2015), who was appointed as the CFNC institute's first folkloric drum teacher, recalled how the batá community reacted to the institutionalisation of batá drumming and the teaching of White and female students.

They [the drumming community] criticised me because I was teaching white people in the school and because I was teaching batá [...] there was a woman and white people in my class but I did not believe it was bad to teach these people.

Initially, most Cuban ritual drummers refused to teach Cuban women. Hagedorn (2001:88) explains that according to her teacher, ceremonial drummer Alberto Villarreal, Cuban men did not want to teach Cuban women because they are

atrevida (impudent, bold, brash), which, in the context of *bata* [sic] drumming, means that they will try to play the *bata* drums in a religious context, despite the deeply held conviction that female ceremonial *bata* drummers are anathema to Santería.

According to Villarreal (cited in Hagedorn 2001:89-90), as soon as these “*atrevida-heady*” Cuban women had learnt to play batá they wanted to play in religious ceremonies. For this reason, it was decided within the CFNC that it would be safest to teach only foreign women as “they were far less likely to trespass into the religion with their newfound *batá* skills and likely would confine themselves to playing in secular *batá* groups” (90). No explanation was given as to which Cuban women tried to play in religious ceremonies, nor are there any accounts from women themselves as to what their motivation or intentions were.

A few years later FolkCuba, another state-run school, was established and attracted a number of female batá students from Europe and North America. When

Cuban women became aware of a segregation that allowed foreign women to learn batá while they remained excluded, they began to complain about this unfairness to men within the drumming community (Villepastour 2013; Eva Despaigne, 30/08/2014). A contentious debate then took place at the end of the 1980s until finally some drummers agreed to teach Cuban women; among them were Ángel Bolaños (pers. comm., 26/08/2014) Irian López (pers. comm., 20/08/2015) and Justo Pelladito (pers. comm., 4/08/2015).

Since Cuba's economic downturn in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, religious and musical tourism has been an important source of income for many ritual musicians where income from foreign male and female students became a valuable commodity. Although foreign male students of batá can often be invited to play during a *tambor de fundamento* (even if they have not been initiated), women are restricted to learning from listening in ritual settings, class environments and occasionally playing for dance classes.²⁶ In the 1990s all-female secular batá groups began to proliferate in Havana, Matanzas, Cárdenas, Cienfuegos and Santiago (Fig 1:1). This was despite the fact that many male ritual drummers did not support women playing batá in public spaces. However, to my knowledge, the majority of these women did not attempt to play in religious ceremonies.

²⁶ See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion on access to playing *fundamento* for non-initiated male drummers.



Figure 1:1: Map of Cuba and key areas of my research.

One pioneering group of women who began playing at this time was Obini Batá, whose members were originally dancers with the CFNC. In terms of their longevity, international acclaim and continued state support, they are perhaps one of the most successful all-female batá groups to date.²⁷ Supported by the government, they receive equipment, rehearsal space and retain a weekly residency at the Yoruba Cultural Association, Havana (a central institute representing *Lucumí* culture in Cuba).

Their show, however (which I witnessed for the first time at the Yoruba Cultural Association in 2012), presents a paradox. On the one hand they are promoted as representing Cuban culture by the Cuban government, while on the other hand their show defies aspects of religious and cultural practice because of the restriction placed on women in religious settings. In addition, their performances are primarily aimed at

²⁷ This opinion is supported by the following authors Sayer (2000); Scherpf (2011); Rodriguez (2015); Hagedorn (2015).

a foreign audience who, for the most part, would never have heard of Santería or its music. An all-female *batá* group that challenges social and religious norms performing at the heart of an association representing Yoruba tradition and culture in Cuba, with a show aimed at tourists, is sending a cultural, sacropolitical message. But what message? Viewing cross-cultural music making more generally, in male hegemonic social structures where female access to instrumental music practices is limited, there is a tendency for female musicians to self-segregate. A case in point is in Cuba where all-female *batá* groups proliferated since the late 80s.²⁸ The *batá*'s gender power dynamics are negotiated and contested in sacred, secular, private, local, national, international and governmental spheres (an area I discuss in detail in Chapter 4).

My data has suggested there is a link between the rise of female secular *batá* performance and a move towards women gaining access to ritual *batá* performance. Previous academic discourse suggested that most Cuban women did not challenge or question their position or status in the religion. For example, Flores (2001:60) writes, "As for the perceptions held by female participants themselves a majority accepts the limits imposed on their status within religious practice as something that should not be questioned." Meanwhile, Vincent ([Villemastour] 2006:189) adds, "Cuban personalities [...] who perceive women's exclusion from *Añá* as an asymmetry which needs reform, are exceptional thinkers and do not represent a wider reform movement." My more recent data, however, indicates a shift.

²⁸ I am only aware of two Cuban female *batá* players who regularly play and perform with men. There is Deborah Carmen Mendy Frontella, one of the original *Obini Batá* players, who continues to play with the *batá* ensemble *Los Ibejis* (Not the Pop band based in France) where she accompanies two male *batá* drummers (see also Chapter 3). The second is Regla Palacio Castellanos who sometimes plays with her husband, the renowned *omo Alañá* Mililián 'Galí' Galis Riverí. I experienced this first hand when I performed with them both during the Festival de Fuego in Santiago in 2015.

Out of the twenty-five Cuban female drummers that I spoke with during my field research, about half of them told me that they felt their exclusion from performing in rituals was related to sexist ideologies in Cuban society and that if allowed to do so they would perform on consecrated batá (see Chapter 4). Whilst these female voices do not necessarily represent the general opinion within the religious milieu, that female batá drummers (many of whom are also *santeras*) perceive their position to be subordinate to that of men, implies a change in attitudes from the period when Flores and Vincent [Villepastour] conducted their research. Furthermore, my research indicates that Cuban women's acceptance of playing batá began from outside (foreign women) and moved inward (pers. comm., Koskoff 21/08/2018). What followed was a "culturally careful progression" (pers. comm., Koskoff 21/08/2018) by Cuban women once they witnessed foreign women's access to the batá and Cuban men's acceptance of such practice. In addition, several *omo Añás*, some of whom had been playing for several decades, also called into question some aspects of the taboos restricting women from batá drumming. The openness of these drummers in expressing potentially controversial opinions publically or to a foreign scholar signals a shift in attitudes and further nuances batá gender narratives.²⁹

Theory, Method and Positionality

This study draws on mainstream and, feminist ethnomusicology and performance studies methodologies. Charles Seeger ([1939] 1944) and Nettle (1983) first advocated a collaboration between the government and the arts by bringing

²⁹ See Chapter 2 for further discussions on ritual drummers who contest aspects of gender taboos.

musicology (and later ethnomusicology) out of the academy and more squarely into the public domain. Participant observer, practice-based research and reflexive writing methods, appropriately describe the research methods I have instinctively employed.

Gourlay (1978) established the importance of positioning oneself and asserting ethnographic authority in ethnomusicological writing. The politics of the gaze is to reveal the researchers' motivations by identifying their own interests with respect to political standing, intellectual commitments, career and creative aspirations, peer approval and a sense of self-worth and promotion. Grounded in postmodern philosophy, reflexive writing is linked to a growing research discourse, which challenges canonical representations of others and treats research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act (Wall 2006). The primary purpose of reflexive writing is further to develop an understanding of the inextricable links in research processes between the personal, political and the cultural (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). Another important function of reflexive writing is to make the researcher aware of and explicit about their bias. Strong critiques of reflexive writing identify a delicate boundary between the personal and public, while dismissing the self-reflexive dialectic as self-indulgent or narcissistic and questioning its usefulness to ethnography, or worse, undermining emancipatory research (Patai 1994; Kemmis 1995; Stock 2000; Agawu 2003; Pillow 2003).

There is a need, therefore, explicitly to declare our lived experiences and our 'positionality', which divulges aspects of identity in terms of gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexuality, personality, and other political, religious and personal attributes that may be significant to both our relational positions in society and to our subject (Barz and Cooley 2008; Šikić-Mićanović 2010). George Marcus (1998:392) suggests that reflexive writing should be "messy," open-ended, resistant to

theoretical holism and “committed to cultural criticism” (ibid). Wanda Pillow (2003:187) goes further by advocating that “messy” texts should challenge data as truths by interrupting and interrogating ethnographic writing in multiple ways by pushing towards the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable. However, whilst ‘messy’ reflexive ethnography does not break down power asymmetry inherent in field research it can often reveal it (Pillow 2003). Between ethnomusicology’s demand for reflexive writing on one hand and the harsh critiques of scholars who have fully embraced the method on the other, I have been forced to consider my own research choices in this regard.

My musical, physical, spiritual, and emotional relationship to the batá drums is shaped by my positionality in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, musical acumen, religious status and personal and professional relationships. I come to this research as a heterosexual, White western woman who has been playing batá for fourteen years, as a scholar, and as someone who believes in equality between races, sexualities, religions and genders (which under some definitions classes me as a feminist). I am aware that a western-centric approach could lead to non-western subjectivities regarding gender and sexuality being ignored. In an attempt to address the shortfall of my own positioning I have endeavoured to consider gender and sexuality theories and discourse, from Latin America generally and the Caribbean and Cuba specifically (Lewis 2003, 2005; Ramírez 2003; Vidal-Ortiz 2006, 2011, 2005; Asencio 2009; Robaina 2011, Hechavarría 2017). I have made the first steps into the religion, and I am in a relationship with a British initiated drummer. So, I have need to question: Who are the main beneficiaries of my research? Why have I chosen this topic? What are the implications of being in a relationship with an initiated drummer? Should a White western woman (who has only recently made steps into the religion) be

conducting research on a predominantly Black all-male music tradition? These are just some of the questions I will begin to unpack through a ‘messy’ reflexive approach.

As my past experiences demonstrate, I am invested in and committed to promoting and celebrating the batá’s music and its history. I am therefore deeply implicated in my research in a myriad of ways, which can pose ethical challenges. In order to manage these, I have harnessed a cross-disciplinary methodological approach to this study. Ethnomusicology’s ‘polyphonic’ make-up (Rice 2008), largely based on social theories imported from anthropology, offers an array of creative and experimental approaches to meet the demands of this research. This study primarily draws on the scholarship of mainstream ethnomusicology, whose commitment is to the study of music’s cultural context; and feminist ethnomusicology (Koskoff 2014), which offers an understanding of power relations while advocating for greater equality and understanding of diversity and oppression. Performance studies, which consider embodiment (Farnell 1999) and individual and national modes of power and identity represented in socio-political performativity (Askew 2002), have provided apt analytical tools for considering and processing research material. The anthropological and auto-ethnographic methods I employ reject scientific paradigms that envision human culture as entirely objective and observable (Collins and Gallinat 2013) and instead call on interdisciplinary, interactive, embodied, non-objectivist scholarship (Kisliuk 1998a:314).

This study is distinctive in that it provides a body of work not only from respected religious elders in Havana, but also from a wide selection of female musicians from four different provinces in Cuba, who study and perform on batá. In addition, for the first time I present research on gay men and the cult of Añá as well as

offer up my own auto-ethnographic experiences as a female drummer and singer. While there has been extensive research focussing on men's sacred batá drumming and its associated religious and cultural practices, references to gender and sexuality, women playing batá, and homosexuality, have been only marginal and the growing tradition of female batá drummers has been largely ignored. My ethnomusicological practice-based research, which employs participant observation and auto-ethnographic methods, attempts to fill this vacuum.

I bring to this research the thoughts and experiences of over fifty Cuban research respondents who are profoundly connected to the batá tradition in Cuba (see Appendix I), some of whom have been friends for many years. Furthermore, I bring my own musical experiences, which span over a decade and include participation in musical rituals in Cuba, UK, Europe, and USA. I have learned aspects of the musical canon from some of the most influential ritual musicians of this generation (see Appendix II). I have familiarised myself with the musical demands of all three drums (although the *iyá* the least) and I also lead the ensemble as a singer. I have performed in rituals and secular artist settings whether as part of a congregation's vocal chorus, as an *akpón* (lead singer), or as a drummer. In addition, as an educator I have provided learning opportunities for students interested in learning batá through workshops in the UK and Cuba for ten years.

I began formally conducting research for this thesis during my pre-doctoral language and music acquisition trip in Cuba over three months in 2014. My main fieldwork took place, however, in 2015 during a five-month trip. My partner, David Pattman, has accompanied me on four trips to Cuba in total. At the end of my field trip as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I underwent two preliminary initiatory steps into Regla de Ocha. The ceremony was conducted by a friend and

research respondent, *babalawo* and *olúbatá*, Irian ‘Chinito’ López. This ceremony has provided a spiritual link to a practice that I had previously only accessed through musical, social and academic resources. I have managed to build trust and friendships with many respondents through ongoing commitment in the field over time.

One of the most significant barriers I experienced with my interlocutors was my Spanish language limitation. Before beginning my research, I had been learning Spanish for a number of years to a basic level. In 2014, I attended a three-month intensive Spanish language course in Havana in preparation for my fieldwork. Although by the end of my language-training course I was proficient at speaking and understanding Spanish to an advanced level, I still lacked an advanced vocabulary of colloquial terms, which can take years to understand. I chose to engage in open discussions with my respondents on a particular topic, rather than conduct formal question and answer type interviews. During the early stages of my fieldwork if I perceived that communication during an interview might be potentially challenging; I enlisted the support of various translators.

I acknowledge there are innate complications associated with having a translator in these situations especially as ritual drummers use a lot of culturally specific terms not always understood by those who are not part of the tradition. Therefore I sought, as my language proficiency developed over time, to conduct the interviews on my own.³⁰ Although this brought about its own set of concerns—my questions might be misunderstood or I might misunderstand an answer—I felt confident this was more conducive to building trust and a connection with my research respondents than having a third person present. When it came to translating

³⁰ Translators included in Havana: Annet Sanchez, Reneir Santos, Natalie Howard and David Pattman; Santiago de Cuba: Carlos Hoga Domingo; Matanzas: Luis Bran.

interviews, I decided to have a selection of ‘core’ recorded interviews translated by professional translators in Cuba (about fifteen in total). Those that fall outside of the ‘core’ remit I have translated myself and then followed that up by having them checked by Cuban friends and/or my partner, David Pattman, who is not only fluent in Spanish but familiar with colloquial terms used in the ritual batá setting.

The way in which my positionality has been affected by my relationship with an initiated drummer is multi-layered. Collins and Gallinat (2013) recommend that family members receive the “same respectful treatment as informants,” which has posed no personal challenge to me. Before I started my field research I was conscious that when I told drummers about my relationship with an *omo* Añá they might become intimidated or afraid of disclosing information if it was of a subversive nature. I found the opposite to be true. Respondents appeared to be reassured by my close connection with a ritual drummer, and if anything appeared more relaxed after this disclosure. Furthermore, the batá brotherhood is an environment where it is at times useful to be perceived as sexually unavailable as a female ethnographer. Being in a relationship and being a mature woman serves to reassure the female partners of male collaborators, as well as to deter unwanted attention from men. Such experiences and pressures and the wellbeing and safety of female researchers conducting qualitative research are remarkably under-documented in contemporary ethnomusicology (Bartz and Cooley 2008).

Oboloer (1986) points out that in anthropological research, “having a spouse of each sex carries automatic access to both sexes.” My relationship identifies me as heterosexual in a country where those who practice same-sex relationships still suffer discrimination. My heterosexuality privileges my positionality working in the heteronormative ritual batá scene. On the other hand, my sexuality may also have

restricted me from accessing, and therefore representing, those within the religious musical tradition in the capacity of singers, dancers, and clandestine gay batá drummers who are in same-sex relationships.³¹

My unique (and in some ways empowered) positionality through my relationship, musical abilities, and recent preliminary religious initiation has allowed me to straddle emic-etic, male-female, sacred-secular, and public-private binaries in order to engage with Cuba's musical culture and its stratified practices. I am aware, however, that as an elite outsider with some insider status, I have the privilege of deconstructing other peoples' strategic essentialism (Wirtz 2014). My gender, political positioning, sexuality, race, class, informer/musician/researcher, and insider/outsider dichotomies, impact my research and interpretations of cultural meaning (Collins and Gallinat 2010). Narayan (1993:671) reminds us:

Instead of the paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider/insider or observer/observed, I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations.

Our shifting identities also impact how we are received in the field, what experiences we are exposed to, and what our respondents choose to share with us. I acknowledge

³¹ Although one female batá player I interviewed is known locally as being lesbian, she did not talk about her sexuality or its significance to my research. Many of the women I spoke with were keen to make sure I knew they were heterosexual. Morad (2015a) identifies his being 'out' as a gay man as an advantage to his research. Although I did not feel able to access and therefore represent the gay musical religious community to the level I would have liked, I was able to have a frank conversation with Micheal Guerrero who is a same-sex practicing *akpón* in Havana (See Chapter 4).

that I am influenced by western approaches to gender, sexuality, religion, tradition etc.

When I started my research, I set out to do a study on women's secular batá performance, about which at the time I knew relatively little. I am aware, however, that because of my positionality I leaned towards privileging the voices of female batá players in secular folkloric performance. Naturally, as a female batá player I have a personal interest in the possibility of female performance and much to gain from women's batá playing, having a better public profile through any publications of my work. Addressing the asymmetry in the representation of female batá players in academic discourse has the potential to increase female musicians' status, which would benefit me as a player, revealing my own personal bias. Whilst the above may affect the lens through which this work is processed, this was neither the reason, nor my intention for taking on this research. Furthermore, my connections in Cuba meant that many of my respondents lived and worked in Havana and Santiago. Although Havana is considered a hub for religious and secular batá performance, this research does not represent in the same depth other provinces such as Matanzas, also considered an epicenter for religious drumming.

It is pertinent to point out that some key findings in this research are based on the testimonies of a select group of Cuban female drummers. While some women are from religious musical lineages, others are not associated with its religious context. Their experiences and opinions, therefore, are not necessarily representative of the wider religious community or society as a whole. Their very profession (playing drums associated with a masculine ritual practice) means they straddle societal norms and that places them in a unique position regarding their experience and views on

gender and sexuality. Further research would be required to ascertain whether their views are representative of Cuban women more generally.

During my fieldwork I had several experiences which led me to my change my research focus away from solely female secular batá performance. It became apparent that it was imperative to include a treatment also of male sacred ritual batá performance. The most significant experience affecting this change of focus was encountering three women playing consecrated batá in Santiago, an action that was sanctioned by a *babalawo-aláña*. Collectively, their actions form part of a campaign to reinterpret religious texts and dispute taboos restricting women from accessing Añá (see Chapters 2 and 3). By engaging with a reflexive approach, it became clear early on in my 2015 fieldtrip that more inclusive approaches to the interrogation of gender in batá spheres would provide a more holistic representation of this subject area. This shift of gaze reflects a turn in feminist anthropology articulated by Moore (1988:6), who led a move away from an “anthropology of women” to a feminist anthropology which studied gender and gender relations as a whole.

Once my research moved towards gender and the sacred domain I began to be concerned that some of the answers I received from respondents—in reply to questions about women, gay men and taboos—could be perceived by some in the religion as controversial and/or challenging tradition. I was aware that by including this data in my findings I could offend some in the community, which could lead to both my partner and I being ostracised from future participation in some batá circles. For this reason, a reflexive approach, where I interrogate data as evidence by reflecting on the impact of my positionality in fieldwork and ethnographic writing, has been even more important to my methodology. I understand the role of a researcher is not to censor voices but to understand that each one, including my own, comes packaged with a

unique positionality that affects the way it wishes to be heard and represented. All my respondents were fully aware of my positionality—I am a female batá player doing research on gender and batá in a relationship with an initiated drummer—however, at no time during my fieldwork in Cuba was I made to feel by either male or female drummers or religious practitioners that my research, questions, and relationship to and passion for batá was inappropriate or controversial. Despite the restrictions placed on women in the sacred domain of drumming I have found *omo Añás* in Cuba to be very supportive of my musical studies and academic research.

One example was being invited to play batá in Cuba with initiated drummers, where I was not paying for a lesson. This includes drumming for dance classes at Teatro America, Havana, over eight months in 2014 and 2015 with ritual musician and *babalawo*, Javier Piña Marquis (see Plate 1.3).



Plate 1:4: Casa de America dance school with akpón Javier Piña (far left in red), Havana 2014. (Photo by unknown drummer)

I was also invited to play *aberikulá* in two religious ceremonies in Cuba: one for *el día del medio* (the middle day of a santero initiation) (See Plate 1.5), and one for an *Ocha*' birthday (celebration of a devotee's initiation day) in 2015 (see Chapter 4). Additionally, I was invited to lead ritual chants at *tambores de fundamento* by many *omo Añás* including the eminent late Ahmed Díaz, Rubén Bulnes and Javier Campos. However, I still lack the required ritual knowledge and religious authority to become an *akpón* (lead singer and master of ceremony).³² In the UK I have been invited by Cubans, Campos and *omo Añá* Geraldo De Almas to sing and play at *güiros*; an alternative music ceremony played with *chekeré* (beaded gourds) a metal hoe and *caja* (conga drum); and, *cajon de muertos*; a ritual music associated with *Espiritismo*, a religious practice with an interest in "spiritual manifestations" of the dead (Ventos 2008:13), which incorporates aspects of Roman Catholic, Amerindian and African religious practice.

³² The only time a non-initiate is restricted in the role of *akpón*, according to Piña (pers. comm.,13/09/2014), is in the ritual role of collecting an *iyawó* from the *cuarto de santo* (Lit: room of the saint, the room where an *iyawó* undergoes initiation).



Plate 1.5: *Aberikulá Tambor*, El Cerro 22/08/2015 (from left): Vicky Jassey; Osaroso; name unknown. (Photo by Nina Rodriguez)

Sadly, unlike in Cuba, an acceptance of my academic project has not been universally echoed in the UK *oricha* community.

A revised conference paper (Jassey 2015)³³ published online early in my research attracted strong critiques from two British devotees.³⁴ One emerged in a self-published rejoinder by Daniela De Armas (2017),³⁵ and the other on the Facebook page of Crispin Robinson. One of the central reproaches from both was to question my legitimacy to conduct and publish research about batá drumming. De Armas (2017 n.p.) states,

³⁴ Jassey, Vicky. 2015. 'A Gendered Tone: Representations of Sexuality and Power in Cuban Batá Performance'. *Post-It: Revista Do Fórum Internacional de Estudos Em Música e Dança* 3 (0): 266–76.: <http://revistas.ua.pt/index.php/postip/article/view/4646>. (Please note there was a publishing error with this article and some of the text is mistakenly in bold lettering).

³⁵ The link to De Armas's rejoinder:

https://www.academia.edu/33020206/Open_Critique_of_Vicky_Jassey_s_Article._A_Gendered_Tone_Representations_of_Sexuality_and_Power_in_Cuban_Bat%C3%A1_Performance_.

how can she [Vicky] speak on behalf of the religious community which she is not part of? [...] I am not interested in holding debates with academics that [sic] are not practicing or walking this path.

Robinson's response to my article appeared on his Facebook page (3/04/2017):³⁶

Certain people are trying to vilify my tradition through a feminist lens. I will not stand for it. Uninitiated western White women attacking Black masculinity in the Caribbean? No. Maferefun Añá [Praise be to Añá] [...] Uninitiated people have no authority whatsoever to assert their views so we can dispense with them.³⁷

De Armas's and Robinson's comments, suggesting that multiple layered identity markers should be considered when assessing who is qualified to speak, validate or censor debate, raises a range of ethical concerns.

Brubaker (2001) theorises the "belief that identity qualifies or disqualifies one from writing with legitimacy and authority about a particular topic" as "epistemological insiderism," asserting that it is problematic to assess "scholarly arguments with central reference to the identity of the author."³⁸ While it could be argued that one's insider positionality breaks down some of the power relations inherent in doing field research, it also potentially creates its own set of subjectivities,

³⁶ The link to Robinson's Facebook page:

Robinson, Crispin. 2017. 'Adé Egun Crispin Robinson'. Facebook. 4 March 2017.

https://www.facebook.com/adeegun.c.robinson?fb_dtsg_ag=AdymANYRep4FNFM6gHdNdtu4OvOC0SeA9hCBI2dNX8Jj8Q%3AAAdxnNV4G54TibXSeJUHrkR8lMB8UgZuhcE8uETvPAFcFmA.

³⁷ Although Robinson did not name me in his post he confirmed in a personal communication with me (pers. comm., 01/06/2017) that the post referred to my article.

³⁸ See also Villepastour (2017:6-7).

agendas and biases. Does that mean, for example, that the only ones eligible to comment on their social group are those that belong to it? As the above quotations illustrate, in the worst-case scenarios epistemological insidership can encourage individuals to try and silence debate. This belief not only limits intellectual inquiry, but also justifies a range of prejudices based on religious status, nationality, race, gender, and more.

The privileges and status I am afforded in Cuba as a foreign, White woman, who has only undergone the preliminary initiation level go beyond my relative material and visible wealth. Foreign women (and in some cases men) are not always expected to adhere to local gender roles by the host society. This may partly be due to the impermanence of foreigners, who are not considered a direct threat to notions of tradition and the status quo.³⁹ In these instances foreign women are able to gain privileged access (often without being aware of it) to sacro-socio spaces usually designated only for men (see Block 2008; Hagedorn 2001, 2015).

I believe that this is one reason why, as a foreign woman, I was able to negotiate playing in both male and female contexts with more ease than Cuban women. Like foreign women, most Cuban female batá players are required to pay for lessons in an environment where Cuban men and boys are not, as they predominantly learn in situ in ceremonies, as do many foreign male drummers who enter the social and religious sphere. However, prestigious female musicians who grow up in religious musical households such as the late Amelia Pedroso, Aleida Socarras and Yaima Pelladito, are able to access musical knowledge through their family links. In

³⁹ This was demonstrated earlier in this Chapter where it was explained that Cuban male ritual drummers refused to teach Cuban women but taught foreign women batá. (See also Vincent 1998; Pedroso cited in Vincent 2004:n.p.; 2004; Villepastour 2013).

addition, Cuban women continue to be the primary householders and are encumbered with daily washing and cooking, which requires a huge amount of manual labour due to the nation's economic underdevelopment. Consequently, women generally have substantially less free time than men for learning and practising.

As this thesis uses discursive and often arbitrary terminology to discuss concepts of gender and sexuality, I would like to clarify their theoretic attributes in relation to this cross-disciplinary research. I use the term gender to describe fluid categories of gendered identities, which are socially constructed through performative acts and compelled by social sanction and taboo (Butler 1988).⁴⁰ Actions of gender performance or 'scripts' (Scott 1990; Allen 2011) vary between cultures and are contingent on sacro-socio-political and historical foundations. Gender, therefore, is context-specific, can be modified over time and focuses on "the relation between variously constituted categories of men and women ... differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, colour, and much else" (Haraway 1997:28). Culture provides semiotic codes to assess and evaluate gender identity which vary from one culture to another (Ramírez 2003). Gender and sexual identity in Cuba for example—with 400 hundred years of colonial rule, the forced importation of hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans, and nearly sixty years of a communist government implementing Marxist ideologies—varies distinctly from say that of Europe and North America (see Hamilton 2012; Allen 2011; Lewis 2003, 2005).

Criticisms of gender theory are levelled at conceiving of gender as an overarching framework or innate identity rather than considering openly visible sources—dialogue, movement, embodiment, rituals, and human interaction—where

⁴⁰ See Fausto-Sterling (2000) for discussions on various gender and sexuality identities.

either individuals mark or perform gender or have gender imposed on them (Sanday 1993:n.p). Furthermore, Lane (2000:169) warns that like other social ideological frameworks, feminist goals “will always fall wide of the mark since they are addressed to gender as an ideological construct rather than an embodied practice.” Sanday (1993:n.p) warns us that feminist theoretical and political hegemony becomes unattainable as a conceptual framework for social relations. She argues instead for a more pliable approach that frees women from the “totalizing control of gender constructs” (1993:n.p) and allows scholars to contribute accounts where women negotiate, contest, exercise and hold power as independent agents and individuals rather than as “a homogenous group who are dependents or subordinates of men” (1993:n.p).

The postmodern feminist critique of the dual nature of political and professional identities, which led to the feminist theorising of ethical and self-reflexive anthropology, has been influential to this study. Seminal works by feminist anthropologists Strathern (1987), Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, Cohen (1989), Abu Lughod (1990), Sugarman (1998), George Marcus (1998) and Pillow (2003) dismantled the self/other paradigm—multiple intersecting selves and one’s positionality in relation to one’s own work—leading to new research models. Walby (1989), Lepowsky (1993), Sanday (1993) and Kent (2012) expose ways in which feminist theories can distort analyses of gender roles and ideologies by focusing on asymmetry and domination, warning that scholars may not be able “to see highly egalitarian societies outside their own hierarchical cultural filters” (Kent 2012).

Postcolonial feminism critiques the ignorance and privilege of western feminism and the lack of representation of non-white and non-western women (Rajan 1993; Spivak 2010; Mohanty 2003). An aspect of Postcolonial feminism that I engage

with in this study is the consideration of layers of patriarchal, racial, religious and colonial oppression experienced by non-western women and women of colour (Petersen and Rutherford 1986; Taygi 2014; Hasan 2005). An aspect of feminist theory I employ to break down gendered hegemonic universalities is adopting an intersectional approach which considers “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall 2005).

Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) explain that what makes an analysis intersectional is:

its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This framing—conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is.

Intersectionality considers the dynamic connections between different kinds of power relations, such as race, class, religion, professional position, gender and sexuality. My intersectional approach considers the ways that layers of privilege influence how people perceive, relate and act towards others, and how beliefs and behaviours have shaped the narratives presented in this study. As part of this intersectional gaze, I have reflected upon my own White-middle class-British-female-batá player-researcher privilege, and have endeavoured to problematise my representation of a predominately Black, economically disadvantaged male drumming community. Furthermore, I have tried to avoid advantaging one narrative over another based on the privileges my respondents are afforded by social positioning. An intersectional way of thinking resists reducing

the rich complexities and ambiguities of human life to simple formulas about oppressors and oppressed, capitalists and workers, Western imperialists and their non-Western victims (Bawer 2012:3).

An intersectional approach makes space for difference by moving away from generalisations. For example, although Black people can still be discriminated against in Cuba, in some situations a Black-male-gay-religious leader may have relatively more access to certain kinds of power than a White-male-straight-non-religious leader.⁴¹ Intersectionality reveals the lens through which people see and are perceived in the world, without reducing the validity of their lived experience and beliefs.

One of the challenges of writing this thesis has been the untangling of overlapping identity markers and theoretical positions in order to allow the reader to fully appreciate the different ways social categorisations independently impact religious and secular social structures in Cuban batá performance. I have engaged with a writing style that pries apart for example, notions of gender and sexuality, for example, although I am aware they are inexorably linked. This is for clarity, consistency, and to show how different identity markers can define roles and access to the tradition, rather than a reflection on how I perceive the social world.

This study acknowledges the interconnected nature of social and religious constructions of gender and sexuality specifically in Cuba, and within Regla de Ocha (Beliso-De Jesús 2013, 2015b). I situate the sexualised body and its reproduction as being part of “the cultures, histories, and political-economic realities of the nations (region, diaspora, globe), and the historicity, imagination, desires, and intentions of

⁴¹ See Chapter 5.

the sexual(ized) subject” (Allen 2011:58-59). I draw on a range of categorisation models where sexual identity is based on conceptions related to behaviour and sexual roles (Dianteill 2000; Lewis 2003; Allen 2011; Hamilton 2012). I acknowledge the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ do not necessarily provide the same social identity markers found in Western discourse or accurately describe same-sex desire in Cuban cultural production, an area still underrepresented in academic discourse.

In this study I examine social definitions of sexuality in the Caribbean as a whole and in Cuba specifically by drawing on recent publications by Lewis (2003), Allen (2011), Morad (2015a) and Hamilton (2012), which explore the ways in which gender, race, and sexuality intersect and define notions of masculinity and femininity and access to religious roles and status. In addition, Regla de Ocha is defined by religious ideologies and practices that are highly gendered from gods, ritual objects (including instruments), ritual roles, songs, rhythms, dances, even the way the batá are played. Aspects of gendering in the religion are on a continuum in relation to their fixity. On the one hand a devotee, regardless of their gender, can ‘receive’ (be initiated with) a female or male *oricha*. Similarly, a ritual dancer may be possessed by a male or female *oricha* during a *tambor*, as it is not contingent on the host’s gender (Clark 2005). On the other hand, ritual roles are defined and practiced within a rigid hierarchical scheme which is relational to the male and female binary and with regards to men and sexual behaviour (see Chapters 4 and 5).⁴²

This study considers the theoretic underpinnings of patriarchy as a model by which to understand “a system of social structures and practices where men dominate,

⁴² Gay men are restricted from becoming Ifá priests or *omo* Añá. In contrast to gay men, the discourse on lesbianism in Regla de Ocha is an area hugely underresearched. See Conner (2005); Beliso-De Jesús (2013:77); Conner and Sparks (2014).

oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1989:214). I draw on theories of patriarchy from a Cuban perspective, which considers local socio-historical-political frameworks of masculinity and subordination, rather than taking a standpoint that considers ‘gender asymmetry’ to be universal (Walby 1989:229; Duncan 1994). Allen (2011:126) explains that masculine identity or *hombria* (manhood) is “among the most prized values in [Cuban] society because it is always already constitutive of honor, dignity, strength, and bravery, the ‘opposite’ of homosexuality.” Like the term *machismo*, used to describe Latin American male behaviour relating to virility, honour and being a good provider, the reproduction and mediation of such terminology perpetuates, fixes and distorts conceptualisations of masculinity. As Puerto Rican scholar Ramírez (2003) notes,

Although power and sexuality are major components of our masculine ideologies and identities, all men are not powerful machos. The marginalization of men from positions of power in both the public and domestic scenes is also common.

While this study focuses on gender and sexuality narratives, I regularly discuss the ways in which race and class are imbricated in sacro-socio-political constructions of identity in Cuban ritual music. Fausto-Sterlin (2000:7) explains, “Understanding how race and gender work —together and independently—helps us learn more about how the social becomes embodied.” Although Regla de Ocha religious practices have been described as “Afro” and “Cuban,” Palmié (2013:27) notes that through the inclusion of White lower classes and the elite since the early twentieth century, “Africanity” and “blackness” often do not, and simply need not coincide” (Brown 2003a; Palmié 2002). Categorising race, however, can be hugely problematic

generally and in Cuba specifically. For example, in Cuba there have been accusations from Cuban and external sources of overestimating the population classified as “White” while underestimating the percentage of the Black and mixed race (*mulato*) population in the state census (Hudson 2002:120).⁴³

Critiques accuse the state of failing to “acknowledge the island’s true ethnic diversity” (Adams 2001:196), which only recognises three non-White categories. Such a simplification can be compared to Cuba’s popular classification methods to describe race, which recognises twenty different descriptive terms (ibid:196). Further, Hudson (2002:120) notes:

The actual extent of the bias is as difficult to establish as it is to define unambiguous criteria with which to define the concept of “race,” although some observers claim that Cuba has become primarily a non-white country.

Bearing in mind the ambiguity of racial definitions, nonetheless, the majority of batá drummers in Cuba are Black. Morales (2008:n.p) and Allen (2011) indicate that issues of race and racism, set against an historical backdrop of violence and oppression, are an on-going problem in Cuba. It is against this historical racially charged backdrop that we see constructions of gender and sexuality defined within ritual musical praxis (See Chapter 5).

⁴³ A 1981 census in Cuba concluded that Cuba’s population was 66% White and 34% non-White (Hudson 2002:196). Other sources put the non-White population at 72% (‘Cuba Briefing Sheet - Racial Demographics’:n.d.). However, obtaining concise facts about Cuba’s racial demographic is somewhat problematic.

Ethics

The sensitive nature of this research meant it was paramount to me that my respondents were clearly informed about the focus of my research (issues regarding gender, sexuality and batá performance) and its intended outcome (a published document). I was careful to obtain permission from respondents for their contribution. In some cases, where I have felt that contents of a discussion may be considered controversial by the wider public I have chosen to use a pseudonym apart from when it has been made clear the respondent wants their views to be known. Each respondent was informed of their rights to withdraw all or part of their contribution at any stage (although none did). I have excluded all contents by respondents which I believe could be considered disrespectful to third parties.

The most sensitive aspect of this study was my research on Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) and batá performance. As this area of my research is unprecedented, I chose to tread carefully, and only discuss this topic with respondents whom I had already established a trust and friendship, or with their trusted contacts. This select group of interlocutors was able to guide me on the appropriateness of my questions and, in some cases, suggest ways to develop my research. The views expressed in this thesis, therefore, represent only a very small number of individuals, and are not necessarily representative of the entire batá community. The delicate nature of this topic also made me double check with respondents that they gave their full consent for their views on this subject to be made public. In some cases, in order to deepen my own personal understanding, respondents chose to share information with me “off the record,” by asking me to turn the recorder off. Then, when a point was “on the record” and available for public dissemination, I was told I could turn the recorder back on.

When I set out to conduct fieldwork I had great aspirations about breaking down some of the inherent power asymmetry of doing fieldwork (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Barz and Cooley 2008). One aim for achieving this was the “‘giving back’ of research to those who help to produce it” (Knotts 2018:13). However, it soon became apparent that once funding and time restrictions were in place, although desirable, this was an unrealistic goal whilst trying to finish this thesis. However, it remains a project I would like to pursue in the future. In some cases, I have been able to share photos and films with those who expressed a desire for copies. I have offered to include some respondents into conversations on social platforms. I have also offered to share my completed work with those who expressed an interest but the language barrier and time restrictions pose the biggest obstacle for fulfilling my wish to repatriate my research materials and analyses. However, on completion of this research I intend to look into funding possibilities for the translation of all or part of this study and for travelling to Cuba to present my work at suitable conferences.

Literature Review

Research on Cuban batá in a religious context has been extensive,⁴⁴ yet perhaps most important is that of Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969), who has been hailed as the ‘third discoverer of Cuba’ (Barnet and Quesada 1997). As one of the earliest researchers of Cuban batá, Ortiz is credited with writing the first organological study of the drums (1954), and offering the first musical transcriptions.⁴⁵ Ortiz single-handedly elevated the Cuban batá tradition by folding “religious innovations in Cuba into notions of African continuities” (Marcuzzi 2005:32). His body of work about the batá (1956, 1973 [1905], 1980 [1952], 1993 [1950], 1994) comments on the socio-religious praxis of musical ritual performance and transmission.

Over the last fifteen years, however, there has been a growing critique of Ortiz’s output and methods (e.g. Cornelius 1989; Moore 1994; Ramos 2000; Hagedorn 2001; Marcuzzi 2005; Font and Alfonso 2005; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006; Palmié 2013; Villepastour 2015; Moore 2018). Ortiz is most criticised for not citing his informants in his early publications, and for his speculative methods. In relation to batá, Marcuzzi charges Ortiz with steering Cuban batá history in a direction that was advantageous to the sacro-political careers of his musical collaborators despite not naming them as

⁴⁴ For example, Ortiz (1937, 1937b, 1952a, 1956, 1973 [1906], 1980 [1952b], 1993 [1950], 1995); Ortiz and Moore (2018); Friedman (1982); Brown (1989); Cornelius (1989; 1991); Furé (1991); Mason (1992); Thompson (1993); Delgado (1997); Vélez (2000); Ramos (2000); Hagedorn (2001); Marcuzzi (2005); Vincent (2006); Vaughan and Aldama (2012); Schweitzer (2013); Villepastour (2015).

⁴⁵ Ortiz (1993 [1950], 1980 [1952b]). More comprehensive and accurate transcriptions appeared considerably later in Amira and Cornelius (1989); Garcia and Minichino (1999); Coburg (2002, 2004); Summers (2002); Vincent (2006); Schweitzer (2013). Works focussing on *oricha* songs, however, have received less scholarly attention and apart from Altmann (1998) do not include musical transcriptions e.g. Gleason (1987); Mason (1997); Wirtz (2003, 2005).

informants (2007:32). The centralisation and elevation of the Cuban batá tradition in Cuban discourse was at the expense of a larger array of *oricha* musical practices in Cuba at the time (7). Furthermore, the historical narrative of Añá's re-creation in Cuba "usurped the possibility of alternative Añá histories" (Villepastour 2015). Ortiz's foundational work provided a seminal contribution to what anthropologist Palmié (2013:7) calls the "ethnographic interface," where cooked-up collective representations of novel content are launched as cultural artefacts and put into collective circulation (54). Ortiz's contemporaries Cabrera (1954) and Angarica (1955) also provided early texts, which have been cited as significantly impacting the religious practice of Santería (Dianteill and Swearingen 2003:287; Brown 2003:150).

Within the discipline of ethnomusicology, Friedman (1982) presented the first ethnography about batá drumming in the United States and provided the first comprehensive English-language ethnography of an individual ritual drummer, Julito Collazo. This was followed by Delgado's *masters* (1997), which focused on musicians who move from an aesthetic to a religious involvement in batá music. Vélez (2000) provided an ethnographic account of the life of olúbatá Felipe García Villamil, from Matanzas. Hagedorn (2001) considers the impact and complexities of race, gender, religion, and political hegemonic structures in sacred and secular musical performance in Santería. Using a highly reflexive methodology, Hagedorn gives an insight not only into the workings of the first secular Afro-Cuban Folkloric ensemble, Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, but also documents her own experiences as a White, non-Cuban woman learning the sacred batá drumming tradition in Cuba.

Schweitzer (2013) on the other hand offers an in-depth study of the musical aesthetics of batá drumming from his viewpoint as an initiated batá drummer.

Marcuzzi (2005:39), looks at the comparative study of the Nigerian batá and Cuban batá and their drumming deities, Ayan and Añá. He investigates “conventions and negotiations of sacropolitical agendas,” arguing against “monolithic claims” of single guardianship and religious authenticity. The author identifies multilocal agencies as the collective bearers of the transformation and transculturation of Afro-Cuban musical cultures and religious worship (33). Vincent [Villegastour] (2006) further explores comparative religious and musical claims of authenticity, authority, entitlement and guardianship of Yoruba and Cuba batá traditions, offering a comparative contribution to religious gender proscriptions in both transatlantic sites. Interesting and perhaps not surprising is the fact that the scholarship of batá performance has been shaped by the gender of scholars.

While the works of male scholars such as Ortiz (1980 [1952]), Ramos (2000:120), Schweitzer (2003:2), Vaughan and Aldama (2012:29), have been more descriptive than critical in reporting the gender bias in batá drumming, recent research from female scholars has analysed this bias (Pryor 1999; Sayre 2000; Vélez 2000; Vincent [Villegastour] 2006, Villegastour 2013, 2014; Hagedorn 2014). Sayre (2000) offered the first comprehensive interrogation of Cuban gender prohibitions. Clark (2005) explores the influence of gender on ritual thought and practice in Santería in the United States by suggesting that religious traditions exist within a female-normative system. In Villegastour’s most recent book (2015) she explores alternative historical Añá narratives and the significance of anthropomorphising Ayan in transatlantic gender narratives. In this volume Hagedorn (2014) argues that women and the feminine attributes of the batá are being left out of religious and scholarly discourse. She draws our attention to the feminine qualities of the *oricha* Ochún (a feminine river deity) in authoritative oral and written discourse. Other works that look

at gender and batá include Moshe's recent book about Cuban music and homosexuality (2015), which includes a chapter about the music of Santería.

Meadows's (2017:x) recent thesis is a critical examination of the "intersections of aurality and predications of Africanity in Nigerian-style Ifá-òrìṣa." The locus of these processes is the introduction of novel religious drumming traditions in Cuba such as, the *dundun* "talking drum" from contemporary Yorubaland and adaptations of batá repertoire adaptations to assist with the *Egungun* masquerade in Ifá-*oricha* rituals. By drawing our attention to women's playing of consecrated batá in Santiago, Meadows (2017) interrogates the ways in which women and men are reshaping gendered subjectivities and reconstituting the boundaries of *orisa* worship and its music. Meadows articulately identifies the agency of women and men who look to contemporary Yorubaland to "craft sound and listening in order to reformulate fate-altering ritual and gendered prohibitions in Cuban *òrìṣà/oricha* worship" (2017:215).

Despite this significant body of scholarship about the Cuban batá, now spanning almost nine decades, little has focused on gender and sexuality in batá performance generally and women's batá performance specifically. Existing literature explains why women cannot play the sacred drums, while female secular and religious performance generally receives only passing mention or is entirely ignored (apart from Meadows's recent treatment).⁴⁶ This remarkable neglect of gender studies on batá drumming adds to the significance of my research, which looks to feminist anthropology and ethnomusicology as appropriate frameworks for the gender and music research presented in this thesis.

⁴⁶ Notable exceptions are Mennel (2005), Vincent (2006) and Villepastour (2015), yet neither are substantial studies.

Concurrent with the development of female batá drumming, the last three decades have given rise to a body of work which examines gender, performance and music cross-culturally (e.g. Koskoff 1987, 2014; Butler 1988, 1997; Herndon et al. 1990; McClary 1991; Sugarman 1997; Moisala and Diamond 2003; Magrini 2003; Doubleday 2008; Danielson 2008). These works explore the constructions of gender and power relations through music and performance in relation to the social and sexual order.

There are no dedicated published works specifically focusing on the creolisation of menstrual taboos in Cuba, or how multi-religious overlapping and intersecting menstrual taboos impacted one another on the island (an area for future research). The literature from which I draw therefore pertains to menstruation and taboo from various other religions and social frameworks (Douglas 1966; Friedl 1975; Phipps 1980; Buckley 1985; Strathern 1996; Buckley 1988; Koskoff 2014; Strassmann et al. 2012; Shail and Howie 2005). These works have provided a foundation for thinking about menstrual taboos within an intercultural context.

Drawing from the above cross-disciplinary body of literature, my study advocates a balance between theory and the real, lived experiences of people and adds to scholarship on ethnomusicology in general and women's music specifically, an area which has historically been underrepresented and undervalued.

Chapter Two

Dangerous Blood:

Batá, Religion, Menstruation and Taboo

In Batá everything corresponds to masculinity; from the skin that cannot be of female animal (a great sacrilege!) to the olúbatá who must be male [...] Because of this, in all the African worship-systems the women are dangerous to the drums and the sacred drummers (Ortiz 1980:305).

Cuba is an island with multiple overlapping belief systems, where intersecting gender ideologies have formed the bedrock for social and religious gender values. Among the most influential and ubiquitous are Catholicism, Palo, Abakuá, Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Añá.¹ This chapter investigates the relationship between religion and power and the dissemination and interpretation of menstrual taboos, which lie at the heart of Cuban batá gender prohibitions. I unpack the multi-faceted implication of beliefs that consider women, through their biological ability to menstruate, in danger from or a danger to the *oricha* Añá believed to dwell inside consecrated batá drums.

Taboos define restrictions on particular practices or associations with a person, place or object (Scott 2015). Myths are the stories which can elucidate a social or natural phenomenon such as a menstrual taboo, whilst also explaining their social and

¹ In the International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, 93% of Cubans identified as Roman Catholic. More recent reports have suggested this number has fallen to around forty per cent, with the number of practising santeros believed to be around seventy per cent (ibid). The island also hosts other religious communities such as Jewish, Islamic and Protestants faiths.

cultural value (Marler 2006; Barthes 1993; Leach 2013). Belief in collective subjective ideas has immense potential and currency in our social world as they can enable the organisation of people on an enormous scale (Harari et. al 2015).

Menstrual taboos can have cross-cultural relevance in varying religious practices including: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and many African belief systems such as those which travelled to Cuba. The conception and constructions of menstrual taboos, through the medium of ritual and utterances, are complex and multi-dimensional. Practice and belief vary not only from one religion to another, or from one culture to another (even when groups are ostensibly following the same religious belief) but from one person to another or even the same person at different stages in their lifetime. Menstrual taboos, therefore, are part of a dynamic sacro-socio process that is susceptible to change over time.

Menstruation, which may be understood as representing the “essence of femininity” (Simone de Beauvoir 2011:203), can be the cause of severe social controls on female behaviour, which is regulated by religious myths, dogma and social stigmas. Religion, therefore, can be seen not only as a medium for spiritual wellbeing but also as a system for organising social behaviour. Complex ideologies concerning menstrual taboos can lie at the heart of exclusion from certain activities, positions of religious authority and aspects of music making. Religious beliefs can perceive menstruating women, or the blood of their menses as powerful, dangerous, dirty and/or a contaminant. A physical manifestation of human birth and fertility is menstruation, the perceived powers of which are at the heart of this chapter. Phipps (1980:299) reminds us that a pathological anxiety of menstruation has ancient historical and cross-cultural significance. Isidore of Seville (cited in Gordon 2004:80)

provides an example of the extraordinary extent to which power was attributed to menstrual blood in the sixth century.

From contact with this [menstrual] blood, fruits fail to germinate, grape-must goes sour, plants die, trees lose their fruit, metal is corroded with rust, and bronze objects go black. Any dogs which consume it, contract rabies.

Beliefs in the power of menstrual blood have stretched across continents and religions and continued to prevail in the 21st century. Menstrual taboos in Regla de Ocha, therefore, are not an anomaly.

Oricha worship and its sacred music in Cuba evolved from the practices of those enslaved Yoruba Africans brought to the island during the trans-atlantic slave trade. Dialogue between Cuban and Yoruba religious practitioners has since continued to shape ritual practice and beliefs in Cuba. Furthermore, Cuban practitioners continue to draw on Yoruba religious discourse to implement and substantiate traditional and emerging rituals and beliefs (Meadows 2017).² In short, Yoruba ideologies generally and menstrual taboos specifically inform Regla de Ocha associated practices. Buckley (1988:53), in his structural analysis of Yoruba medicine, presents a semiotic paradigm for understanding the relationship between human health, menstruation and spirituality. He reveals how in Yoruba medicine the human body and the cosmos can be categorised according to three basic colour-coded elements; white (*funfun*), red (*pupa*) and black (*dúdí*). Colours are significant through their relationship with the cosmos and each other, and the extent to which they are

² See later in this Chapter for discussions on the African chronotope and Chapter 3 for more detailed examples of contemporary Yoruban and Cuban religious dialogue.

hidden or revealed within the human body. Red (or blood) outside of the body, for example, is semiotically considered a colour out of place and perceived as a signal of illness or danger (ibid:53).

The extent to which these Yoruba philosophies are embedded in Regla de Ocha Cuban practice is difficult to quantify. This is especially true as the taboo, which restricts women from playing consecrated batá, differs somewhat from Ayan (Añá) in parts of Yorubaland. According to Marcuzzi (2005:464) and Villepastour (2015a:157), at the time of their studies within specific regions in Yorubaland, women could be integral members of drumming compounds through their parental lineage. A woman could be head of an Ayan household, prepare and conduct Ayan ceremonies and be initiated into the Ayan cult (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:143). In these areas female proscriptions appear to revolve around not looking at or touching the consecrated packet inside the drums with the hands. Although an anomaly, women can play consecrated batá as long as the drum is sealed (Villepastour 2015a:157). Marcuzzi (2005:472) suggests that the reconstruction of the Añá cult in Cuba and the subsequent categorical proscription of female involvement were likely connected to

- i) similarities in sensibilities among the three cults which came to coalesce in a more restrictive configuration akin to the Ifá or Osanyìn cults; ii) a lack of agnate Ayan peoples willing to negotiate for a female cult presence; iii) an absence of female drummers; iv) a cabalistic, perhaps bigoted, power grab on the part of those men aligned with the early Ayan community. Nonetheless, the inclusion of the sacred material accoutrements of the Ifá and Osanyìn cults within the Cuban Ayan cult must be considered relevant to the question of how it came to be that such an unwavering restriction against female involvement in the Ayan cult emerged in Cuba.

The batá genealogy in Cuba does not flow through the female family bloodline as it does in its homeland. The bloodline has instead been replaced with dramatised, symbolic birthing rituals, where one consecrated batá set is ‘born’ from another during a secret ceremony by initiated heterosexual men.

Taboos underlying the Cuban batá tradition appear to be influenced by an amalgamation of Spanish, Yoruba and other African cultural and religious systems through the process of creolisation. This process is dynamic and ongoing, and the way practitioners engage with a range of ideologies varies greatly. For example, one woman who has been actively campaigning against taboos that prohibit women playing consecrated batá is Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró. She substantiates her argument by explaining “Yoruba traditions have white and red as two key ritual colours which symbolise semen and menstruation respectively,” and this signifies the “power and sacredness of sperm and menstruation” (pers. comm., 6/07/2015).³ Meanwhile, Marcuzzi (2005:465) claims menstrual blood has the power to “render [Yoruba] medicine ineffective just as strong medicine can disrupt the monthly cycle of the female.”

Douglas (1966:41) locates the notions of taboo and pollution in the realm of “dirt as matter out of place” and uncleanness needing cleaning, or disorder needing order. Menstrual taboos, which restrict women’s activities, can, she suggests, be considered as “a positive effort to organise the environment” (Douglas 1966:2). Through the medium of religion, society can prescribe different roles, social status, behaviours, and social environment for those who are menstruating and those who are not. Menopausal women, for example, can gain status and access to previously

³ See later in this Chapter for more details on Pouymiró’s argument against batá gender taboos.

restricted areas of ritual life (Friedl 1975; Koskoff 2014).⁴ Scholars have presented various theories to explain these cross-cultural perceptions of menstruation taboos, which include their connections to fertility and representations of life and death (Strathern 1996:67). Women's "inherent sexuality" and "insatiable and destructive sexual appetites" (Koskoff 1988:38), purity, impurity, conformity and the organisation of ideas (Douglas 1966:2; Schweitzer 2015:185), and perhaps most persuasively, as a means of establishing paternity assurance (Strassmann et al. 2012). Ultimately, menstrual taboos reflect and are shaped by the dominant culture (Shail and Howie 2005). This chapter examines how dominant culture in Cuba is in part influenced by the ubiquity of male-only heterosexual cults that proscribe prohibitions concerning menstruating women.

In the drumming cult of Añá, it is generally considered that women's bodies are detrimental to Añá, as is Añá to women's health. Although there are a number of inconsistent reasons given as to why women cannot play consecrated drums in Cuba (Sayre 2000), menstrual taboos appear to reside at the heart of the prohibition. Menstrual taboos which convey ideas about gender and sexuality, disseminated through cultural, academic and religious networks, bestow ideas of morality, order and hierarchy on society (Douglas 1966:127; Kalbian 2005:1).

As the opening quote of this chapter by Ortiz (1980:305) suggests, taboos are often conveyed in generalised terms. In practice taboos are perceived and acted on in nuanced and varied ways even within a seemingly focussed subject area such as

⁴ I experienced an example of this during an *Egun* (ancestor) ceremony I attended in Cuba. I was told to turn my back during certain parts of the ceremony, but the elderly lady next to me remained where she was. She leaned over and whispered to me that because she has reached her menopause she didn't need to turn her back (pers. comm., 15/06/2015, Havana).

sacred batá practice. Various beliefs and practices illustrate the subjective nature of religious thought and discourse as well as the agency that lies with the conveyors of spiritual ideas and reasoning. In addition, I am aware that my own personal positioning (see Chapter 1) affects the lens through which I interpret and process my ethnographic findings. By presenting a multi-vocal assemblage of lived experiences from Cuban male and female religious practitioners and drummers, I aim to shed light on some generalised assumptions concerning the subjects of taboo, menstruation, women and drumming in Cuba.

Gender Ideologies, Women, Drumming and Menstrual Taboos in Cuba

In Cuba, gender ideologies and notions of taboo and pollution are compelling because it is a nation where overlapping religious beliefs intersect in unique ways. *Cubanidad* (Crahan 2003) is a term used to express a Cuban national identity, which “encapsulates the diversity of the constituent elements of Cuba’s religious, social and cultural phenomena, including the holding of diverse religious beliefs by a single individual” (ibid:37). Campos (pers. comm., 28/10/2017) explained, for example, that nearly everyone in Cuba has been baptised as Catholic. Therefore, it is common for a *santero* to be baptised, an *olúbatá*, to be a member of the Abakuá cult, a *palero* (a person who practises Palo) and a *babalawo* (Ifá priest) all at the same time.⁵ Regla de Ocha has elements of Catholicism and Palo.

The symbiotic relation between Palo and Regla de Ocha (Palmié 2002:191) is significant with regards to the fact that they share similar gender ideologies and

⁵Accordingly, key respondents in this research have multiple religious titles. Irian “Chinito” López is a *palero*, *olúbatá*, *santero*, *babalawo* and Abakuá member. Angel Bolaños is a *santero*, Abakuá member and *olúbatá*. Javier Campos is an *olúbatá*, *babalawo*, *santero* and Abakuá member.

menstrual taboos.⁶ In Cuba divergent heterogeneous belief systems deriving from different continents and cultures are dynamic, interconnected and constantly evolving making it more useful to consider Cuban religiosity as being part of a spiritual complex. Gender ideologies and notions of taboo associated with these spiritual practices are similarly compound and fluid. Flores (2001:54) identifies “two main religious currents that nurtured the Cuban religious expressions of today”:

Catholicism from the Iberian Peninsula and African-derived religious practices from present day Nigeria and the Congo basin. Social gender norms in Cuba were constructed from interreligious dialogue and transcultural syncretism processes between European and African belief systems (Hearn 2008:155). Comparative studies of syncretisation and parallelism between Catholicism and Regla de Ocha religious structures are numerous (Trotman 1976; Marcuzzi 2005; Eades 1980; Palmié 2002; Palmié 2013). However, there has been a lack of published works on gender and religion in Cuba and the creolisation of menstrual taboos in the Caribbean.⁷ This leaves open many questions, not least how overlapping religious systems impact concepts of gender and social organisation in Cuba. In order to address this research vacuum whilst staying within the remit of this thesis, the following text focuses on religion, gender, taboo and its relation to ritual music in the African-derived spiritual practices and cults of Regla de Ocha, Añá and Osáin.

⁶ Palo is a religious practice that centres on communicating with the dead. The *tata nganga* holds the highest religious authority in Palo, and the term means "father of the *nganga*"; the *mayordomo* is the second in command followed by the *yayi* or *madrina* (godmother). The *yayi* is qualified to officiate any ceremony, attend to participants of the fiesta, and the *nganga* (a mental cauldron that contains spiritual objects) itself if her two male superiors are absent (pers. comm., Trimiño 22/11/17).

⁷ Published works on gender and religion in Cuba include Flores (2001); Robaina (2010, 2011); Otero and Falola (2013); Beliso-De Jesús (2015) and Hechavarría (2017).

Santería is considered a uniquely Cuban spiritual practice, formed through a process of creolisation with other belief systems which has become globalised in the last few decades. The absence of a central governing authority means there is no unified code, and practices can be open to interpretation (Vélez 2000:16).⁸ This leads to the heterogeneity of ritual practices on a continuum from nuanced to distinct, between one *rama* (religious branch or family) and another. The transmission of ritual knowledge is undertaken by initiated priests (or elders) who assume authority through years of advanced ritual involvement and the initiation of others. Among some *ramas*, ritual practice and the hierarchy of roles can be proscriptive and stratified according to conceptions of gender and sexuality.

The notion that “women are dangerous to drummers” from Ortiz’s earlier quote (1980:305) stems from the idea that women can contaminate male drummers through sexual contact. His remark is significant for a number of reasons. Ortiz’s career, spanning a fifty-year period, has been crucial to the establishment of Afro-Cuban studies and modern articulations of the Cuban national identity (Marcuzzi 2005:372). Ortiz’s recorded thoughts were, until recently, consumed by a largely uncritical religious and academic audience who came to know and rely upon his work (Moore 1994:32). There are limited other sources available from this period to ascertain whether Ortiz’s statement represented beliefs generally or just those of a small group. Ortiz does not specifically name his sources and they did not represent the whole African religious diaspora in Cuba (Villepastour 2015:7; see also Moore 2018). Furthermore, the experiences of women were neither sought nor seen as a priority by

⁸ The Yoruba Association, based in Havana, is a government-funded institute, which has attempted to act as a centralising religious authority. Although members enjoy some autonomy in this capacity, many religious practitioners I spoke with are sceptical about their political affiliations and as a result choose not to become members.

researchers at this time. Nonetheless, through Ortiz's work the beliefs and practices of a select few became promulgated and absorbed into Cuban culture.

Broad statements, which claim universalities relating to taboos, women and drumming, are problematic not least because they ignore nuances and anomalies, but also because they get launched as a cultural artifact and folded back into the religious and academic milieu, a process Palmié calls the 'ethnographic interface' (Palmié 2013).⁹ Furthermore, such claims entirely overlook the lived experience of a minority community of female drummers who do in fact drum within Afro-religious contexts in Cuba. In Palo, for example, Raidel Hernandez Trimiño (the *tata nganga* of local Palo house La Contienda Bira Montaña in Matanzas) explains that women are prohibited from playing consecrated Palo drums "for the same reason as the batá liturgy" (pers. comm., 22/11/17). However, in houses where non-consecrated drums are used, women can play if they are not menstruating (ibid).¹⁰ Meanwhile, many female batá drummers I spoke with had played non-consecrated batá in Regla de Ocha rituals, an act considered sacrilegious by some ritual musicians (see Chapter 4).

There are other types of drum and song traditions that can be used instead of batá to officiate Santería rituals. Common traditions include *güiro* and *bembé*, played with three drums and a bell. Each musical genre uses the same song corpus, although batá has a much wider canon of both rhythms and songs.

⁹ In his thesis (2000:129) Willie Ramos also claimed "for the most part, bata drumming (or drumming of any kind, for that matter) is taboo for women in Africa as well as in the Diaspora."

¹⁰ Trimiño's daughter, Buru Hernandez (pers. comm., 22/11/2017), who is a ritual drummer, explained that although in their religious house they use consecrated drums, which she cannot play, an un-consecrated drum is set up so she is able to play alongside the men during Palo rituals regularly.



Plate 2.1: *Güiro* in Guanabacoa (from left): Iris Pelladito (*clave*), Geraldo Pelladito (*chekeré*), Reineris Feliu Torres (Dayami's cousin) (*chekeré*), Dayami Pelladito (*conga*) (Photo by Vicky Jassey 7/9/2015)

The Pelladito family from Guanabacoa includes four sisters: Dayami, Eneida, Tami and Iris Pelladito, who perform *güiro* ritually several times a week (see Plate 2.1), along with their father Geraldo Pelladito and cousin Feliu Torres. They also regularly perform *cajon de muertos*, a ritual ceremony conducted on wooden boxes for the deceased ancestors.¹¹

Even though there is no apparent theological prohibition against women drumming on non-consecrated drums in African-derived rituals (Chapter 4), Dayami

¹¹ The Pelladito family in Guanabacoa were the only female group I encountered who work professionally as ritual musicians in Cuba (see also Chapter 4). They also have a folkloric group called 'Batá Show', playing a range of folkloric religious drumming styles (see also Chapter 4).

Pelladito explained that she and her sisters had come under fierce criticism from men and *omo* Añás for their participation in ritual drumming because of its association with female prohibitions and menstrual taboos (pers. comm., 9/8/2015).



Plate 2.2: *Tambor* with consecrated *bembé* and *batá* drums, Havana (Photo by Vicky Jassey 16/7/2014)

Female *batá* drummer Regla Palacio explained that in Santiago women have been known to play *bembé* drums in rituals (pers. comm., Palacio 5/7/2015). However, during a *tambor* in Havana, I was told that the Matanzas *bembé* drums being played alongside *fundamento* *batá* were consecrated and as a result women were not permitted to play them (see Plate 2.2). Perhaps not surprisingly, empirical evidence of women drumming in religious ceremonies in Cuba has come from the

lived experiences of the female drummers themselves and from female ethnographers, many of who play batá themselves (Pryor 1999; Sayre 2000; Vincent [Villepastour] 1998, 2004, 2006; Villepastour 2015; Hagedorn 2001, 2015). Whilst instances of women drumming in ceremonies are not extensive and do not represent contemporary mainstream Cuban practice, they collectively dispel generalised assertions that women do not drum in African-derived religious musical rituals in Cuba.

Although I am aware of the potential issues of binary gender comparisons (Derrida 1976; Koskoff 2014), women's ritual drumming exists in Cuba in an entirely different capacity to that of men's because of the taboos around menstruation and consecrated drums. As a result of the taboos, which restrict women from drumming in rituals, their experiences and relationships to the drums are entirely different from their male counterparts. For this reason, in the following text I separate the voices of the male drumming majority from the female drumming minority as a way of illustrating the intersections, differences and nuances in the way taboos, menstruation, access and batá drumming are conceptualised and enacted in Cuba.

Women, Menstrual Taboos and Añá - The Male Voice

For the vast majority of *omo* Añás even the physical presence of women and gay men near their *oricha* is considered profane and dangerous (see Chapter 5). There is, however, an exception to this rule when all initiates are expected to ritually salute Añá by kissing and touching with their forehead all three batá during a ceremony. The late *olúbatá* Ahmed Díaz (pers. comm., 29/08/2014), explained the complexity of the prohibition and why women and gay men saluting the drums in ritual is permitted:

There is a phrase which says ‘*Oba unkuele lerio oba unkuele leri Añá*’ which means ‘all great kings have to bow their heads onto Añá’ [...] It’s like when soldiers are in front of a king they bow and show respect so there is no aggression.

Here Díaz implies that the ritual act of subservience neutralises the risks associated with female contact with Añá.

Javier Campos (pers. comm., 20/07/2015) identifies a number of generic taboos for drummers associated with the spiritual care and maintenance of *fundamento* batá.

The day before playing you cannot have sex; you have to be early at the place where you will play, take out the drums and air them... you’ve got to learn how to toss *obi* to the drum [...] ¹² When it is time to have a meal [before the ceremony] those who are not *tamboreros* cannot sit at that table, not even *babalawos* [...] The drums cannot be put on the ground. ¹³ This is only done when you’re going to throw *obi* to them. About the drums and women, about that topic, there is just one thing... [the *oricha*] Osáin.

Two of these taboos are connected to menstruation. The first relates to the belief about the possibility of female contamination. The power of menstruation is believed to be so strong that even indirect contact with a woman—via a man who has had sex with a woman regardless of whether she is menstruating or menopausal—is considered dangerous or harmful to both the drummer and the potency of Añá.

¹² Campos refers to divination using four pieces of coconut.

¹³ *Tamborero(s)* can also be pronounced or spelled *tambolero*.

Men who have had sex with a woman preceding a religious activity are called *sucio* (unclean). Ramos (2000:206) claimed that ‘unclean’ men who have had sexual contact with woman prior to playing Añá can experience “grave repercussions” such as “impotence, sterility, or genital bleeding.” However, none of the drummers I spoke with in Cuba in 2014 and 2015 voiced this concern. Instead, they said ‘contamination’ through sexual contact with a woman before a *tambor* would cause the tension of the batá skins to *aflojarse* (to loosen).¹⁴ López (pers. comm., 17/08/2015) explained “If I play a *tambor* and the day before I have had sexual contact with my wife the other drummers will realise because the sound of the drum goes down.” This is an experience he explained had happened to him twice. Campos’s final reference to Osáin and female proscriptions in his earlier quote is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In Matanzas, the musical director of AfroCuba de Matanzas and *omo* Añá, Ildaberto Berriel “Puchito” and *omo* Añá Orlando Álvarez (pers. comm., 14/10/2017) believe that the male energy of the Añá fraternity is offset by the role of *madrina del tambor* (godmother of the drum).¹⁵ A *madrina del tambor* is a respected member of the religious community who is chosen because of her age, experience and religious knowledge. She is responsible for advising *omo* Añás on personal and religious matters, dress codes, and the religious significance of musical repertoire relating to specific religious houses. She also washes and takes care of the *bandeles* (ritual batá covers) and is in charge of the flowers and other items needed during the ceremonies. This role injects a strong matriarchal presence into the batá cult in Matanzas, one

¹⁴ Respondents include Campos, Rodríguez, López, Bolaños and Joan Argüelles González.

¹⁵ I had not heard of the role of *madrina del tambor* until after my field trip when I came across the title in a book (Santana 2014:67). I was able to contact “Puchito” and Álvarez to ask about this position via a mutual friend in Matanzas, Luis Bran. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak directly with women who fulfil this role.

which I had never heard reference to in batá circles or academic discourse until I came across its passing mention in Santana (2014:67). I later asked Campos (pers. comm., 28/10/2017) if such a role existed in Havana. He told me this role for women is rare and the responsibilities are somewhat limited to making, mending and washing the *bandeles* (beaded covers) and to the *madrina* being present at the *cumpleaños del tambor* (the consecration birthday of the drums).¹⁶

Generally, there is a strict code of secrecy, which limits what information *omo Añás* and *babalawos* are willing to disclose with regards to the justification of female incompatibility with Añá. However, it is said to be connected to the consecrated packet housed inside the batá receptacles (also known as *el secreto*, *la carga*, *el Añá* or *afowobo*) (Ortiz 1954:288; Vélez 2000:120-27; Marcuzzi 2005 429-472; Villepastour 2015:140; Hagedorn 2015:150). This resolute secrecy about the true nature of the female taboo and Añá renders any liturgical debates locked strictly within emic male-heterosexual cult practice. These secrets are guarded vigilantly and knowledge of the complete consecration process is limited to a select few within the fraternity. Campos (pers. comm., 12/07/2015) explained, as far as he was able, Añá's incompatibility with women:

From the ceremonial point of view, Añá has a thing that cannot have the same contact twice. I cannot tell you what it is, that thing inside the drum... but that thing in there... it's like... let me set an example and see if I can explain myself. You cannot give birth to the same child twice. You have a son today and the next one you will have next year. But a kid you give birth to you can only deliver one time. So you understand? Same thing with Añá... Añá cannot give birth twice. What happens with

¹⁶ See Chapter 5 for further discussions on the role of *madrinas* in Abakuá practice.

women and menstrual periods? It is the time when the woman is producing her eggs so she can have a baby, right? Scientifically speaking that's what it is... she is undergoing a period of time when she can have a baby. But Añá, since it already has a... it already has something related to that then it cannot give birth twice. That's why Añá and women cannot come together.

Members of the fraternity are sworn to secrecy regarding the ingredients that make up '*el secreto*' (the secret package inside a consecrated drum). Campos implies that because of this he is limited in what he can reveal about the true reason behind female batá proscriptions. However, his comments indicate strongly towards aspects of ritual, female fertility and birth as the crux of female prohibition whilst also providing an example of the way men attempt to recreate women's power of procreation through religious practice. The fact Campos chose to frame his argument through biological rather than religious language, claiming women have increased (as apposed to decreased) fertility during menstruation, reveals the complexities associated with explaining female gender taboos to those outside of the brotherhood.

Angel Bolaños (pers. comm., 26/08/2014), one of the most respected and well-known batá drummers in Havana, on the other hand gave only one reason as to why women are not permitted to play consecrated drums.

It's not a list, it's only one. Because women menstruate, and that doesn't combine with the *fundamento* of the *tambor*. It's not compatible with the *fundamento* of the *tambor*. That is the matter, the only one [...] Look, here women who are menstruating can't work in anything to do with *santo* [*oricha* worship]. They get asked to work in *santo* and who can tell if they are menstruating or not? There have been cases when you go into the bathroom and find that thing there, and that shows lack of respect.

Bolaño identifies a tension and distrust of women regarding their menstruation, a point further highlighted by Ifá priest and batá drummer Justo Pelladito [JP] (pers. comm., 4/08/2015) (uncle to the Pelladito sisters in Guanabacoa mentioned earlier), who worked with the Conjunto Folkórico Nacional de Cuba as a percussionist, dancer and singer from 1962-1992. He explained:

JP: When you are dancing near the drums the drummer doesn't know if you are menstruating or not, so to be sure he asks you to move away.

VJ: The men don't trust the women or *santeras* to say if they are menstruating or not?

JP: It is a part of it. If there is a man there is no problem [...] let me tell you something, not everyone is honest or sincere. You can see a woman who has her menstruation and she doesn't say because she doesn't want to miss out on the party.

Bolaños and Pelladito are both part of the older generation of drummers and their opinions possibly represent conservative views on menstruation and women's ritual involvement. However, age is not necessarily a marker of conservative principles. Milián "Galí" Riverí, an *olúbatá* who was responsible for bringing the first set of Añá to Santiago from Matanzas in 1989 (Luaces 2014:130) and who is from the same generation as Bolaños and Pelladito, claimed "women can play [consecrated] drums when they aren't menstruating" (pers. comm., Riverí 5/07/2015). Nonetheless, Riverí does not allow his wife, Regla Palacios, who is a batá player, to play his consecrated batá as he explained it would not be accepted, although he does not personally subscribe to an absolute female exclusion.

Menstrual taboos surrounding consecrated batá are not lifted during pre-puberty or the menopausal phase in a woman's life. Curious about this, I asked my *omo* Añá respondents why this was. Bolaños explained that it is connected to “the secret” but “the real reason is because you're a woman” (pers. comm., 3/8/2015). Many concluded that in the end it was biological sex that excluded women and not menstruation that underpinned the main premise of the female prohibition.¹⁷ López (pers. comm., 2/08/2015) was unique in his response,

I don't have an answer for that. I have never said no they can't. It has to be a much deeper investigation [...] I don't agree with a complete limitation. I just don't know how far to take it. I am very careful about experimenting because I don't know what would happen. I would like to be the first but I don't know what the consequences would be. You are always dealing with the possibility of death and bad consequences.

López's comments came as a surprise to me as it was the first time I had heard an initiated drummer and drum maker admit to not having an answer as to why women cannot play if they don't menstruate. Furthermore, his admission that a deeper investigation is needed and “I would like to be the first” (ibid) may indicate he is very much open to the possibility and might one day permit non-menstruating women to play his *fundamento*. López, however, is known for his pioneering approach to religion and music despite being from the conservative Cuban-style Regla-de-Ocha-Ifá, though he prides himself on providing sound justification for his religious and musical modifications. Whilst it could also be argued that once women reach their menopause they are too old to obtain the sufficient musical accomplishment to play in

¹⁷ Informants include Javier Campos, Octavio Rodriguez, Ángel Bolaños and Justo Pelladito.

rituals (Marcuzzi 2005), this is not necessarily the case for female batá drummers such as Socarras, Pelladito, Eva Despaigne and Dagmaris Despaigne, who have been playing batá most of their lives. As López's comments suggest, notions about female prohibitions are continually being reshaped, modified and reproduced by successive generations of religious godchildren who embed their ideas and practices into a dynamic process which forms part of the "invented tradition" paradigm (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).

A belief that female contact with *fundamento* can cause serious harm or even death underpins female proscriptions and the need for heterosexual males to physically protect women from contact (Vélez 2000:156; Schweitzer 2003:144). The late Ahmed Díaz (pers. comm., 29 August 2014) explained that

A badly placed drum, for example, you know that they are always [hung] high up, so if you [a woman] pass underneath four times it's already too much. Once is ok but if it's four times it's too much. That's why the *tambor* should have its own private room. Not just bleeding, the whole health of the person deteriorates.

It is this belief that creates an ambiguous 'no-go' zone around the sacred drums.¹⁸

Díaz was the only drummer I met who articulated he had experienced a woman's health deteriorate following close contact with Añá. He told me of an incident where a woman was taken to the hospital because she had been in close contact with his *fundamento*, which had been hanging in her house for a few days. The argument that it is dangerous for women to come into close proximity to Añá is further complicated by the fact that it is common to see women inadvertently brush up against consecrated

¹⁸ This concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

drums in a ritual space. However, I am not aware if they later experienced adverse physical health as a result of this close contact (see also Schweitzer 2013:62).

Nonetheless, the boundaries that define sacred ‘no-go’ female spaces and how they are maintained remain somewhat nebulous.

Women, Menstrual Taboos and Añá - The Female Voice

Flores claims that the majority of *santeras* accept the religious restrictions imposed on them “as something which should not be questioned” (2001:60). She adds that some women,

accepting concessions by men that benefit them, go so far as to overvalue the place assigned to them. Another group accepts the place given to them, with the difference that they admit to the discrimination entailed though without proposing a change that would transform this situation.

Hechavarría (2017) concurs with Flores by claiming that her research on a small group of *santeras* in Havana concludes that women’s shared ideas about the tasks and functions they perform in Santería, compared with the positions held by men, are based on notions concerning biological determinism. *Santeras*, she explains, defend their inferior position with essentialist ideas, which naturalise their position (113). One example of the way the majority of female initiates subscribe to gender taboos can be seen in Plate 2.3. Here female initiates are complying with the gender taboo by keeping their distance from the consecrated batá in front of them.



Plate 2.3: Santero Initiation *Tambor* (from left): singer Yayma Machado (bottom left corner), drummers Afimaye Galarraga, Joan González and Odelkis Socarras. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 3/09/2015)

Contrary to comments made by Hechavarría and Flores, however, many of the *santeras* whom I spoke with did consider their religious position to be subordinate to men as a result of what they referred to as *machismo* (an area I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4).¹⁹ Socarras, for example, who is a *santera* from a religious family of *omo Añás*, explained, “Women have always been concerned about why can we not play *fundamento* drums. These questions have always been in place” (pers. comm., 18/07/2015). It is relevant to point out that many of these women were either drummers or educated well beyond statutory high school level.²⁰ These opinions,

¹⁹ See Chapter 1 for a definition of this term.

²⁰ These observations were drawn from female initiated *santeras* and batá drummers including: Eva Despaigne, Havana (pers. comm., 30/08/2014); Dagmaris Despaigne, Cardenas (pers. comm., 13/09/2015); Aleida Socarras, Havana (pers. comm., 18/7/2015); Yaima Pelladito, Matanzas and Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró, Santiago (pers. comm., 4/7/2015); to name a few. I heard a similar rhetoric from two educated *santeras* in response to the paper,

however, were not only restricted to women; I also heard several male respondents, some of whom were also religious drummers, critique what they also perceived as gender inequality in the religion.²¹ However, a few considerations need to be taken into account to contextualise these results. Do these opinions form part of a larger shift in thought regarding gender, religion and power in Cuba? Or, are they limited to a marginalised group of individuals who by virtue of their profession or class are already challenging the gender status quo? How affected were respondents by my positionality as a Western female drummer? Might I have gravitated towards people who shared my social values? Would, for example, a male indigenous or Western ethnographer, initiated into Añá and/or Santería asking similar questions have received the same responses? I suggest the answer is probably no.

Women in Regla de Ocha do, however, acquire positions of religious authority through years of initiation, or through working closely with powerful religious men, or by being their wives or daughters or, as discussed earlier, when they have reached their menopause.²² Regardless of how scholars or some female practitioners interpret gendered systems of authority in Regla de Ocha-Ifá, there is a growing global community of *santeras* who are clearly empowered by their relationship to the *oricha*, the divination systems of Regla de Ocha and Ifá and the roles prescribed to them. At a surface level, although women appear to hold less religious agency compared to that of heterosexual and gay men, they make up a large proportion of the religious

“*Menstruación, Bendición o Maldición?*” (Menstruation, Blessing or Curse?) given by Pouymiró during an academic conference as part of the Festival del Caribe, Santiago. I also heard this from *santeras* Marilys Zaya Shuman, the Director of *Mujers y Muchachas Revista* (Women and Girls Magazine) (pers. comm., 20/7/2015), and Annet Sanchez, a professional translator who worked with me during my fieldwork.

²¹ Among the *omo* Añás were: Irian López (pers. comm., 2/8/2015); Joan Argüelles González (pers. comm., 5/8/2015); and Milián “Galí” Riverí, (pers. comm., Riverí 5/07/2015).

²² Brown (2002:291) states “many of the most important *madrinas* of the twentieth century were married to *babalawos*.”

community and their knowledge, hard work, skills and dedication to religion is and always has been essential to the religious practice and its growth. Ultimately, perceptions of gender oppression and hierarchy are relative to one's positionality, privilege, status, and/or intersectional place in the world.

Among all of the female drummers I spoke with in Cuba there was a unified understanding that identified menstruation as the central ideology that underpinned their exclusion from playing *fundamento* in rituals. Regla Aleida Socarras (b. 1966) has been playing *aberikulá* (non-consecrated batá) since she was eleven.²³ She is part of a prominent Añá family living in Havana. Her late father Fermín Nani was a renowned batá drummer and her son Odelkis Socarras is an *omo* Añá and a *babalawo* currently playing regularly in Havana. She was a member of the all-female group *Ibbu Okun* that travelled internationally for a number of years. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Socarras (pers. comm., 18/07/2015), which sums up the kind of response given to women who ask why they cannot play consecrated batá.

VJ: Was it ever explained to you why women cannot play?

AN: No one ever did.

VJ: Did you ask?

AN: Many times, I have asked and no one knows what to answer. No one has told me yet the reason why not, which is the answer that I really want to know.

VJ: Your father, your son?²⁴

AN: No, everybody tells me the same thing; that women are cursed, that women menstruate, all those arguments are no answer to me, see?

²³ Aleida explained that she does not use her father's surname, Nani, although this is the title by which she is often referred to in published works such as Vincent (2006) and Villepastour (2013).

²⁴ Aleida's son, Odelkis Socarras, is an *omo* Añá and a *babalawo* who plays regularly in Havana.

Other female drummers I spoke with described similar responses to their enquiries into why they are prohibited from playing *fundamento*. Although many subscribe to the notion that they are incompatible with Añá when they menstruate, a majority believed that *machismo* was a central component of female prohibitions once women had reached their menopause.²⁵ My ethnographic data implied that respect for the religion and its methods of imparting knowledge, combined with a fear of being ostracised by the religious community for inappropriate behaviour or questioning, were reasons why many women did not continue to pursue this line of enquiry. However, it is necessary to consider that the women I spoke with represent only a small minority of the larger religious milieu. Whilst powerful religious men are the architects who ultimately have the power to interpret and define menstrual taboos, the status quo is maintained by all genders that reify and embody ideologies through repeated ritual performance.

Exceptions to the Rule

Cuban gender prohibitions in ritual performance, although influenced by Yoruba religious ideology, are predisposed to collective and individual innovations. During my first interview with Bolaños (pers. comm., 26/08/2014) he explained,

²⁵ Respondents who held this view included: Eva Despaigne, Deborah Frontella, Yaima Pelladito, Dayami Pelladito, Regla Palacios, Nagybe Pouymiró, Dagmaris Despaigne and Aleida Socarras.

women shouldn't be behind or beside the drum because it affects the drum, the sound changes, it causes destruction and it brings problems for the [male] drummers, for the drum and for her as well, problems!²⁶

When I went back to interview him in 2015 his position had changed (pers. comm., 4/08/2015):

Most people [women and men] in Havana touch the batá drums, but nothing happens. One thing is touching it and another is playing it. I live alone with my wife, and she has to touch it to put it on the table or on a chair. The thing is that there is a huge difference between touching the drum and playing it, for women or men who are not sworn.

This change is maybe explained by the fact that in early 2014, Bolaños had a stroke that left him paralysed down one side and unable to use his left arm. Whether Bolaños relaxed his conception of the rules in order to accommodate his disability or whether this shift directly reflects changes in attitudes towards gender prohibitions generally is not clear.

Female proscriptions regarding the batá, however, can fluctuate to accommodate individual needs. *Olúbatá* Felipe Garcia Villamil, for example, explains “women are kept from playing the drums in order to protect them, not the drums. It is believed that the spirit that inhabits the drums, desirous of blood, may cause women to bleed to death” (Vélez 2000:156). Yet when he moved to the United States and was unable to return to Cuba to get his *fundamento*, it was an American *santera* called

²⁶ In Matanzas batá tradition it is common to see, when an *iyawó* is being presented to Añá, the *madrina* of the *iyawó* standing behind the drum. This also happens in Havana if the *madrina* is from Matanzas.

Basha Alperin Aladé who was called upon by Villamil and her Cuban religious godmother, Rosa Leyva Chango Laramie to bring his drums from Cuba to the US (pers comm Basha 23/09/2018).²⁷

Basha, herself a drummer, who at the time understood women were not allowed to play or touch the batá for religious reasons, agreed to the undertaking (circa 1980-1986). Villamil explained, “She brought the outside things, the ropes, the secret, the ache, all of that, she brought all of that [...] I needed the drums because without them I was nobody” (ibid 117). Basha clarified that Villamil subsequently invited her to become the *madrina del tambor*, which following her godmother’s advice she turned down (pers. comm., Basha 23/09/2018). Basha added that she had no recollection of any discussions with Villamil or her *madrina* regarding the potential dangers believed to come from close contact with Añá, nor was she aware of any ill health following the operation (pers. comm., 23/09/2018).²⁸ Another example of where concessions to the menstrual taboo are made is found among some *omo* Añás who use *omiero*, a spiritual cleansing liquid, as an antidote so they can play consecrated drums after previously having sex with a woman (pers. comm., López 2/08/2015).

Apart from the examples outlined above, during my field research in 2015, I had several personal experiences that led me to believe that there are significant shifts in attitudes towards gender batá prohibitions in Cuba. On one occasion the renowned Nigerian-revisionist Frank Cabrera, whilst proudly showing me his batá hanging on

²⁷ Basha asked to be referred to by her first name.

²⁸ In 1986, Basha went to live in Ifé, Nigeria for two years where she explained she regularly performed on consecrated Ayan (Añá) batá. Relative to broader narratives of gender, batá and change, she also informed me that the influential drummer who told her that women can not play batá (not even *aberikulá*) later became her batá teacher (pers. comm., 23/09/2018).

the wall, asked me if I played Añá. I replied “no!,” and he then proceeded to pass me his okónkolo. When I refused to take it, Cabrera repeated “take it, take it there’s nothing in it” so I asked if they were *aberikulá* to which he replied “no.” I still did not feel comfortable taking the drum as I was unable to obtain a clear answer as to what kind of consecration the batá had gone through.

Afterwards he proceeded to call a leading *babalawo*, Taiwo Abimbola in Nigeria, in order to ask him if women could play batá in Nigeria. Abimbola replied that he did not know but would let him know on the following day. I made numerous enquiries to Cabrera as to Abimbola’s response to this question, but even after a month of asking, Abimbola had not provided an answer. The next day, when I re-visited Cabrera to attend a *tambor* that incorporated the novel appearance of an *Egúngún* masquerade (a Yoruba ritual performance connected to the ancestors), the lead drummer, Hector Larduet, told me that the batá were consecrated with Añá.²⁹ Cabrera is an experienced religious practitioner who has a deep understanding of both Cuban-style and Nigerian-style-Regla de Ocha-Ifá. His reasoning behind attempting to pass me a consecrated batá remains unclear. Possibly it was connected to his position at the forefront of religious change in Cuba (Meadows 2017).

On another occasion an *olúbatá* and *babalawo* (who is not a Nigerian style Regla-de-Ocha-Ifá practitioner) suggested he would consider initiating me to Añá once I reached my menopause if I signed a declaration saying that any illness I incurred after the ceremony was not his responsibility.³⁰ Although I had not said I wanted to undergo such a ceremony, he apparently assumed that because I play batá

²⁹ I discuss the re-Yorubisation of batá in Cuba in more detail in Chapter 3.

³⁰ Because of the controversial nature of this practitioner’s comments, for ethical reasons I decided not to disclose his name.

and I am conducting research into gender and batá I would naturally want to be sworn and play in ceremonies. Whether he would actually have gone through with the ceremony is impossible to say. I also met two Nigerian-style Ifá priests who independently said they would consider swearing women to Añá.

Although the refusal to take the consecrated batá drum from Cabrera was a spontaneous reaction, I retrospectively processed the reaction as being not out of fear for my health but out of respect for the governing ideologies of the practice I am researching. I was equally surprised, if not more so, by the offers made to initiate me to Añá. I had been visiting Cuba and taking lessons for many years and I had never heard of or experienced such a monumental shift in thinking with regards to women and Añá. I was left wondering if this was a sign of change or part of the ethnographic footprint left in the field by researchers who, regardless of their positionality, subtlety or lack of it, impact the subject of their study. However, these opportunities made me think seriously about what my own positionality was with regards to Añá and the batá menstruation taboos, rather than just document the opinions of others inside the tradition. This was not something I had ever had to contemplate seriously before, because the possibility of playing Añá had simply not been within the realm of possibility.

My life experience and research has led me to believe that menstruation taboos are a social construction that help us order our world. Like many of my Cuban female counterparts (see Chapter 3 and 4), if it were generally accepted that women could play *fundamento* I would, if permitted, consider participating. I admit that initially when these offers were made to me I felt a sense of excitement not because I saw myself going through with such a controversial ritual and being an agent of such radical change, but because the offers themselves signalled change in favour of

women playing. My positionality means I personally do not subscribe to the gender taboos restricting women from playing batá. However, I also understand that I am somebody who was not born into this tradition, nor am I fully initiated into the religion, and therefore my understanding of the spiritual significance of the power of menstruation is limited in this respect.

The deviations from the norm outlined above illustrate dynamic sacro-social processes that form part of the invented tradition paradigm (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). History demonstrates that ideologies, practices and taboos, which inform concepts of tradition, can change radically and give the appearance of happening rapidly. Traditions that survive and thrive, it appears, are those which can adapt and respond to the present as opposed to being dependent on or locked into practices of the past. The incorporation of Osáin into the batá's consecration process, the initiation of White men into the fraternity in 1985 (Schweitzer 2013:52), and the recent acceptance and posting on social media of video recordings of *tambor de fundamento* ceremonies (Windress 2017:37), are three apt examples of radical changes to the *batá* tradition brought about by changing sacro-socio-political landscapes. Change, therefore, is in constant motion and is dependent not on the actions of one person but the push and pull of oppositional forces from a whole collective. It is the kinetic force, produced by stretching and contracting the boundaries of subjective ideas, that constantly re-shapes, in both drastic and subtle ways, how taboos are enacted and conceptualised.

Osáin, Añá and Female Prohibitions

Pertinent to female prohibitions in the Añá cult are the two complimentary belief systems that were folded into Añá's reconstruction in the Cuban diaspora, Ifá and Osáin. Marcuzzi (2005:470) explains that the ritual use of medicine and the overlapping of spiritual coherencies between Ifá, Osáin and Añá led to the introduction of a spiritual confederacy in Añá reconstitution in Cuba. It is the symbolic involvement of Osáin, the *oricha* of herbs and medicine, in the consecration and maintenance of Añá, however, that practitioners believe to be the single biggest obstacle to female participation (Marcuzzi 2005:463; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:108; pers. comm., Campos 20/07/2015; López 2/08/2015). The significance of Osáin's relationship with Añá, López explained (pers. comm., 2/08/2015), is that "Osáin is the patron of Añá."

Osáin is 'received' in material form by *babalawos* and owners of sets of *fundamento*. As Campos (pers. comm., 14/01/2018) explains, however, the Osáin 'received' by drum owners has a different '*camino*' (Lit: pathway) from the Osáin "received" by *babalawos*. Like most other *orichas*, Osáin is fed blood during the batá consecration processes, *juramento* ceremonies (initiation of *omo* Añás), the drums' *cumpleaños* (an annual marking of a batá consecration) and in cases whenever Añá is fed (which could be whenever they are ritually played) (pers. comm., Campos 14/01/2018).

In Santería, an *osainista* is initiated to work ritually with herbs and medicine (pers. comm., Campos 14/01/2018; Concha-Holmes 2010:16), a role that apparently women can undertake when they are postmenopausal. Nonetheless, female *osainistas*

are hard to locate.³¹ The only suggestion of their existence I came across was from López, who claimed to know a *babalawo* acquainted with a female *osainista*. However, I was unable to trace her or any other female *osainistas* during my research in Cuba, confirming a similar assertion made by Marcuzzi (2005:463). The impression is that whilst menopausal women working with Osáin are permitted in Cuba, they are an anomaly.³²

Marcuzzi theorises that at the dawn of the batá tradition in Cuba there were a limited number of Ayan specialists who had knowledge of all aspects of its Añá practice (ibid). The folding together of Añá, Ifá and Osáin into the consecration process provided aspects of balance orthodoxy and authenticity to an emerging tradition (Marcuzzi 2005:434). López (pers. comm., 2/8/2015) explains that Osáin's involvement with Añá came about because it was seen in the *odu* (religious text) and because it was observed that initiated drummers were continually in poor health. He explained that although drummers are initiated into Añá, this is to “cleanse the person's energy so they can play and see inside the drum” (ibid). Osáin's involvement on the other hand provides the drummer with the necessary spiritual protection for health and wellbeing (ibid). However, Osáin, he explained, is dangerous to people regardless of their gender but especially to men who have had sexual contact with a

³¹ Campos (pers. comm., 14/01/2018) noted that he too has not met any female *osainistas* and what he believes is that women receive yet another version of Osáin, which is a *guia* (guide).

³² Conversely, Osvaldo Villamil (cited in Concha-Holmes (2010:224), an *osainista* who is head of Sta. Teresa cabildo in Matanzas, suggests there is no dogma prohibiting women from being *osainistas* and suggests it is because “you [women] have given up your spaces” (ibid:224). Villamil also claims that “in Africa there were no *osainistas*, the concept of an *Osainista* is a Cuban concept” (ibid:223). This notion conflicts, however, with Marcuzzi's (2005:468) research, which identifies the Yoruba Osáin cult not only as containing “male-dominated professions that recognise their patron as male” but also as one whose female proscriptions “tend to be more restrictive than in Cuba.”

woman because Osáin “eats blood.” This is a subject he conceded “is difficult to talk about” (ibid).

As mentioned previously, initiates are prohibited from disclosing the profound reason as to why women and Osáin are incompatible. However, Campos (pers. comm., 20/07/2015) explained as far as he was able to:

Osáin was the *oricha* that never sympathised with women, and Añá depends on Osáin [...] when they [women] have their period they don’t get along well with Osáin... there is something... a connection that won’t... they don’t get along well, you see?

Whilst some changes to tradition and concepts of taboo can happen subtly over time, others are more radical. Enrique Orozco Rubio, a Nigerian-led *babalawo* who is an *aláña* (someone who is *omo* Añá and who owns a set of *fundamento* but is not a *batá* drummer, see Velez 2000:29-50) is currently challenging and reinterpreting aspects of Regla-de-Oricha-Ifá-Añá-Osáin gender ideology.³³ He claims (pers. comm., 30/06/2015) that

[T]here is no problem with women and Osáin [...] The taboo exists in the minds of the practitioners, not in the literature nor in the rites and much less the *orichas* [...] In the eyes of *Oludumaré*, the supreme god of the religion, he who commands the rest of the divinities, men and women are completely equal.

Orozco Rubio argues that Osáin is part of all initiation processes for both men and women. He contends, therefore, that if women and Osáin were incompatible “women

³³ See Chapter 3 for more in-depth discussion regarding Nigerian Ocha-Ifá, gender and *batá*.

wouldn't be able to become *santeras*, nor participate in *mano de Orula* [an entry-level initiation into Ifá], nor receive anything which has undergone the involvement of Osáin (ibid).” Whilst indicating changes in attitudes by some practitioners in Cuba, Orozco Rubio’s views remain an anomaly and a radical interpretation of religious ideologies. Meanwhile, López (pers. comm., 2/08/2015) admits changing the ceremony to do with Osáin and Añá” because of Osáin’s potential malevolence.³⁴ The inclusion of Osáin and Ifá and the continual modifications inserted into the consecration process, musical canon and ritual practice by powerful individuals highlight the ambiguous and dynamic nature of tradition. The shifting of global religious, social and political movements casts gender ideologies and practices into a perpetual state of flux and evolution.

Myth, Authenticity, Tradition and the African Chronotope

The power of myth, whether religious, social or political, is in its ability to convince large groups of people to agree and act in a certain way. Barthes (1993:109) reminds us that “Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.” Religious stories or creation myths and religious texts in the form of *patakínes* (religious stories) and *odus* (divination texts) are frequently quoted in Cuba to uphold or justify religious beliefs. As Harari et al. (2015) reminds us, this is not a stable process and belief in myths can change rapidly with extreme consequences. The French population of 1789 who virtually overnight went from “believing in the myth of the divine right of kings to the myth of the sovereignty of

³⁴ The changes López made were replacing the gourd housing the *oricha* with an iron pot, keeping it outside in a cupboard away from people rather than inside the house, and a daily action whereby he brings it out to tell it he is the owner (pers. comm., 2/8/2015).

the people” provides an apt example (Harari et al 2015:52). Barthes (1993:110; emphasis author’s) explains that

Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth [...] presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance.

The dissemination of myth has the potential to impact people in profound ways as embedded in their stories are codes which define, reify and authenticate power structures. Furthermore, myths “transmit patterns of cultural significance that promote balance, continuity, and mutual identity within societies” (Marler 2006:167).

Central to Cuban claims of authority and authenticity, and discussions and disagreements over *odus*, *patakínes* and gender prohibitions is the African chronotope. A chronotope, Bakhtin (2010) explains, is where spatial and temporal frames that are conceived collectively by a social group are represented through literature and discourse as a single timeless narrative. In Cuba, the idea of chronotope is attached to a timeless African imaginary. Palmié (2013) identifies an African chronotope as a vital point of reference for any claims of legitimacy and authenticity in contemporary Afro-Cuban ritual practice. The African chronotope provides an imaginary location of authentic religious heritage and is therefore a powerful component in claims or counter-claims that sanction or reject modifications to religious practice. ‘Africa’ consequently becomes an idea or sensibility, rather than a specific location (Clarke and Thomas 2006:xxiv).

Wirtz (2014:31) points out that how we semiotically engage with history and time shapes our experiences as temporal beings and historically situated subjects. The

semiotics of temporal framing includes material markers like clothing, instruments, music, bodily gestures and movements (ibid:32). Temporal frames can shift and develop a timeline or trajectory of linked events. Wirtz (2014:32) goes on to explain that the “semiotic potential of historical-present forms” which “give immediacy while preserving temporal (and social) distance” is realised during possession in ritual or folklore performances, when archaic African deities or the deceased are conjured to temporarily move among the living (ibid). This interrelated relationship between past and present in ritual and sacred objects in African-derived religions serves to inculcate “implicit knowledge about social relations and power” (Routon 2008a:638). The following text illustrates the relationship between myth, the African chronotope and menstrual taboos in the Cuban batá.

Obatalá’s Four Wives - *Patakínes* and Female Batá Prohibition

Gender prohibitions in batá performance are largely understood through the interpretation of myths and religious texts. The power of mythology is derived from its ability to unify collective thought and provide metaphors that contain divine, personal and cultural meaning for those who encounter them (Marler 2006:167).

Myths become modified over time in both drastic and subtle ways, which can say more about the temporal and cultural markers of the myth-teller than the protagonists represented within the stories.

An analysis of two similar drumming stories, one from the Nigeria, the origin of *orisa* drumming, and one from the Cuban diaspora, illustrate some interesting differences and similarities. The first was recounted by Adetoyese Laoye, a former king of Ede in Yorubaland, in 1959 (Euba 1988:5). He identifies (Laoye in Euba 1988:6)

four women as holding prestigious positions as drummers of the powerful, wise and most senior *orisa* Obatalá.

When Obatalá lived on earth, he had four wives and whenever he wished to dance his wives supplied music by clapping their hands [...] In the course of time, Obatalá got bored with hand clapping and decided to make four drums for his wives to play. The drums were named after the wives, Ìyánlá, Iyá Agan, Kéké, and Afééré and they are the drums which form the *Ígbín* ensemble that is used up till today by the devotees of Obatalá.

During my field trip to Cuba in 2014, I asked Díaz why women were prohibited from playing consecrated batá, and he called on a similar story to that of Laoye, but with some divergences. The difference between the two, some sixty years and a continent apart, is significant for understanding the ways in which creation myths can reflect cultural difference. Díaz's (pers. comm., 29/08/2014) version is as follows:

There are four drums, which were based on four women. There were four women who pleased Obatalá with their music. They used to make music with harps and tambourines. Obatalá was a ruler who went from country to country making peace, and when he got home tired out he liked to relax by listening to the music of the four women. Obatalá had many enemies in the town, as he was a very powerful *oricha*. They didn't have a way to beat him. So, what did they do? They looked to those four women who were responsible for re-charging his energy.

The enemies took the women and sacrificed them, so when Obatalá arrived home and saw the disaster he took to his bed with an enormous depression. There started to be big problems in the world [...] all this led to the creation of Añá. [The

orichas] Changó, Orula, Eleguá, Osáin started to shape the idea of the *tambor* through a ceremony, which I can't explain here, but is set in the *patakí*. When they created Añá they looked for the first drummer who existed whose name was Ponla Ponla Sese. So, when he started to play the drums Obatalá said 'what beautiful, interesting music' and he began to get better and things got back to normal. But, so that this *oricha* [Añá] wouldn't fall into the hands of the enemies, custody of it was given solely to men, people who had the same qualities as those of the enemies to be able to defend it [...] It's not a question of machismo, it's something that the *orichas* determined to guard the drums. From there comes that taboo which has been created so that women can't play *fundamento*. To stop women even attempting to play and to remind women of the prohibition Osáin added the condition that any woman who got too close to Añá would show her blood through menstruation.

There is a clear relationship between Díaz's version and the former story by Laoye. The fact Laoye's text was published more than fifty years earlier than Díaz's version suggests the possibility that the Nigerian article found its way to Cuba, was reinterpreted, and then emerged as oral literature. In both renditions, four women are depicted as having the important spiritual role of appeasing *Obatalá* by playing different forms of percussion or chordophones. By comparing women's positionality in both versions, we begin to see the "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) paradigm in process and its relevance to female prohibition in Cuba. Firstly, in the Nigerian story women are depicted with a higher status, performing important roles both as wives and musicians, whereas in the Cuban *patakí* they are described as "women who pleased Obatalá" (pers. comm., Díaz 29/08/2014). Secondly, in the Cuban *patakí* although it is suggested that there were "four drums" "based on four women" (ibid) they are described as playing music on harps and tambourines,

instruments that are not indigenous to Cuba or Yoruba culture and have no status or significance within either Afro-Cuban or Yoruba ritual practice (Doubleday 1999). In contrast, in the Nigerian version Obatalá makes four drums for his wives to play, instruments that hold significantly more prestige in Cuban, and Nigerian *oricha* worship.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, in the Cuban story the four women were murdered in order to undermine their power, such was their importance to the divine order. Their failure to prevent their own murders, in Díaz's story, is depicted and associated with a perceived 'female weakness' for which Osáin punishes all women with the "show of blood through menstruation" and a prohibition that prevents them from playing consecrated batá drums. It was, according to the Cuban *patakí*, a man who saved the day by drumming on Añá drums and restoring Obatalá to health. In comparison to the Nigerian story, the Cuban *patakí* expresses a negative relationship between women's drumming, menstruation and their perceived weakness (Hagedorn 2001:96; Vaughan and Aldama 2012:29-30).³⁵ Another detail is the inclusion of Osáin in Díaz's story, which was said to be involved with shaping "the idea of the *tambor* through a ceremony" (ibid). As mentioned earlier, the inclusion of Osáin into the Añá complex appears to be a Cuban development (Marcuzzi's 2005:468; Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:164)

Does the Nigerian version reflect more relaxed attitudes towards gender ideologies in contemporary Yorubaland? For every story that depicts one way of seeing the world another can be found portraying the opposite. Galí (pers. comm., 5/7/2015), from Santiago, provided an example after I told him that women had played consecrated batá in Santiago. He said, "Remember that Changó learned batá

³⁵ See also Campos' reference to women and lack of strength in Chapter 1.

with Yemayá and Ochún helped make Añá as well!” Changó was a deified king who is believed to be the owner of the batá. Yemayá and Ochún are both powerful principle female deities in the Yoruba pantheon. Marcuzzi (2005:468) explains that

Though these types of narratives subtly (and, at times, not so subtly) situate women in the midst of behavioral constraints, at the same time women are clearly situated in temporal proximity to drumming origins, suggesting that symbolic repertoires of the female body, animated through the female characters of the narratives, have long been central to the Ayan [and Añá] cult.

In the end, the power and lifespan of a creation myth is dependent not on actual events but on how well its narrative complies with the worldview and desires of the storyteller, and how receptive his or her listeners are to the cultural concepts embedded within the story (Barthes 1993; Marler 2006).

God’s Divine Punishment - *Odu*, Menstruation, Women and Batá

Further religious justifications for menstrual prohibitions take the form of orally transmitted interpretations of Cuban *odu* (versus of Ifá), where menstruation is understood as a divine punishment or curse (pers. comm., Ahmed Díaz 29/08/2014; Octavio Rodriguez 21/10/2015; also see Ángel Bolaños cited in Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:365). Numerous Ifá *odus* describe women’s overzealous curiosity as the reason why they have been ‘cursed’ with menstruation. Aleida [Socarras] Nani (cited in Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:164) provides an excellent example of how this *odu* is quoted to maintain gender parameters. During an Añá consecration which took place at her house, she was told by a young *omo* Añá not to look through the curtain

at the secret Añá ceremony taking place; he then reminded her of “god’s punishment for curiosity” (ibid:164). Insulted by the comment, Socarras replied, “then that will always happen to me because I am always curious” (ibid:164). However, open challenges by women to the interpretations of *odus* which justify taboos were rare among female drummers I spoke with during my field research. Similarly, I have found very few examples in academic discourse, indicating that this kind of challenge is an anomaly (see also Villepastour 2013).

Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró, a *batalera* from Santiago, is another exception. She is the only Cuban woman I am aware of who is publically campaigning for women’s rights to play *fundamento* batá. She is also one of three women recently filmed playing a set of *fundamento* for what is thought to be the first time (Meadows 2017:133). Furthermore, she has publicly challenged the *odu* (divination texts) that represent menstruation as a ‘curse’ (Pouymiro unpublished).³⁶ Pouymiro publically challenges interpretations of religious texts which frame menstruation as impure, a punishment, or a reason to prevent women from obtaining equal religious status to men. Her argument is based on the reinterpretation of religious texts from the *Corpus Literario del Caracol* (The Literacy Corpus of [Divining] Shells), the *odus* of the Corpus of Ifá, and research undertaken in the field.

On the 6th July 2015 she continued her campaign when she gave a paper at the 35th Festival de Carbe conference.³⁷ The paper was titled *Soy Una Obini Bata, Mujer Tamborera ‘La menstruación: bendición o maldición’ de Enrique Orozco Rubio* (I

³⁶ Pouymiró gave me permission to cite from her unpublished article of 2013 titled “*Ilu Ni Oshun – Mujeres vs Mito, 2da parte*” (L: The Drum is Oshun – Women vs. Myth part 2). The article challenges the negative framing of menstruation in various religious texts and offers an alternative interpretation.

³⁷ Pouymiró explained that she has regularly challenged gender taboos at religious conferences in Santiago de Cuba (pers. comm., 4/07/2015).

am a female batá drummer ‘Menstruation: blessing or curse’ of/by Enrique Orozco Rubio’). During the conference Pouymiró announced that she was part of a group of women who had played consecrated batá.³⁸ During the presentation she declared (pers. comm., Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiro 6/07/2015):

To describe women as impure based on the fact that we menstruate is an argument which goes against the greatness of man’s human opposite. It is precisely our menstruation that guarantees the continuation of the human species [...] We have reacted against these barriers, which depict women as impure beings [...] Today, this project aims to demonstrate that it is possible for those women motivated and interested in playing the consecrated Añá drums to do so.

In her unpublished work, referring to the *odu Ogunda Ose*, Pouymiró wrote, “curiosity doesn’t mean that menstruation is an illness.” Furthermore, she explains that whilst an *odu* asserts that the *oricha Olofin* brought about menstruation, the *oricha* “neither mentions nor suggests excluding women from active female participation in ritual and religious practices” (ibid). In addition, Pouymiró provides an alternative ‘female’ interpretation of menstruation in the sacred context by claiming; “menstruation is a natural *ebó* (sacrificial offering) process performed by women after fertilization has failed to occur” (ibid). She determines (pers.comm 4/07/2015) that “in the religious system it is not the *orichas* who discriminate against women, but practitioners conditioned by the patriarchal cultural patterns of their

³⁸ Adding ‘de Enrique Orozco Rubio’ to the title of Pouymiró’s paper is somewhat confusing. I believe it may refer to the fact that Orozco Rubio sanctioned her to play consecrated batá as well as her subsequent presentation about the event at the conference. She complained (privately to me) that Orozco Rubio mediated the content of her paper and prevented her from showing photos of herself with the other two women playing his consecrated batá during her conference presentation, which she felt compromised her autonomy (pers. comm., 12/07/2015).

society.” In these instances, Pouymiró is inverting previous interpretations of religious texts and myths to align them with her own viewpoint. This process highlights an on-going, dynamic, dialectic relationship where subjects draw on the agency of myth and religious texts to justify the status quo, as well as validate modifications.

Summary

With respect to the Ayan-female prohibition in Cuba, though there are more than a few holes in the proverbial bucket it still seems to be able to fetch a fair amount of water. (Marcuzzi 2005:224)

Although the menstrual taboos which limit female access to ritual drumming continue to hold in Cuba, how these prohibitions are conceived, justified and enacted varies widely across time, religious communities, and individuals respectively. Their purpose appears to be to define and organise gender stratifications in religious practice, which for many brings about spiritual equilibrium. Nonetheless, there is a small contingent of women navigating the boundaries of menstrual taboos in order to drum in African-derived ritual performances.

While some male and female batá drummers critique certain aspects of the prohibitions that restrict women from playing *fundamento*, namely the continued limitations placed on women once they reach their menopause, gender prohibitions connected to consecrated batá continue to be honoured by the majority of practitioners. Menstrual prohibitions are reified through the symbolic language of creation myths and religious texts, which become inserted into ritual practice. This

written and aural lore forms part of the invented tradition paradigm and the African chronotope where change and concepts of authenticity are assumed through ideas of a timeless continuity with the past.

Some practitioners who contest the gender status quo are reinterpreting myths and Ifá texts in order to subvert notions that menstruation is a contaminant. This has ultimately led to three women playing consecrated batá in Santiago in 2015. The public campaign by these women against menstrual prohibitions, however, has been far from straightforward as we will see in Chapter 3. The open critique of menstrual prohibition by some Cuban women and men, and the willingness by a few *omo* Añás and Ifá priests to offer greater religious autonomy, can be interpreted not only against global shifts in attitudes towards gender equality, but also against the necessity for some to find divisive methods for gaining renown in a competitive religious market. Ultimately, subtle and radical changes to taboos and their ideologies, which can become embedded and normalised over time, form part of the dynamic yet volatile nature of tradition as a concept and as a practice.

Chapter 3 examines the performative actions of ritual and how they reify some of the concepts and ideologies outlined in this chapter, with a focus on gendered boundaries and stratifications of ritual batá performance. I explore gender codes embedded in music, dance, possession and ritual and analyse issues of power and polarity generally, and specifically in relation to a campaign in Santiago to redefine Añá's gender taboos.

Chapter Three

Ethnographic Reflections on Ritual, Gender, Añá and Change

This chapter explores the four-way nexus between ritual, gender, power and change. Beginning with the paradigm of embodiment, I locate sacred spaces and the ritualised body as a starting point for the analysis of culture and the performativity of gender (Csordas 1990:39). I explore the gendered implications of ritual hegemony and invented traditions leading to the swelling, on a national and international scale, of membership to the male-only heterosexual Añá fraternity. Finally, I present a case study which reveals the internal power complexities in the face of alleged modifications of batá gender taboos in Santiago.

Gender Stratification in Ritual Batá Performance

Performance is a key component in constructing social parameters and hierarchies in the spiritual and corporeal world. In this chapter I demonstrate how gender ideologies are called into being (Althusser 2016) through the medium of performance, where they are naturalised and embedded into concepts of tradition. McCullum (2013:91) reminds us that

The power of ritual comes through the changes in people's bodies, whether on a collective or individual basis. It is a power that is made and built up over time (usually years) through many different individual actions by both performers and their backers, and is bound up with kinship, politics and economic organisation.

Like one's gender, taboos are learned and maintained through embodied, repeated performative actions (Butler 1988:520). Askew (2002:8) identifies that performance is not only used to generate representations of power but that power itself is "more often than not an act of performance." What follows is an investigation into the ways ritual performances denote power, gender and status stratifications.

There are several different kinds of public religious ceremonies that utilise consecrated batá. Among the most common are *presentaciones* (presentations) and *cumpleaños* (religious birthday) ceremonies. In a *tambor de fundamento*, the nexus of power resides with the ritual musicians who collectively become a vehicle through which the congregants communicate directly with the divine. The ritual musicians control the ritual space both physically and sonically. The sacred sounds of a *tambor* can structure the proceedings for devotees, signalling when the ceremony begins and ends, when to dance, where to dance, when to salute the drums, when an *oricha* is perceived as nearby and when the *oricha* is present. For believers, ritual musicians are integral to and responsible for supporting devotees in the fulfillment of their spiritual duties, unifying the religious community and, if appropriate, bringing down the *oricha* to the corporeal world. The means of achieving this is communicated through utterances and embodied practice passed from one generation of ritual drummers to another. Rooted in this transmission are concepts of embodied knowledge resulting in sacred spaces becoming stratified by gender and sexual behaviour.

Pertinent to rituals that involve the *oricha* Añá is a 'no-go female zone' in front of and behind the batá drums during rituals, partly caused by a tension between

the female body and Añá.¹ This is a space where women and ‘out’ gay men are physically kept from getting too close to the drums by *omo* Añás for reasons largely outlined in Chapter 2.²



Plate 3.1: Women dancing in front of *fundamento* during a *tambor* in Calle Zaragoza, El Cerro, Havana. (Image taken from video 27/11/2011 courtesy of Hamish Orr)

¹ See also Schweitzer (2003:143-5) for a description of the ‘no-go’ zone being reinforced and policed by *omo* Añás. As is demonstrated later in this chapter with a quote by Campos, the maintenance of this ‘zone’ is not restricted to consecrated batá alone but can also be extended to aberikulá played during rituals.

² The taboo against gay men having contact with Añá is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.



Plate 3.2: This image includes the late Ahmed Díaz playing *iyá*, Andri Díaz on *okónkolo*, Vitiquin Suuru and Rubén Bulnes. (Image taken from video 27/11/2011 courtesy of Hamish Orr)

Plate 3.1 and 3.2 shows two halves of a room during the same *tambor*. The two images demonstrate how gender is often configuration with the sacred space. It is common for women and gay men to make up the majority of the congregation, where they most commonly dance in lines facing the drums (see Plates 2.2). Male-heterosexual ritual drummers occupy the other half (Plate 3.2).

Omo Añás invariably police gendered zones during *tambores*. Part of a ritual drummer's or congregant's ceremonial training involves instructions from their religious elders and ritual observation as to who can go where within a ritualised space. A 'no-go' zone for women (as seen in Chapter 2, Plate 2.2) becomes maintained through habitual action and the paradigm of embodiment (Csordas 1990;

Farnell 1999, Norris 2001, Merleau-Ponty 2012). How this ‘no-go’ female zone is conceptualised and enacted, however, is fluid and can depend on individuals, the situation, who is present and perhaps also whose drums are being played. If the ‘no-go’ zone is transgressed, ritual drummers, and at times other congregants, reinforce the parameters by telling women or gay men to move away from the drums, or in some cases, acting as a human barrier by placing themselves in front of the drums. The following ethnographic vignette provides two contrasting experiences of how the ‘no-go’ zone can be conceptualised. In the first example I am openly invited to transgress this space by an *omo* Añá. In the subsequent example the same drummer in a different *tambor* re-establishes its boundaries.

Navigating the Ritual Female ‘No-Go’ Zone

Ethnography: Part I, *Tambor*, Havana 14/07/2014.³

I could hear that I had arrived at my destination some distance before reaching the address written on the scrap of paper in my hand, given to me by a batá drummer I was taking lessons from at the time.⁴ Although quiet at first, the low bass pulsing through the hot humid air grew steadily louder as I walked up the street. Unable to be contained by mere bricks and mortar, the beautiful sound of batá rhythms and songs spilled out of the house ahead of me. Like watching a blurred image come into focus, as I drew closer to the house the drum tones got louder and clearer and I began to make sense of the sounds reaching me. I recognised the rhythm and song to be for Eleguá—one of the *orichas* said to open and close life’s pathways.

³ This ethnography is written from field notes and memory.

⁴ For ethical reasons I have not used the real names of the musicians.

I was greeted at the door by a stranger and led in into a long narrow room, which was formed of two halves. In one half were the three drummers and musicians, who were seated in the customary position in a line with their backs against the wall and the consecrated batá strapped to their thighs. The *iyá* (the largest and lead batá drum) was in the middle and was being played by my teacher at the time. The *itótele* (middle sized drum) was to his left and a female *akpón* (singer) was sitting adjacent to the *itótele*. The *okónkolo* (the smallest drum) sat to the right of the *iyá*. The drummers faced a small shrine resplendent with ritual objects, food offerings and flowers. The congregation was made up of about fifteen *santeros*. The room was so narrow they had to stand in the other half of the room nearest to the *okónkolo*. The *tambor de fundamento* was for a *santera* who was being presented to Añá. The presentation ceremony had yet to happen as I had arrived during the *oru cantado*, a ritual segment where all the *orichas* are honoured with their rhythms and songs. No one paid me any attention as I stood at the back of the congregation and participated in the collective swaying with the music and the familiar choruses.

When the *oru cantado* finished, the room quickly emptied and the musicians, all acquaintances of mine, noticed me and called me over. To my astonishment the *okónkolo* player, Martínez, who I had not seen for a couple of years, half stood up with a drum strapped to his thighs and extended his arms out towards me.⁵ Although I was moved by this demonstration of affection, I felt awkward reciprocating an embrace because in order to do so I would have to lean over the consecrated drum strapped to his thighs; putting my female body in a proximity generally considered to be profane and dangerous. Not sure what else to do, I carefully leaned over his drum, cautious to keep as much distance between the drum and lower part of my body. As I kissed Martínez on both cheeks I was sure somebody was going to make a remark about my closeness to the drum; not only was nothing said but both the *iyá* and *itótele*

⁵ For ethical reason I am using a pseudo name.

players also threw out their arms warmly gesturing for me to lean over and greet them in the same manner. I was astonished by their relaxed attitudes as I came so close to their drums to greet them. As this was the first *tambor* I had attended in Cuba for two years, I wondered if the strict gender taboos I had previously observed had been relaxed. I was interested in what seemed to be a shift in attitude and I wondered if the female body was no longer considered taboo, and what this might mean for women *batá* drummers in the future.

I stayed until the end of the *tambor* and later chatted with the musicians. However, I did not feel it was an appropriate time or place to ask about why I had been allowed to get so close to the drums. A few weeks later Martínez invited me to another *tambor* where I had a very different experience.

Ethnography: Part II, *Tambor*, Havana 13/08/2014.

I arrived at a *tambor* in the neighbourhood of El Cerro during a tropical storm that turned the air grey with water as it came down in unrelenting sheets. When I arrived completely drenched, the room was empty apart from three *batá* drummers sitting ready to play with their drums on their laps. Martínez had the *iyá* this time, and without moving or getting up said hello, asked how I was doing and introduced me to the two other drummers. I didn't approach the drums as we exchanged verbal pleasantries.

We waited some time for the congregation to arrive as the storm took its course. The room was empty apart from the seated drummers and myself. Occasionally a *santera* would pass through the room to the kitchen or the back of the house. I was stood watching the enormous lightning display through an open window when a *santera* approached me and offered me a low stool to sit on. She placed it more or less where I had been standing, about a metre and a half away from the

drummers. The moment I sat down, however, Martínez gestured with his hands and told me to move further away from the drums. I moved the stool half a metre back and looked to Martínez for approval, but he gestured me to move further and I moved another metre.

The contrast of these two experiences, a month apart, left me confused and wondering if my foreign status set me apart or whether Cuban women and gay men have to navigate the ambiguous nature of the ‘no-go’ zone during ceremonies in a similar way. Clearly, how I perceived the ‘no-go’ zone—through years of keeping my distance after seeing other women being asked to move away—differed greatly from how it appeared to Martínez. The breaching of the ‘no-go’ zone, as reported in the first ethnography is not an anomaly: as Schweitzer (2013:61) also explains:

I have observed, in a variety of contexts, instances where the spatial delineation has broken down (e.g., participants having brushed up against the drums and/or managed to get behind the drums).

A contravention of this gendered tenet can result in drummers asking the offending party to move away, or in extreme cases stopping a *tambor* even if it is in mid-flow in order to reestablish its boundaries (Schweitzer 2013:61). But how close is too close?

Schweitzer clarifies that explanations are “vague [...] often contradictory [...] and address the spiritual and physical safety of the non-drummers” (62). Rumours of such “violations of orthodoxy” (62) can result in the drum, the drum owner (who is not necessarily present during a *tambor*) and/or the lead drummer (responsible for the drums) losing status and prestige, a highly prized commodity within the fraternity. How prohibitions are conceptualised and embodied can differ greatly, not just from

one drumming group to another, but as my two ethnographies demonstrated, from the same drummer in different situations.

A year later I spoke with Martínez and asked him about the discrepancies in his behaviour in these two *tambores*. Martínez is part of a younger generation of respected *omo* Añás (born in the early 1980s) who are in high demand in Havana and may play up to seven times a week. He is predominately loyal to one *piquete* (religious batá ensemble) but he will play with others if he is available.

Martínez (pers. comm., 5/08/2015) admitted that in the first *tambor* (which was not with his regular *piquete* or with an elder present) he had made a mistake in how he greeted me: his pleasure at seeing me, he explained, caused him to forget the ritual protocol. When I asked Martínez why he had asked me to move away from the drums in the second *tambor*, he explained that,

Since I was young everybody had that thing that women can't do this and can't do that. Including being close to the drum which would harm their bellies or be harmful to their health.

I asked if he is afraid of women being too close to the drums because of what he had been told. He replied (pers. comm., 5/08/2015),

No, really it's to do with the part where they [the elders] say 'women cannot be close to drums.' But look, one of the many things I have questioned [...] what happens is they say, 'move over there a bit you can't be too close' and all that, true? But we know the female singers are next to us and it's the same thing, they are close to the drum. But this [prohibition] was made many years ago. I ask myself that and sometimes I don't say anything but I think 'they say that women can't get close to the drum but the singer

is a woman just the same, she should sing further away'. The rest of the women that are present, *santeras* and others, if one of them comes close and we say 'move further away' maybe they'll ask themselves 'why are they asking me to move when she (the singer) is so close?'

Martínez's candid responses are in themselves a marker of change. They also reveal the complexities of striving to maintain concepts of tradition within changing social spheres. Martínez's comments suggest a divergence between theological and cultural beliefs supporting the prohibition, and dynamically embodied practice (Farnell 1999:365) acquired through mimicry from apprentice-style relationships with elders. Such a divergence is significant because he is currently at the forefront of religious *batá* drumming in Havana and is part of the next generation of drummers who represent the tradition. His reasoning and questioning mark a deviation from that of some of his elders: who as Campos (pers. comm., 12/02/ 2012) explains, in relation to female devotees saluting the drum, they do not always tolerate being asked questions about such matters:

The elders would say to the women 'don't put your head on the drum [...] just your hand and keep away'.⁶ I would ask 'but why if it is *aberikulá*?' They would say, 'you shut your mouth kid'. A convincing argument and you had to shut up.

Both Martínez and Campos' comments highlight the top-down nature of the pedagogical process where knowledge of the musical canon and ceremonial protocols are passed from elder to novice through repeated action over time (Vélez 2000).

⁶ Campos is making reference to a ritual action in *tambores* where initiated men and women 'salute' the drums by touching their forehead on each drum or alternatively use their hand.

Their comments remind us that Cubans themselves are subjected to religious and social ambiguities. Within these apparently rigid conceptual frameworks, asking the wrong questions can be interpreted as a direct challenge to the sacred social order. It is possible that my experiences of religious ambiguities are an extension of internal religious structures that become further complicated when applied to foreigners. Every cultural change appears to bring new challenges, creating the need for further adaptation. The ritual female and gay-male ‘no-go’ zones in *tambores* are manifestations of concepts that have been embodied and physicalised by initiates of all genders. It is an experience of the moment and is susceptible to change according to a range of factors, which include how the drummers feel in a particular space, the size of the room, the size of the congregation, their age, their experience and the ritual leaders present.

Añá Rituals, Gender Organisation and the Embodiment Paradigm

Another example of gender-stratified ritual space is exemplified in *tambores* where Añá is featured, such as in the drum transmission ceremony where there are two sets of *fundamento* present, one old and one new, or where new members of the Añá cult are initiated in the *juramento* ceremony. In these situations, gender formations in the ritual space can appear even more polarised compared to semi-public batá ceremonies such as *Ocha cumpleaños* (initiation birthdays) and *iyawo presentaciones* (presentations of new initiates). I witnessed that during drum transmission and *juramento* ceremonies the ritual ‘no-go’ zone was extended. For example, in Plate 3.3, one can see a semi-circle of heterosexual male Ifá priests and *omo* Añás surrounding two sets of *fundamento* during a transmission ceremony. One set is on the laps of the

seated drummers and the other is out of view lying on the floor in front of the semi-circle of men. One can also see women (and just out of sight is a girl of about three) standing on the periphery (in the doorway) of the ritual space looking towards its centre.⁷



Plate 3.3: Irian López's Drum Transmission Ceremony in La Corea, Havana. (Still from a video by Vicky Jassey 23/06/2015)

⁷ Further evidence of gender organisation during drum transmissions and Añá initiations can be viewed on YouTube:
ElberGzo. n.d. *Juramento de Aña de Marcos En Pogolotti Con Armando El Zurdo*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnAccd8IaRk&list=PLtQSIYYTISo6PtnYrLo3pugxbNTDXcSbY&index=7>.
Veronica Neito. n.d. *Transmision Tambor de Fundamento1 Papo.Flv*. [Accessed 3 June 2016].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZlxeFLqryM> [Accessed 3 June 2016].
elguevoencapuchado15. n.d. *Juramento de Aña En Casa Del Oba Araba Francisco Valdes Ika Junko*. [Accessed 3 June 2016].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56UE80zpIIE&list=PLtQSIYYTISo6PtnYrLo3pugxbNTDXcSbY&index=6>
iyawo710. n.d. *Presentación de El Farah Al Tambor Añá Santiago de Cuba*. Accessed 4 June 2016. *Presentación de El Farah al tambor añá Santiago de Cuba* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK6lRtY2N6I>. [Accessed 4 June 2016].

Some aspects of the ceremony are formally taught (i.e. we were all instructed to kneel during this part of the ceremony) while others are acquired by means of watching and following community elders (i.e. young girls who learn to stand apart from men and boys by copying female family members). Here virtuosic formalised communicative displays and naturalised culturally embodied practices are collapsed.

To understand the role of the body, gender and the ‘paradigm of embodiment’ in a ritual context is to situate the body as a vessel containing coded messages learnt through constituted processes over time (Csordas 1990:5). The body’s physical presence, experience and representation—as an object of discourse—“is a field of historically situated social relationships enacted through its roles in social action” (Wirtz 2014:103). Drawing on Cutler’s (1987) ‘theology of embodiment,’ Schultz (2002) identifies how in the expressive genre of Marathi Rāshṭrīya Kīrtan, music, religion and politics are negotiated through embodied ritual processes. The transfer of knowledge through the body, Norris (2001:112,116) notes, occurs through mimetic processes where non-verbal and conceptual experiences and feelings are communicated through gesture and posture. Strathern (1996:193) identifies mimesis as “the imitation of the other, both as a reaction and as an attempt at appropriation, an expression of identity and difference rolled into one.” The transfer of ritual knowledge and traditions through embodied practice requires that a novice “insert oneself as little as possible” (Norris 2001:9), conforming instead to the embodied patterns of those around them with greater experience and status. Embodied actions reify concepts of our place in the world in relation to those around us, providing social frameworks through which to understand status, gender and hierarchy (ibid).

Invented Traditions, Ritual Hegemony, the *Juramento* Ceremony and Non-drumming *Omo Añás*

Rituals are repeated and to an extent, improvised social performances (Drewal 1992), which are imagined as timelessly preserved practices by those invested in them. Their reproduction promulgates conceptions of hierarchy, identity and place (Wirtz 2014). The *juramento* ceremony, where heterosexual men become initiated into the Añá cult, is one example. The practice of Regla de Ocha has grown exponentially and with it the *tambor de fundamento*. Over the last few decades, membership to the heterosexual male-only brotherhood has burgeoned following the opening of its doors to non-drumming Ifá priests, White and foreign drummers who straddle race, class and politically heterogeneous demographics. In the following text I investigate how social and religious change and the practice's growing popularity have affected gender conventions within the tradition.

The brotherhoods of Añá and Ifá provide essential ritual services to the Regla de Ocha community. One such service is a *presentación* (presentation) where a *santero/a*, in order to become fully initiated into Regla de Ocha, is ritually presented to the *oricha* Añá during a drumming ceremony. Añá is considered to have “the power to transmit communication between the earthly and heavenly abodes” (Marcuzzi 2005:412). However, the metaphysical discourse used to buttress the constituent role of Añá in Cuban initiation rituals has “particular political significance” (411). The centralising of Añá in the initiation process of Regla de Ocha is perhaps the most significant component in ensuring that as the *Ocha* community expands, so too does the Añá cult and its practices. Marcuzzi (2005:370-371, 431-418) suggests that this highly significant drumming ritual may have been instigated as recently as the mid-twentieth century. Although Marcuzzi's proposition remains

speculative due to a lack of evidence to substantiate his ideas, so too is there a lack of evidence to counter the supposition. In support of his hypothesis, he draws our attention to the agency and politics of ritual hegemony where gatekeepers garner status and monetary gain by situating themselves at the centre of either invented or burgeoning ritual practices.

Changes to Añá traditional practices continue to reflect larger socio-political shifts. Perhaps one of the most significant examples was the ensuing economic hardship of the *período especial* in 1989 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this time, membership to the fraternity burgeoned exponentially. It was also the period when Cuban women began forming secular batá ensembles and performing to the public (Chapter 4). In the 1980s two significant taboos affecting who was eligible to undergo the *juramento* ceremony (initiation into the Añá cult) were lifted. The initiation into Añá of White men (many of whom were foreign) and the acceptance into the cult of non-drumming *babalawos* caused the fraternity to thrive, bringing with it monetary gain and international acclaim.

The relaxation of racial restrictions saw the first Cuban White (or pale-skinned) man initiated into the Añá fraternity in 1985 (Schweitzer 2013:52). Around this time some foreign White men, who had begun learning secular batá drumming, also went on to become ritual drummers and eventually Añá cult members. Discourse relating to requirements expected of male (especially foreign) ritual drummers before they are allowed to play changed significantly since the late 1980s. Angel Bolaños (pers. comm., 3/08/2015), who is currently one of the high-status living elders of the tradition in Cuba, explained that in the past you did not need to have undergone any form of initiation in order to play *fundamento* at a ritual.

If you want to learn batá you can learn. Before if you wanted to play, they would ask the drum [Añá] by using the coconuts. Then after you start playing you have to learn [...] but to swear is another mechanism. There are some people who come and play but don't swear to the drum [become initiated to Añá].

Rodriguez (pers. comm., 21/10/2015) adds, “The old guys were so guarded about the drums and Añá they didn't want to swear many people.” Campos (pers. comm., 20/07/2015) explained that when he started playing batá the first step for a novice was to learn how to play well. Once you had achieved this you could have your hands ritually washed but there needed to be a few other drummers who were also ready to undergo the same ceremony. He explained “this was something that you would see every four or five years, not like today when you see people doing this every month.” In addition, in Cuba young boys learn batá drumming in situ playing *fundamento* in rituals. For many it may take years before they or their families can afford for them to undergo any type of initiation ceremony.

Current discourse, however, suggests that in order to play consecrated batá it is a requirement to be initiated to Añá. The top search on Google under “bata drummers”—a Wikipedia page called “batá drum”—claims that an “‘initiate’ is one who “through the great spirit Añá is granted the ability to perfectly play the Batá drums” and is the only one who is “worthy to touch or play the batá” (‘Batá Drum’ 2017). While I am aware Wikipedia is not an online source to be trusted, it is the first port-of-call for millions of people seeking information. Its power to disseminate information therefore cannot be underestimated. Meanwhile, in academic work it is common to read similar, although somewhat less dramatic assertions about the requirements of men before they are allowed to play in rituals, even from batá scholars themselves. Hagedorn (2015:168), for example, claims that “Although in

theory anyone can play un-consecrated (*aberikulá*) drums, only heterosexual male drummers who have had their hands washed or are sworn to Añá in special ceremonies are allowed to play consecrated batá drums.” As Delgado (2015:107) asserts, the Añá batá tradition requires “formal ritual initiation [...] into the fraternity of “sworn” batá drummers before one is allowed to play the drums.” Tenzer (2006:124), who is not a batá scholar, writes “Male performers undergo an initiation in order to perform at sacred events.”

However, I have witnessed a discrepancy between practice and the academic discourse above as I have frequently observed uninitiated males from the UK play consecrated batá in a *tambor* on their first trip to Cuba. Although some foreign drummers have dedicated themselves to acquiring a deep knowledge of the batá corpus before they become initiated, I have noted that others with very limited batá drumming experience have been initiated into the Añá cult. Reducing restrictions on the entry requirement to the brotherhood has served to expand fraternity membership and provide monetary benefits to the Cubans who initiate them. For many foreign men, the prestige of being associated with an exclusively male drumming cult appears to have a powerful appeal, yet other foreign men do not agree with the gender and sexuality taboos.⁸

Any action endorsed by members of a group, which gives them superiority, falls within Social Dominance Theory (SDT) (Sidanius and Pratto 2001:228). In the context of my research, the inclusion of Osáin into the batá consecration process in Cuba, or the relaxing of entry rules into the fraternity-keeping religious batá drumming available only to a growing community of heterosexual men—are examples

⁸ At least five European male *omo* Añás have told me privately that they do not feel comfortable with the batá gender and sexuality taboos. I have chosen not to identify them for ethical reasons.

of how groups establish and maintain control through devices such as “in-group favouritism.” In addition, belief in self-defeating ideologies by subordinate members of a group (for example, women and gay men in the context of the batá tradition) can also be considered examples of SDT (Kurzban 2001:414).

SDT can be applied to an emerging ritual that took place within the Añá fraternity in the 1980s, when a ceremony was introduced that allowed the initiation of non-drumming *babalawos* to enter the Añá brotherhood. Bolaños (pers. comm., 3/08/2015) explained that in Havana in 1988, he was the first *olúbatá* to swear a non-drumming *babalawo* called “Pulpo” Ogbesa to his set of batá, ritually named Adofo. When I asked Bolaños why *babalawos* were initiated without being able to play, he said “One thing doesn’t have to do with the other. There are some batá players who play for years and they never get sworn” (pers. comm., 3/08/2015). Campos (also a *babalawo*) explained that he is “in total disagreement with swearing people who cannot play,” adding that although he has been involved with the ritual preparation of swearing *babalawos* to Añá, he has never sworn men who cannot play to his own set of *fundamento* (pers. comm., 20/07/2015).

Ifá priest Victor Betancourt (pers. comm., 19/07/2015, Havana), who to some extent follows contemporary Nigerian-Ifá practice, talked about what he believes are the incentives behind the rise in popularity of this recently invented ceremony.

It’s a trend, it’s ridiculous, and others do it in order to earn money. I have had friends who sat right here and told me so.

He went on to explain that in Cuba during the 1980s and 1990s rituals such as divinations and initiations were conducted in an “unrestrained way” and as a result, “to put it crudely, there are more chiefs than Indians.” Betancourt also explained that the religious economy was in decline at the time, and the *juramento* ceremony was a way of earning money.

Requirements for joining the Añá fraternity have now been extended from once including only Black Cuban heterosexual men who were proficient batá drummers to initiating men or young boys of any race or nationality who either do not play at all (such as non-drumming *babalawos*) or have very limited knowledge (foreign drummers new to the tradition). As a result, the brotherhood is now part of a global community in which its traditions have become internationally recognised and respected.

SDT underscores the process by which group leaders introduce innovative practices that result in the expansion of group membership, agency and governance whilst maintaining power asymmetries and exclusivity. The revised practice of allowing White non-drumming *babalawos* to swear to the Añá cult provides an example of a change which has boosted male heterosexual membership of the cult, generated work opportunities for male ritual drummers, and disseminated the group’s beliefs and practices to domestic and international audiences. Ultimately, the exponential growth of the Añá brotherhood has increased the male heterosexual hegemony and its overall authority, while ostensibly further marginalising women and homosexuals.

My ethnographic experience provides empirical evidence for how non-drumming *babalawos* are challenging Añá cult traditions.⁹ For example, Campos explained that some Ifá priests are now demanding to sit at the *mesa de Añá* (the ritual table where drummers are fed before a *tambor*), which was until recently exclusively for musicians. Further examples when, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter, two Ifá priests and a *babalawo-olúbatá* who offered me the opportunity to ‘swear’ to Añá.¹⁰ *Babalawo* Betancourt (pers. comm., 19/07/2015), explained that he did not see any reason for the female Añá prohibitions and if Orula agreed (following a divination)—and it was implied by the *oricha* that it would benefit the lives of those who were to be sworn in some way—he would consider initiating women to Añá even though he is not a drummer nor is he sworn to Añá. When I asked how it would be possible for him to swear me to Añá if he was not initiated himself, he explained (pers. comm., 19/07/2015)

I can enter into any Añá room and direct any Añá ceremony, firstly because I am a *babalawo* and have the super divinity Olofi and Odu [...] According to the beliefs of Afro-Cubans the *babalawos* who possess this supreme divinity can perform any kind of ritual.

⁹ These experiences are not necessarily indicative of common practice and should be considered in relation to my positionality as a White, foreign, female *batá* drummer conducting research on gender and *batá* drumming.

¹⁰ I have named two of the Ifá priests because they are already internationally known for their radical views and approaches to gender and Ifá and they made these offers during formal interviews. I have decided for ethical reasons not to disclose the name of the *olúbatá-babalawo* referred to in this text, because such a disclosure may affect his position in the community and because his offer was not made during a formal interview. It is worth pointing out that as I was not interested in accepting any of the offers to ‘swear’ to Añá, I cannot be sure if any of the above persons would have actually gone through with conducting such a ceremony.

Matanzas *babalawo* Ernesto Acosta agreed to swear me to Añá if I could find a willing *omo* Añá to assist him with the ceremony (pers. comm., 15/09/2015). The final and perhaps most extreme example is that of women being given permission to play Añá in Santiago by a *babalawo* and *omo* Añá. This is an area I describe in more detail in below.

While the views of the *olúbatá* I have quoted are anomalous, the statements and actions of the *babalawos* involved in the first initiations of women into the Ifá priesthood are not surprising. Although their opinions do not necessarily reflect that of the wider religious community, they suggest ripples that may lead to wider changes to gender practices (albeit driven by a competitive religious market). The examples I have offered also present a challenge by some *babalawos* to the overarching authority of Añá's drummer gatekeepers, who were previously the only ones in a position to make modifications to their tradition.

The possibility that the *juramento* for non-drumming *babalawos* is a recently adapted ritual and the growing discourse that claims male batá drummers (foreign ones at least) have to undergo one of two ceremonies in order to play consecrated batá could be considered part of the invented tradition paradigm (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). The examples above illustrate both the processes of change and the fluidity of tradition and taboos as well as some of the mechanisms the Añá cult has adopted in order to evolve and sustain itself in an ever-shifting world. These changes have impacted gender narratives in oppositional ways. On the one hand, opening the Añá membership has exponentially expanded the national and international reach and dominance of this heterosexual male-only cult. Further, the ritual hegemony of the *juramento* ceremony serves to normalise gender taboos that prohibit females and non-heterosexual males from participation on a local and international scale. On the other

hand, widening membership from a small close-knit community also opens up the cult to splitting into factions and critical thinking around beliefs and practices. The *babalawo* who allowed three women to play his *fundamento* in Santiago is perhaps the most extreme example. It was perhaps only a matter of time before an increased demographic of initiates accepted into the Añá fold began challenging the central tenets of the tradition because of differences in ethical and theological views, younger generations responding to cultural change, or as a means to make advances in a highly competitive religious market.

“Una Bomba”: Gender, Ifá Re-Yorubisation and Change

Salient to religious practices is the “dynamic interplay of heterogeneity” (Meadows 2017:220), where tenets of embodied religious practice are open to interpretation. This process is polemical in Cuba following the growth of Nigerian-style Ifá since the beginning of the twenty first century. A growing community of *babalawos* in Cuba, Meadows (2017:215) explains, are crafting “sound and listening in order to reformulate fate-altering ritual and gendered prohibitions in Cuban òrìṣà/*oricha* worship.” In the following text I present a case study of a small religious community in Santiago, which, in an attempt to redefine Añá’s cult practices, reveals the complexities of power and gender struggles in the face of ‘reform.’

The recent incorporation of contemporary Nigerian Ifá-*oricha* practice in Cuba, Meadows (2017:214) explains,

has enabled African Traditionalist women and men to creatively adapt and refashion the tenets of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion (YTR) in the service of the realization of specific projects and desires.

A process I experienced first-hand during my time in Santiago. I arrived in Santiago in June 2015 to continue my field research and attend a conference with a religious theme, which was part of the annual Festival del Caribe (also called the Fiesta del Fuego). I was keen to speak with the only female batá drummer I am aware of who is actively and publically campaigning for women's rights to play consecrated batá, professional percussionist Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró (Plate 3.4), who I had met the previous year.

Pouymiró's unique approach to batá gender taboos has received relatively widespread attention from other female scholars (Pryor 1999; Meadows 2017). Her story has been comparatively well-documented compared with other less radical Cuban female batá drummers.¹¹ Whilst it may appear that I too have privileged Pouymiró's account over other equally important voices, the central role she has played in this research was circumstantial rather than planned. I was by coincidence on the scene in Santiago around the period when women played the consecrated batá for what was thought to be the first time, and when Pouymiró publically broke the story at a religious conference.¹² Because of our contact the previous year, the nature of my research and the fact I was also a female batá drummer, I was given access to an incredibly rich ethnographic experience that was at the very centre of my research. This greatly impacted my work as I pivoted away from focusing on female secular

¹¹ Amelia Pedroso was also relatively well represented in academic discourse (see Vincent 1998, Sayre 2000, Vincent 2004, 2006, Villepastour 2013). Although the all-female group Obini Batá have also been well represented it has been more as a group rather than as individual players (Hagedorn 2015; 'Seis mujeres cubanas se atreven a tocar tambores Batá' (Six women drummers break barriers in Cuba percussion) (2016) Reading Eagle - LIFE (<http://readingeagle.com/life/article/women-drummers-break-barriers-in-cuba-percussion>). This article was also published on news websites in India, Canada, Italy and the USA (The Hindu 2014; The Canadian Press 2014; Reading Eagle 2014; Naples News Daily 2015).

¹² See later in this chapter for a discussion over claims that these were the first women to play *fundamento*.

batá performance and moved instead towards the religious aspects of gender, sexuality and change in contemporary religious batá performance.



Plate 3.4: Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró performing as part of the 34th Festival del Caribe at the Casa de las Tradiciones, Santiago (Photo by Vicky Jassey 8/7/2014)

Ethnography: “Una Gran Noticia!” Santiago 27/06/2015.¹³

I bumped into Pouymiró in the main square in Santiago de Cuba, ahead of our scheduled meeting and within the first few minutes of greeting each other she told me she had “*una gran noticia!*” (a big piece of news). Excitement emanated from her as she told me that on the 22nd June 2015 (the previous week), she had played consecrated batá drums along with two female religious associates and she wanted the world to know about it. As a female batá player who is restricted by the gender taboo and as a researcher studying gender and batá performance, this news was significant and sensational. Standing in the square in the oppressive summer heat, my head began to reel while Pouymiró told me her story and began making arrangements for me to meet everyone who had been involved.

Within just two days of arriving in Santiago I had spoken at length with the four main protagonists in this story: *batalera* Pouymiró and a family of Ifá priests. The two other women who played the consecrated batá were mother *iyanifá* Caridad Rubio Fonseca and daughter, *iyanifá* Anais López Rubio. The drum owner and Ifá priest who sanctioned their access to the *fundamento* was *babalawo* Enrique Orozco Rubio, Caridad’s son and Anais’ brother (I will use Anais’ first name to avoid confusion with her brother). Although Pouymiró had been campaigning for twenty-five years for women’s rights to play both *aberikulá* and *fundamento* batá, it was her year-long religious association with the Rubio family and her initiation into Ifá (*ikofá*) that helped her to arrive at her goal and intensify her campaign.

It is relevant to contextualise where Pouymiró’s story sits historically and geographically within batá discourse. The batá tradition has grown exponentially in

¹³ This ethnography is constructed from field notes and memory.

Santiago and the Eastern provinces of Cuba since the Añá cult arrived only recently in 1989 (Luaces 2014:211-212) when compared to Havana and Matanzas, where it has been established since the 19th century.¹⁴ Along with the Santería population, the fraternity has since flourished in this region where there is now a significant community of *omo* Añás and numerous sets of consecrated batá. However, as the batá does not have a long history in the eastern provinces, traditional practices may be more open to adaptations.

Pouymiró is an educated, professional percussionist who has spent years learning and playing batá.¹⁵ Although she has knowledge of playing common *oricha* song sequences on all three drums, her skill, compared to say that of the average male ritual drummer in Cuba, is limited.¹⁶ In order to become an accomplished batá player, regular exposure to and experience of playing with more advanced players in ritual environments is an essential part of the knowledge-transfer process. Because of Pouymiró's gender she has been unable to access the resources a male drummer would expect and as a result a deeper understanding of the rhythm, song and ritual batá corpus has been difficult for her to obtain.¹⁷ Since meeting Orozco Rubio in 2014 Pouymiró had begun teaching Fonseca and Anais some basic rhythms on *aberikulá* batá, partly for ceremonial purposes and partly with a view to perform in secular settings. Fonseca and Anais were at the very beginning of their pedagogical musical

¹⁴ Galí and Buenaventura Bell were the first *omo* Añá to bring a set of *fundamento* from Matanzas. The *fundamento* were consecrated by Esteban "Chachá" Vega Bacallao (Luaces 2014:211-212).

¹⁵ Although all of Cuba's population is educated and literacy rates are almost 100%, (<https://countryeconomy.com/demography/literacy-rate/cuba>. [Accessed 28/01/2018], many ritual drummers leave school at the earliest opportunity to earn an income so do not attend higher education programs.

¹⁶ See Meadows (2017:115) for a biography of Pouymiró's musical career and her political feminist standing.

¹⁷ Pouymiró told me that she had previously not been initiated as a Santería priest because a religious affiliation might restrict her campaign. She also explained that she does not attend *tambores* because she is not made to feel welcome by the religious community in Santiago due to her campaigning for women's rights to play batá (pers. comm., 4/07/2015).

journey when I met them as they were still struggling to play even the most basic batá rhythms. Regardless, or perhaps because of their lack of experience and knowledge of the batá, the three women were adapting aspects of the Cuban batá corpus by incorporating songs from the contemporary Nigeria-Ifá worship including that of Yoruba singer *iyanifá* Asabioje Afenapa (Meadows 2017:136).

Pouymiró and Fonseca were preparing for a secular batá performance at the 35th Festival del Caribe in Santiago. I was invited to join them playing batá and singing, so rehearsals began on that day (1/7/2015). Below is an account which provides some nuanced details about various different approaches to the introduction of contemporary Ifá song texts, responses by local Añá elders to the news of women playing consecrated batá in Santiago, and how the unfolding of this news shaped a small batá performance which was part of the 35th Festival del Caribe 2015.

The first two rehearsals preparing for the performance involved working only with Pouymiró and Fonseca, who wanted to concentrate on rehearsing the contemporary Ifá songs and working out how they would fit over some common Cuban batá *toques* such as Yakota, the fourth section of Osáin (in the *oru seco*), Baba Fururu, Ñongo and Chachalokefun.¹⁸ The late Buenaventura Bell was due to perform with us and he joined us after two rehearsals.¹⁹ Pouymiró explained that Bell had taught her to play *aberikulá* when many male batá drummers in Santiago had refused to teach women because they considered it profane (pers. comm., 4/07/2015).

After the first rehearsal with Bell, Fonseca pulled out of the performance. It was not made explicit why, but I believe it may have had something to do with Bell

¹⁸ One can find notated versions of these rhythms in the following literature; Yakota (Coburg 2004:42); Section 4 of Osáin (Amira and Cornelius (1999:67); Ñongo (Coburg 2004:64-66; Schweitzer 2013:193-201); Chachalokefun (Coburg 2004:68-73).

¹⁹ I heard news via social media that Bell passed away in March 2018.

refusing to include the contemporary Ifá songs she wished to sing over traditional batá *toques*. She told me after the rehearsal that he had not respected her religious position as an *iyanífa* and her contribution to the repertoire. After one more rehearsal with Bell, but without Fonseca, Pouymiró told me that she had decided to tell Bell that she planned to go public with the news that she had played consecrated batá. Pouymiró was very nervous about telling her former batá teacher this news, as she was sure he would be angry with her. Two days before the performance was due to take place, I accompanied her to Bell's apartment where she broke the news to him. Bell initially went quiet and stared at the floor for a long time; finally he raised his head, scratched his chin, and said "*Oye, esto es algo serio, esto es candela*" (Listen, this is something serious, this is a scandal). Then to our surprise, he went on to discuss logistics with Pouymiró about how women could go on to become 'sworn' to Añá. He even went as far as suggesting that they could use his *fundamento* (presumably the set he and Galí brought from Matanzas) to birth a new set of Añá for newly initiated women. He showed no signs of being against Pouymiró's actions of playing *fundamento* or her future plans to get more women playing Añá. Given Bell's age (I believe he was in his 70s) and his position in the Añá fraternity, his reaction came as a surprise to both Pouymiró and I. However, he explained that he would not perform with us at the festival because he would "need to protect himself" from the aftermath of the news becoming public, which both he and Pouymiró believed was going to be unpleasant.

I was due to interview the female batá player Regla Palacio the following day and Pouymiró had given me permission to tell her the news. She also asked me to invite Palacio to take part in the performance now that Bell and Fonseca had withdrawn from the event. To my surprise her husband, the famous Galí Riverí, turned up with her and so I chose to interview them together. Early in the interview I

divulged Pouymiró's news but neither seemed particularly bothered and even seemed to agree with the idea that women should be able to play Añá. That they agreed to both take part in the upcoming performance and arranged a rehearsal at their home the following day, was further endorsement of Pouymiró's stance. After a repertoire change and a line-up change Pouymiró, Rivera, Palacio and I performed a traditional Cuban repertoire to an audience of about fifteen people in a small community centre called San Pedrito as part of the 35th Festival del Caribe, in Santiago on 8th July 2015 (Plate 3.5).



Plate 3.5: After performance at the Festival del Fuegos Festival, Santiago 2015 (from left): Galí Rivera, Vicky Jassey, Regla Palacio and Nagybe Pouymiró (8/07/2015)

These unfolding events demonstrate the ways in which a small group in Santiago are re-imagining the batá's musical corpus and Añá gender prohibitions. The interpretation of contemporary Nigerian-style Ochá-Ifá ideologies circulating in

Cuba has provided religious justification for their actions. The sanctioning of three women to play consecrated batá by an *omo* Añá-Ifá priest who is not a drummer is significant. As Orozco Rubio did not grow up playing batá within the Añá brotherhood he does not necessarily have the same embodied theological foundations, cultural conditioning and social bonding that creates a framework for maintaining batá gender prohibitions like other cult members, such as Martínez may have (earlier in this chapter). The timing I also believe is relevant if we consider that Pouymiró had been campaigning to realise her goal of playing consecrated batá for around twenty-five years. So why did it happen in 2015 and why do we see esteemed *omo* Añás and *olúbatás* such as Bell and Galí appear to support Pouymiró's attempt to reform female batá proscriptions? I propose that key changes to the sacro-socio landscape have played a crucial role. The most pertinent are the introduction of initiating non-drumming *babalawos* into the Añá cult (discussed earlier in this chapter); the relative normalisation of female batá drumming in secular settings since the 1980s (see Chapter 4); and the initiation of women into the Ifá cult since the 2000s (see Chapter 2). I believe these changes played a crucial part in laying the groundwork that resulted in three women playing *fundamento* and going public with their campaign.

Dominant Narratives and Multiple Sub-Texts in Batá Gender Discourse

Fonseca's son, Enrique Orozco Rubio (Plate 3.6), is a *babalawo* and *omo* Añá who is "creatively" adapting tenets of Cuban-style Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Añá (Meadows 2017:13). Enrique, an educated man qualified in psychology, is head of a *casa templo* (Lit: house temple, religious house) called *Egbe Iran Atele Ilogbon* in Santiago (see also Meadows 2017:101). His religious Ifá *rama* (branch or religious lineage) stems

from the powerful and conservative Ifá leader Bernardo Rojas (Brown 2003:82). Enrique is part of a small religious community attempting to transform female religious prohibitions with the aim of creating greater gender symmetry. Significantly, he was the first to initiate a woman into Ifá in Santiago: his sister Anais (Plate 3.7); and shortly after that his mother, Fonseca (Plate 3.8) (pers. comm., Orozco Rubio 30/06/2015; Meadows 2017:154).



Plate 3.6: Enrique Orozco Rubio (Photo by Vicky Jassey 1/7/2015)



Plate 3.7: Caridad Rubio Fonseca (Photo by Vicky Jassey 3/7/15)



Plate 3.8: *Iyanifá* Anais López Rubio (Photo by Vicky Jassey 9/07/2015)

Orozco Rubio is also an *aláña*, meaning someone who owns a set of *fundamento* although he is not a drummer (Felipe Villamil cited in Vélez 2000).²⁰ His drums were ‘born’ from Galí’s consecrated batá.²¹ To my knowledge, he is the first Añá drum owner to allow women to play his consecrated batá drums. Enrique told me he believes his elevated ritual status as a *babalawo* and the religious standing of his mother and sister as *iyanífás*, entitled him to circumvent Añá’s female gender taboos and ritual practices (pers. comm., 30/6/2015).²²

The four protagonists involved in breaking with the Añá brotherhood’s long-held gender taboo, Nagybe, Enrique, Caridad and Anais, initially presented a cohesive narrative. They decided to contravene the prohibition and publically present what they see as a subversive challenge to the accepted mainstream asymmetry in Ifá and Santería. Furthermore, they had a strategy on how to disseminate their story nationally through Pouymiró, presenting a paper at a high-profile religious conference during the Festival del Caribe on the 6th July 2015. Their strategy for international dissemination of their campaign was to engage with foreign researchers such as Meadows and me.²³ This news, Caridad dramatically claimed, “will be bigger than the relations between the US and Cuba!” (pers. comm., 2/7/2015), while Pouymiró declared it would deliver “*una bomba*” (a bomb) to the drumming and religious community (pers. comm., 4/07/2015).

²⁰ I have chosen to adopt Villamil’s terminology to describe non-playing owners of *fundamento*. However, I have heard different terms used such as *dueño del tambor* (owner of the drum).

²¹ Riverí, along with Buenaventura Bell, were the first to bring a set of *fundamento* to Santiago in 1989 from Matanzas.

²² See later in this chapter for discussions of ritual hegemony and Ifá-Añá alliances.

²³ North American ethnomusicologist Meadows audio-visually documented the women playing consecrated batá on the 22nd June 2015. It is possibly the first footage of its kind.

The group's decision to engage with audio-visual and academic materials in public and international academic channels had a clear and open agenda.²⁴ They wished to dispel the myth that women who play consecrated batá will be inflicted by physical harm or even death. Furthermore, they created a cultural artefact, which gives substance and agency to their belief in gender equality. By forging international links with other women interested in their story, they have attempted to engage with a global feminist movement and open up channels for the international dissemination of their campaign. The footage of the event provides a means by which their protest could be internationally projected into the public arena via social media. References to their campaign in both Meadows's PhD thesis (2017) and my own is an obvious outcome. Their efforts created a platform for their voices to be heard against a backdrop of overwhelming silence regarding the experiences of female batá players in Cuba and in doing so inverts stereotypes of marginalised women as powerless.

As I spent more time with each of the respondents, sub-texts began to bubble to the surface and revealed numerous conflicting motives and agendas, which presented multiple 'messy' narratives (Pillow 2010). My personal bias of course cannot be ignored. Being a female, feminist, and batá player meant that despite my responsibility to keep a scholarly distance and maintain a neutral approach, I sympathised with the aspirations of my respondents. It was a remarkable research opportunity to witness women, who consider themselves to be socially and musically marginalised, address and challenge what they perceive to be their subordination. Each person involved in this story (including myself) had a stake in the breaking of

²⁴ The Pouymiró, Fonsca and Anais invited me to film and photograph them playing consecrated batá at Fonsca's home and *casa temple* (see Plate 3.9).

this historic event: its representations and ‘Reverberations,’ therefore, became political.

Mohanty (2003:21) reminds us that transnational feminism has often either spoken for or ignored the lives of marginalised women in “third world countries.”²⁵ Furthermore, she highlights the “inherently political nature of feminist scholarship” and warns against simplistic historically reductionist generalisations, reinforcing binaries that create colonial, hegemonic connections between “First and Third World scholarship” (ibid:37). In an effort to break down generalisations that depict men only as oppressors and women only as the oppressed (Mohanty 2003:25), I present a nuanced representation that attempts to challenge simplistic fixed gender-stereotypes.



Plate 3.9: (from left) Caridad Rubio Fonseca, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró and *iyaníá* Anais López Rubio playing consecrated batá. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 9/7/2015)

²⁵ See also hooks (1990:241-243).

The defining moment of these three women resisting religious conventions by playing consecrated batá was not, as I had thought, part of a religious occasion. This historic event took place privately on June 22nd 2015 in Fonseca's and Anais's *casa templo* (home temple) (pers. comm., Pouymiró 4/07/2015; see also Meadows 2017:115) The event took place during a rehearsal in preparation for a secular performance due to take p in the coming weeks at the Festival del Caribe. Pouymiró (pers. comm., 4/07/2015) explained that she called Enrique to ask him for help transporting her *aberikulá* drums to the rehearsal. To her surprise, Enrique—who knew of Pouymiró's desire to play consecrated drums—told her that the three women could play his *fundamento*, which live in the rehearsal space in the *casa templo*. Once it had been established that the three women were going to play the consecrated batá, Pouymiró organised with Meadows to record and document the historic event, an occasion Pouymiró had waited years to achieve (pers. comm., Pouymiró 4/7/2015).²⁶

Just two weeks later, on the 6th July 2015, Pouymiró delivered her paper at the conference and publically declared:

I am presenting the reasons for which a group of women, thanks to the freedoms offered us by the traditionalist African Religion, have now been able to play the consecrated Añá drums, without risking the integrity of the Añá existing tradition.

²⁶ Pouymiró claims she publically expressed “that women should also be able to play fundamento drums” at the 1992 Festival del Caribe. She explained that at this time “santeros said that would never happen because it was forbidden, because we women are impure due to menstruation” (pers. comm., 4/07/2015).



Plate 3.10: Pouymiró delivers her paper titled “*Soy Una Obini Bata, Mujer Tamborera* ‘La menstruación: bendición o maldición’ de Enrique Orozco’ at the conference. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 6/7/2015)

In her presentation, Pouymiró justified their playing of consecrated batá by contesting and reinterpreting religious Ifá texts used to uphold the prohibition against women (Chapter 2). As I spent more time talking with each person involved with this story, however, internal power struggles and alternative agendas revealed themselves, which at times opposed the collective dominant narrative in which we had all become somewhat invested in. In one example, Enrique arrived part of the way through a rehearsal where Pouymiró, Fonseca and I were preparing for a batá performance. Although he was not part of the rehearsal or performance, within a couple of minutes he had taken the *iyá* from Pouymiró so that he could take part. Unhappy with the sound of the secular batá drum on his lap he went and got his consecrated *iyá*. After spending some time tuning it with a mallet, he then attempted to lead the ensemble.

Clearly, he was not a drummer and had limited skill and knowledge and struggled at every turn. Our rehearsal turned into a class where Pouymiró, in a major gender reversal, began teaching him the rhythms by demonstrating then on the consecrated drum positioned on his lap. This situation presented two entirely new experiences for me; the playing on consecrated batá for secular pedagogical purposes and more importantly, seeing a woman play and touch a consecrated batá.

Although this was a rich ethnographic experience from a research perspective, it was personally challenging for different reasons. From a musical viewpoint, the rehearsal took a backward turn once Enrique arrived. From a feminist perspective, Enrique was allowed to enter a female musical space and dominate it for his own gain. As a student of the batá, I was uncomfortable with what I considered to be a disregard for the sacredness of the consecrated batá drums, something I had come to revere. Overall this experience demonstrated how complicated, subjective and contentious the process of gender reform can be.

Other examples of emerging paradoxes within the collective dominant ‘gender reform narrative’ became apparent when Pouymiró explained that Enrique had mediated the content of the conference paper she had prepared (see also Meadows 2017:141). This included extensive edits, and on the day of the conference he refused to give her permission, as part of her presentation, to show the photos of the three women playing consecrated batá. Pouymiró explained she did not know why he had changed his mind but suggested it was perhaps because he was afraid of the repercussions for his family (pers. comm., 9/07/2015). Enrique’s dominion over the three women was summed up by Fonseca, who claimed “We don’t do anything without the authorisation of Baba (father) Enrique” (pers. comm., 2/07/2015).²⁷ These

²⁷ Baba is a term not just for father, but also a religious term for male elder.

complex power relations clearly contradicted both Enrique's and their own ideology of supporting greater male-female equality.²⁸ Although the three female batá players were publically campaigning for greater gender symmetry, they were simultaneously uncritically allowing Enrique to control their campaign as well as their musical and religious space.

The most perplexing paradox within this story, however, was yet to unfold. On the day the three women were filmed by Meadows playing Orozco Rubio's set of Añá, Pouymiró (Quoted in Meadows 2017:136) recorded a statement,

We are not going to violate—nor will we be violating—any natural law, or anything that is not normal. I don't believe that if men come from the wombs of women, there can be any impediment against us executing the *tambores de aña* [sic]...Today, June 22, 2015, for the first time in Cuba and in the world, we women will play the *fundamentos*. I believe that this is something important that can revolutionize music [and] that will revolutionize the religion. All things are subject to change.

In addition, I heard similar statements from the other two women, Fonseca and Anais, which stated that the taboo prohibiting them from playing *fundamento* was a patriarchal construction to which none of them subscribed. Therefore, their playing of the consecrated batá served to undermine gender prohibitions. By the following year, however, according to Pouymiró, a lot had changed. She informed me that relations between the Rubio family and herself had broken down beyond repair (pers. comm., 20/10/2016). In addition, she added that one of the other two female drummers, who

²⁸ See also Beliso-De Jesús (2015) for discussions on the heteronormative conditions of women's increased religious agency in Ifá, and the control of this movement by "heteropatriarchal" priests.

had played *fundamento*, had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and was given a year to live. Sadly, she passed away on the 25th January 2017 (for ethical reasons I am not in a position to go into detail). Pouymiró (ibid) told me she blames some illnesses she herself had experienced, other misfortunes she had incurred and her fellow batá player's death on their playing of consecrated drums.²⁹ Pouymiró now claims “women should not execute the *fundamento* batá if they have not received the consecration ceremonies that authorise them to do so” (pers. comm., 14/11/2016).

It is not the first time the death of a female batá player has been associated with batá drumming. This was also the case with the famous batá drummer and *akpón*, Amelia Pedroso, who died at a young age of cancer (Villegastour 2013:58). Pedroso also campaigned for the reform of gender taboos connected with batá drumming (ibid). How the recent death of the female batá drummer from Santiago is received and interpreted will no doubt depend on the protagonist's positionality to the subject. Those who believe in the taboo may well invest in the story as a way of warning against the dangers of women contravening the batá gender taboo. Others, meanwhile, may simply attribute their deaths and connection with batá as a coincidence.

In another twist to the story, Pouymiró now holds Enrique, as a facilitator and religious leader, liable for this misfortune and for allowing them to play his consecrated batá without “religiously protecting them” (pers. comm., 17/10/2016). Pouymiró (ibid) explained that she now believes that “Women can't play *fundamento* batá if they don't receive the consecration and ceremonies that authorise them to do it.” She told me that she had received advice and guidance from a newly established

²⁹ Pouymiró (pers. comm., 17/10/2016) explained that she felt strongly that the three women had been exposed to dangerous spiritual energy.

religious relationship with an Ifá priest, who had since made her aware of the danger she and the other women had been exposed to when they played consecrated batá. Her shift in position undermined not only the dominant narrative originally asserted by the group action, but also views she has argued for over three decades. As it is not a generic prerequisite for men to receive a consecration ceremony in order to play *fundamento*, Pouymiró's reasoning suggests that she believes that women are more vulnerable than men to Añá's malevolent powers. This possibility further undermines her earlier declaration, "I don't believe that if men come from the wombs of women, there can be any impediment against us executing the *tambores de aña*" (Quoted in Meadows 2017:136).

Several other instances arose during my time in Santiago which presented alternative narratives from that of the strategised gender-reform campaign once instigated by the three women and Rubio. The date women were said to have first played Enrique's *fundamento* is an example. Meadows (2017:45-46) claims June 22nd 2015 (the day she filmed the three women play) to be the first recorded documentation of women playing Añá. The three female batá players Anais, Pouymiró and Fonseca, confirmed this date during my conversations with them a week later. However, there is a discrepancy between this date and the date provided by Orozco Rubio, who explained that he had been allowing *iyanífás* in his *Egbé* (religious house or temple), namely his mother Caridad Rubio Fonseca, his sister Anais López Rubio, Dailena Bords and Dulesis Yopi, to play his consecrated batá for over three years (pers. comm., Orozco Rubio 30/6/2015).³⁰ Furthermore, friction between Pouymiró and Fonseca was evident as they vied for agency over how 'the

³⁰ A similar discrepancy was reported with the initiation of *iyanífás*.

story' was being documented, communicated and disseminated.³¹ Meanwhile, Pouymiró openly admitted that she hoped to find a foreign benefactor that could fund her leaving Cuba, so she could escape the grinding poverty she endures. Mohanty (2003:33) reminds us that "It is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women's locations within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised." Needless to say, the batá gender taboo continues to be perpetuated by an alliance between both women and men. This case study demonstrates how a simple gender-asymmetry power dynamic can be dependent upon religious status, musical knowledge, age, internal family structures, ambition, and access to wealth, education and class.

Enduring paradigms, Brown (2003:160) reminds us, are produced within "dynamic settings and of struggle and cooperation, innovation and reargued reaction, social constraints and opportunities." Ritual practices were not "passively produced by the aggregation of heterogeneous social groups" but through "'reform', agendas and strategic choices" (ibid) by religious leaders. In addition, Kubik (1999:13; quoted in Villepastour 2015:6) states that

One charismatic personality will suffice to release a chain reaction. *One* virtuoso musician can end up being imitated by hundreds. This fact has often been neglected by researchers proceeding from a collectivistic perception of culture.

How then do we measure the impact of the events in Santiago within the context of reform in a wider Cuban context? For the most part I suggest it is too early to say.

³¹ Each woman took me aside and privately expressed fears over how the other was dominating the "telling of the story." I am aware that I too am playing a part in directing how "the story" is told through presenting my research.

Certainly, the actions of this small group in Santiago have made waves in the religious and batá community. Bolaños's knowledge and criticism of the event shortly after my return from Santiago was evidence of this. Other factors, however, need to be considered when measuring the potential impact on the Santiago campaign. First, the location; Santiago received its first set of *fundamento* relatively recently and is not generally considered a nexus of cult Añá practice compared with Matanzas and Havana. Second, Enrique's lack of musical skill and knowledge does not position him as a respected gatekeeper of the Añá tradition. It is, therefore, unlikely his reforms will be imitated by others in the fraternity in the short term. Third, the breaking of relations between Pouymiró and the Rubio family undermines their initial strategy of a cohesive dominant gender-reform narrative. Fourth, the subsequent shift in Pouymiró's argument—a protagonist who now considers it dangerous for women to play *fundamento* without being sworn to Añá—could be considered by some contradictory to her previous campaign. Fifth, and perhaps most significant, is the news that less than two years after playing consecrated batá one of the three women died prematurely. For some (like Pouymiró), this tragedy may be considered a dire consequence of what happens if women play *fundamento*. As a result, the news may be used to provide anecdotal evidence to warn other women against playing the consecrated batá.

It is for the reasons outlined above that I believe the Santiago story may initially reinforce as opposed to threaten gender taboos and segregated practices in the Añá brotherhood.³² Nonetheless, the voices of these women and men, who have openly critiqued the male hegemonic order and female marginalisation, have been

³² When I arrived back in Havana following my trip to Santiago, I met with Bolaños who had already heard about women playing *fundamento* in Santiago. He was clearly upset by the news.

heard, whereas they may previously have been ignored. I believe that there is a fracture in the status quo. Whether this fracture develops into a gaping crack depends on whether their voices are joined by others who feel the same and whether, when combined, those voices form a loud chorus all shouting the same message. Until then, gender prohibitions and segregated practices in the Añá tradition will remain well and truly in place.

Summary

The 'no-go' zone, policed and maintained by heterosexual males and processes of embodied ritual practice, normalises women and gay men keeping their distance from consecrated batá during sacred performances. Agency lies with the ritual musicians who conceptualise and reify these fluid boundaries, leaving women and openly gay men to navigate their contracting and expanding borders. Meanwhile, rituals imagined as timeless traditions continue to reinforce and swell the heterosexual male-only cult membership. The *juramento* ceremonies for batá drummers and *babalawos* over the last few decades provide apt examples of dynamic processes of invented rituals and reform. The increased trend for Ifá priests to become initiated into the Añá fraternity, which according to Bolaños he began in 1988, has had some surprising and no doubt unwanted consequences. On the one hand, these ritual hegemonies have expanded membership of the heterosexual male-only Añá cult and generated a substantial demand for both drummers and Ifá priests. On the other hand, the opening up of the fraternity to non-drumming *babalawos* has ultimately led to an Ifá priest defying one of the central tenets by allowing a group of women access to his consecrated batá in Santiago. The unfolding story of these women, who have publically contested gender

prohibitions restricting female access to playing *fundamento*, is fraught with complexities and internal power struggles. Their plight demonstrates the difficulties involved in attempting to implement reform and challenge male cult domination.

Chapter 4 investigates the rise of female batá drumming in Cuba and how menstrual taboos impact upon aspects of their secular performance. I discuss the role of the Cuban government in supporting all-female batá group and how this has ultimately led to women performing batá in ritual settings.

Chapter Four

“A Touch of Feminine Distinction”:

The Rise of Female Batá Drummers in Cuba.¹

Los Orishas Bailan con Tambor de Mujer

Con un sonido que clama por las raíces de la música tradicional cubana, los tambores bata irrumpieron un día, para sorpresa de los orichas, tocados por manos firmes para el cuero, pero delicadas, sensuales y ... desafiantes. Es por ello que despues de dos decadas de existencia, las divinidades de las religiones afrocubanas no han dejado de sentirse cautivadas por elegancia y versatilidades del sonido de Obini Batá, agrupacion femenina que ha sabido reverenciar un espacio de la cultura cubana que todovia merece un mayor reconocimiento y difusion. (Medina, Lucas Magazine 2014:11)

The Orishas Dance to Women Drummers

With a sound that cries out for the roots of traditional Cuban music, the sound of batá drums burst out one day. To the surprise of the orishas, the hands playing the skins were firm but delicate, sensual and ... defiant. Because of this, after two decades of existence, the deities of the Afro-Cuban religions have not ceased to feel captivated by the elegance and versatility of the sound of Obini Batá, a female group which has honoured a space of Cuban culture that deserves greater recognition and dissemination.² [Translation my own]

¹ “A touch of feminine distinction” is a quote by the director of all-female group Obini Batá, Eva Despagine (pers. comm., 31/08/2014), in reference to adjustments the group made to feminise aspects of their performance.

² The text refers to “two decades”: The wording of this could be ambiguous and refer to two decades since Obini Batá began performing or two centuries since the batá found popularity in Cuba.

The above paragraph about the all-female Cuban batá group Obini Batá is extracted from an article in a Cuban magazine. It is laden with symbolic imagery that stereotypes women batá drummers with Cuban concepts of femininity. This chapter examines such stereotypes within women's batá performance in Cuba and the musical space they have carved out despite the gender prohibitions that have historically restricted their playing of batá drums. I explore the role of the socialist state in the rise of all-female batá drumming groups in Cuba and discuss some of the political and social implication of all-female folkloric groups. I investigate concepts of female sexuality and heteronationalism in female batá performance. Heteronationalism, Lazarus (2011:82) defines as

a suitable concept that highlights racism, ethnocentrism, patriarchy (male dominance and sexism), and heterosexism as foundational imperatives of neo-colonial nation building within the Caribbean.

I investigate whether there is, as many people have suggested, a link between female batá drumming and lesbianism.³ In addition, I examine the ways Cuban women negotiate the boundaries between sacred and secular batá performance using un-consecrated *aberikulá* batá. Finally, challenging stereotypes that position women as musically subordinate, I present two case studies, which chart female agency in ritual and secular batá performance.

The opening article quotation suggests there is a celebratory relationship

³ This link is highlighted in Vincent's thesis (2006:190) and has been suggested to me by Cuban and European male ritual musicians.

between the *orichas* and female drummers. My research, conversely, confirms that although female batá drummers have proliferated in Cuba over the last thirty years, tension still exists around the idea of women playing batá for the *orichas*. Although a majority of male ritual drummers have attempted clearly to separate the boundary between female-secular-artistic batá drumming and male-sacred-ritual practice, this line is becoming increasingly blurred.

The contrasting evocative adjectives used to describe Obini Batá's performance in the opening quote of this chapter exemplifies some of the paradoxes that arise when women perform musical traditions generally considered to be masculine. McClary reminds us that music is a

medium in which the fears and hopes of a people are played out, negotiated, and shared, a medium which is both shaped by social values and in turn contributes to the organization of conduct and beliefs.

Words, spoken or written, become a political tool for transmitting or contesting these social codes (1990:9).

During the four decades prior to the publication of the above magazine article, around ten all-female professional folkloric drumming groups using or specialising in batá drumming had been performing in Cuba. Although seven are still active (see Fig. 4.1), Havana-based Obini Batá garners the lion's share of attention from local, national and international scholars and journalists.⁴

⁴ E.g., see Sayre (2000); Scherpf (2011); Despaigne and Despaigne (2008); Rodriguez (2014); and Hagedorn (2015).

Name of Group	Founded	Current /Past	Director	Female/ Male	Location	Information Source
Okan Batá	1980s (not specific)	Past	Not Known		Sanitago	Pers. comm., Pouymiro 4/07/2015
Obini Batá	1990-1993*	Current	Eva Despaigne	F	Havana	Pers. comm., Despaigne 31/08/2015 & Justo Pelladito 4/08/2015
Obini Irawo	1991	Current (but not playing batá)	Not Known		Santiago	Pers. comm., Pouymiro 4/07/2015
Afro America	1992	Current	Justo Pelladito	M	Havana	Pers. comm., Pelladito 4/08/2015
Obini Ache	1992	Current	Elizabeth Otero	F	Cienfuegos	Pers. comm., Otero 12/7/2014
Ibbu Okkun	1993/1994	Past	Amelia Pedroso	F	Havana	Pers. comm., Torres 31/08/201; Conner and Sparks 2014
Obini Aberikulá	1998	Past	Daniel Alfonso	M	Matanzas	Pers. comm., Mesa 16/09/2016 (percussionist)
Batá Show	1998	Current	Geraldo Pelladito	M	Guanabacoa	Presentación Del Grupo Femenino de Tambores Batá - Batá Show. (see footnote for full citation)
Rumba Morena	1996	Current	Diunis Valdez	F	Havana	Pers. comm., Valdez 12/08/2015
Obini Oñi	2000	Current	Dagmaris Despaigne	F	Cárdenas	Pers. comm., Dagmaris Despaigne 13/09/2015

Figure 4:1: A chart of all-female, Afro-Cuban folkloric groups in Cuba.⁵⁶

⁵ Ascertaining exactly which female batá groups were first is complicated by ambiguous data. I have not been able to find written evidence to confirm which group first performed publicly. Socarras from Ibbu Okun could not recollect the exact date of their first performance but said it took place in 2003 (pers. comm., Socarras 31/08/2014). Despaigne (pers. comm., 30/08/2014), founder member and director of Obini Batá, claims her group also began performing in 2003. However, Pelladito, who was a drummer in the CFNC at the time Obini Batá, who

Part of my initial research aim was to provide a wider perspective inclusive of other female batá groups, but in the course of my research I became closely involved with Obini Batá after being invited to rehearse and perform with them during a field trip in 2014. This immersive experience provided me with an in-depth insight into the workings of a prominent Cuban all-female batá group. The empirical data this opportunity provided have been imperative for my investigation into the relationship between gender, religion, politics, music and sexuality in Cuba. Challenging many of the claims made by journalists and scholars who have written about Obini Batá, I deconstruct the imaginary (Allen 2004) that depicts the group as subversive to religious male hegemony.

El Período Especial and the Emergence of Female Batá Drummers in Cuba.

The emergence of women playing batá in Cuba appears to be very recent. In the course of my research, biographical details offered by Aleida Socarras suggest that she began learning the batá around 1978, which is the earliest account of a Cuban female batá drummer I have collected (pers. comm., 31/08/2014). Socarras explained that she began learning batá alongside her father, Fermín Nani, when she was eleven, while he taught at the Conjunto Folkórico Nacional de Cuba. Prior to this, it appears that women were entirely prohibited from playing any kind of batá drum including *aberikulá* (non-consecrated batá) (Villepastour 2013; pers. comm., Eva Despaigne,

were dancers with the company, claims “Eva has it wrong. Obini Batá started in 1990, a year before Afro America was founded” (pers. comm., 4/08/2015).

⁶ Batá Show. *Presentación Del Grupo Femenino de Tambores Batá.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hwHwKkk92s> [Accessed 16/08/2016].

30/08/2014; Pouymiró 6/7/2014). A year after Socarras began playing batá, folkloric drumming was put on the curriculum at the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (ISA). Justo Pelladito taught these classes and among his students “were White men and a Cuban woman” (pers. comm., 4/08/2015).⁷ Initially, Pelladito was criticised by many of his peers who perceived his willingness to teach women and White Cuban men as going against traditional values (pers. comm., 4/08/2015). However, he explained, “I did not want to discriminate against people who wanted to learn” (ibid). In Santiago, Pouymiró (pers. comm., 6/7/2014) remembers the responses she got when, as a novice percussionist of eighteen years, she asked if she could play batá.

I was very young when they told me that women could not play batá, not even *aberikulá*. Then I go ‘why?’ and they said, ‘Because it is not possible’, ‘besides, you women are impure because you menstruate and menstruation is incompatible with a divinity called Añá that lives inside the drum’. Then I asked, ‘but does this drum have Añá inside?’ they said ‘No, it doesn’t but you cannot play it either!’

Bolaños (pers. comm., 26/08/2014) describes the reaction he received from some drummers when he began teaching women.

There were some *tamboreros* [drummers] who said, ‘what are you doing teaching a woman to play?’ ignorant, no? I would tell them why not, this is a musical instrument, it’s not so they can play *fundamento*. It’s like teaching a *tumbadora* [conga drum] [...] the next thing I know they are all teaching women.

⁷ Pelladito did not mention race in reference to his female student.

Following debates among the male sacro-musical community, some within the Añá fraternity began teaching Cuban women certain generic *toques* on batá (pers. comm., Bolaños 27/08/2014; Pelladito 4/08/2015; López 2/08/2015). By the 2000s Cuban all-female batá groups began assembling and performing. Several of those women, who were among the first to play *aberikulá* in public spaces in the early 1990s, however, experienced strong criticism from many *omo* Añás in the musical community (Vincent [Villepastour] 1998:n.p, 2004:60, 2006:165; Medina 2014:11; pers. comm., Nagybe Pouymiró 6/07/2015; Deborah Frontela 19/08/2015). Socarras's experiences of playing batá among ritual male drummers' years before female groups began to coalesce are under-documented. Not only was she unique in her access to secular batá drumming, she was also actively encouraged to play by many leading ritual drummers of the generation, including her father Fermín Nani, Ángel Bolaños, Mario Aspirina and Regino Jiménez (pers. comm., Socarras 31/08/2014). Socarras went on to be the *iyá* player with all-female group Ibbu Okun, who appear to have begun performing around the same time as Obini Batá (see earlier in this chapter).

Bolaños later verified that he only taught foreign women and men because of financial reasons. When I asked Bolaños whether it was true that Cuban batá players would only teach foreign women he replied (pers. comm., 26/08/2014),

I personally don't teach even Cuban men batá. Not because I don't want to teach them, the problem is that everything has its price. I'm not going to waste my time teaching a Cuban [woman or man] and get 20 pesos [approximately 18p]. A Cuban would have to give me ten or fifteen dollars for a class, he hasn't got that kind of money.

Nonetheless, as most men learn to play batá in ritual situations they are able to bypass the need for one-to-one classes. Meanwhile, Cubans were also excluded from the state-run FolkCuba workshops from 1986 (Hagedorn 2001:88) as these workshops were also set up for foreign paying customers. The Cuban women I met who were interested in learning did not have the financial means to pay for either state-run or private batá classes, nor did they get opportunities to learn inside a ritual context. Frustrated at their situation, many argued against their marginalisation (Villepastour 2013:63). Pouymiró's experience (pers. comm., 6/7/2014), however, was different.

In the 1980s, Buenaventura Bell Morales, percussionist of the Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente [...] started giving me lessons for free and hidden in his house because at the time it was forbidden for women to play the [batá] drums. But while other girls and I suffered this prohibition there were American women in Havana learning how to play batá drums! So, here in Oriente we expressed our disagreement and this contradiction because we knew there were foreign women learning how to play instruments that are part of our national identity so we pushed forward with our desire to learn.

As Pouymiró points out, some male batá drummers refused to teach Cuban women because of their close proximity to the tradition and Añá community (Pedroso cited in Vincent [Villepastour] 2004:60).⁸ A group that was attracting a lot of attention from the Añá community was Ibbu Okun whose members included Socarras and Amelia Pedroso. To this day Pedroso is a legend within Santería's religious musical community and beyond for her contribution as an *akpón*. Although Obini Batá

⁸ In 2006, Jesus Lorenzo Peñalver 'Cusito' told me that he was willing to teach me certain toques because as a foreign woman, I would always return to Europe where my knowledge was not a threat to the ritual batá community.

promoted women's entitlement to play secular batá in artistic settings, Pedroso's subversive views on women's rights to play Añá (Vincent [Villegastour] 1998, 2004, 2006), combined with the respect she garnered as an *akpón* and religious practitioner, place her at the vanguard of any campaign associated with promoting women's prerogative to play either secular or religious batá. Pedroso's ability to straddle both secular and sacred spheres as a singer and batá drummer, combined with her status as an older person who had years within the religion meant she commanded the attention of the male musical elite in a way which has never since been matched. Her views and religious and musical knowledge, I believe positioned her as the single greatest threat to male sacro-musical hegemony to date.

In addition to the above, Pedroso travelled to the US on several occasions, where she inspired a following of women, many of whom identified as queer (Villegastour 2013:67). A number of these women later became interested in Santería, learned batá drumming and travelled regularly to Cuba to study with Pedroso as well as male ritual drummers. Pedroso's legacy and connection with this group of women further tied together, in the religious community's imagination, an association between women, batá and lesbianism (a subject I discuss in more detail later in this chapter).

After Obini Batá and Ibbu Okun were formed in the early 1990s, and possibly because of their success, not only did many male ritual drummers accept Cuban women playing *aberikulá* in secular settings, but a few even became the directors of all-female Cuban folkloric groups which featured batá drumming (see fig 4:1). By the beginning of the twenty-first century over ten all-female groups had emerged in different parts of Cuba, including Havana, Guanabacoa, Matanzas, Santiago, Cienfuegos and Cárdenas.

What was it that sparked this surge in female batá activity? Men granting women access to *aberikulá* batá, I argue, did not result from a collective drive for greater gender equality per se, but rather was largely due to the prestige, international mobility and the financial rewards offered by an expanding market driven by foreign students, many of whom were female. I propose that there are three main components which led to a burgeoning of all-female Cuban batá groups in the early 1990s. First, Cuban women began questioning and challenging the unfairness of male Cuban batá drummers teaching foreign women while they continued to be excluded. Second, if Cuban women had not made it known they were unhappy, one wonders if their exclusion would have been perpetuated until the present day. Third, was the Marxist-feminist indoctrination that was set in motion at the beginning of the revolution.⁹ Fourth was a significant change in policy towards tourism following the economic collapse in 1989 that began *el período especial* (the special period). The USSR's withdrawal from Cuba following its disintegration forced the government to implement wartime austerity measures. Morad explains, however, how "Alongside despair and disorientation, the *Special Period* brought about a certain relaxation of regulations applied across the Island" (2015:2). This led to the opening up of musical spaces previously closed to women and gays, and ultimately to changes in the constitution and the law in 2018.¹⁰

In 1974 President Fidel Castro declared, "When our revolution is judged in

⁹ Marxist-feminist ideologies were implemented in Cuba with the inclusion of Article 44, which declared "women and men have the same rights in the economic, political, cultural and social fields as well as in the family" (quoted in Skaine 2004: 170).

¹⁰ The Special Period saw radical policy changes especially regarding tourism, which was actively encouraged for to attract foreign currency. This led to a greater exchange of cultural and political ideas and practices between Cubans, North Americans and Europeans. See Morad (2015) for an in-depth discussion regarding the impact on the gay music scene in Havana during this time.

future years, one of the matters on which we will be judged is the manner in which our society and our homeland solved the problems of women” (Centre for Democracy in the Americas 2013). Placing solely men in positions of authority went against Cuba’s Marxist political reforms. Under the new government, women began to have greater autonomy. However, greater independence meant a significant increase in their workload. Women now provided a “double shift’ with domestic services and paid labour, or a “triple shift” for those involved, as many were, in political activism and voluntary labour (Hamilton 2012:30). Some women, I propose, maintain a “quadruple shift,” by managing all of the above as well as their ritual responsibilities. Women were still being excluded from top decision-making positions, which President Raúl Castro forty years later blamed on a “lack of systematic work and political will to secure the promotion of women,” adding “It’s really embarrassing that we have not solved this problem in more than half a century” (Centre for Democracy in the Americas 2013 n.a). I suggest that the deeply ingrained gender ideologies of numerous intersecting religions, played a crucial part in undermining political attempts to reform gender asymmetry in the socio-political milieu (Routon 2008b).

Not only was the Special Period a time of extreme hardship for Cubans struggling to find enough food to eat on a daily basis, it was also a period which saw the loosening of state control over religion, sexuality, tourism, commercialisation and capitalism. As a result, this period brought with it greater sexual, religious and creative freedom (Allen 2011:119; Morad 2015:152).

Although the first all-female Cuban music group, Anacaona, was founded in the 1930s, it was not until the late 1980s that Cuba saw a resurgence of all-female

groups, not all of which were restricted to the folkloric genres.¹¹ Zoe Fuentes, the Musical Director of the all-female Cuban dance music group Canela, which also utilised *aberikulá* in their performances, claims (World Percussion and Rhythm Magazine' 2013; emphasis author's):¹²

[T]here were not any female groups in Cuba until the founding of Canela in 1989. So, we are the pioneers of the New Women's Movement of Cuban Popular Music. There has always been a large quantity of women musicians studying in the School of the Arts. However, they would specialize in programs and classes that were focused on classical training and they would not specialize in instruments that were used in popular musical genres [...] It's because of Canela, that other women musicians became enthusiastic about creating their own groups. That's why Canela is recognized as special. We are the FIRST FEMALE GROUP OF THE NEW GENERATION OF CUBAN MUSICIANS!!!

It was no coincidence that all-female groups emerged in Cuba during the 1990s.¹³ For women, the special period represented a time of greater freedom from family and political ideals. It also allowed them (often out of necessity) access—through music, dance and *jineterismo*—to hard currency from tourism.¹⁴ Allen (2011:120) points out

¹¹ Other all-female popular Cuban groups were: Sexto Sentido, Son Damas and Anacaona, which reformed in 1988. 'Música Femenina: Cuba's Fascinating Girl Bands'. n.d. http://www.lahabana.com/Culture/article_music_traditional.php?id=Musica-Femenina-Cuba%27s-fascinating-girl-bands [Accessed 16/08/2016]

¹² Again, one can see the importance of claiming to be the "first" in historic accounts of female musical emancipation.

¹³ See also Ruf-Maldonado (2006) for discussions of the transformation of Cuban theatre practice following the *período especial*.

¹⁴ Rundle defines the phenomenon of *jineterismo* which means horseback riding, to indicate hustling or prostitution. She explains "*Jineterismo* is a much-debated issue in Cuba, and is most often seen as a consequence

that the “working, dancing, smiling, sexing black body” was essential to the nation’s burgeoning tourist sector. Hamilton (2012:47) notes that, although the socialist regime had a verbal commitment to fighting prostitution, it “stood uneasily against the backdrop of erotic language and imagery used in its own tourist campaigns.” Cuba was promoted “as an exotic paradise, often using images of Afro-Cuban women to sell this fantasy” (ibid) (see Plate 4.1). Whilst associating Afro-Cuban women with prostitution, the racist hiring practices of the formal tourist industry favoured light-skinned Cubans (ibid).



Plate 4.1: Canela (Image taken from Melena 2011: 4)

Against a backdrop of historic institutional racism and marginalisation, the Afro-Cuban folkloric scene was one area where Afro-Cuban men and women were accepted and, up to a point, celebrated as part of Cuba’s national identity (Allen 2011:120).¹⁵ African-derived cultural traditions, which had been previously

of tourism” (Louise and Rundle n.d.). See Koskoff (2014:26) for cross-cultural links between women, music and prostitution.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion of race, racism and their connection to the batá.

marginalised, were now packaged by the state and sold as a commodity to the tourist industry. The all-female, state-funded Obini Batá were one such group.

Obini Batá and the Cuban State

Obini Batá's state sponsorship includes salaries, equipment, a permanent rehearsal space, a technician and a residency in one of Cuba's most culturally significant historical buildings, The Yoruba Association (YA) in Havana, as well as international mobility and global prestige. Their local performances are predominantly aimed at tourists who visit the YA. Meanwhile, their overseas performances are not given to foreign audiences with an interest in Cuban music but to political groups interested in the socialist policies of the Cuban state. For example, the Cuban Institute of Music and the Ministry of Cuban Culture have sponsored Obini Batá's travel to France, where they performed for the French Electricity Workers Union, and Nigeria, where they were presented as an example of how "the Cuban Revolution pays special attention to educate and develop social projects that enable the professional development of women."¹⁶ On the Official Website of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Obini Batá is referred to as "faithful exponents of tradition" ('Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba' n.d.).¹⁷

¹⁶ Sources: Anonymous. 'Obini Bata: All-Women Afro-Cuban Music Group » LaHabana.Com'. 2011. *LaHabana.Com* (blog). <http://www.lahabana.com/content/obini-bata-all-women-afro-cuban-music-group/>; Anonymous [Accessed 1/09/2011]. 'Cuban Cultural Delegation Visits Ekiti State in Nigeria'. 2012. CubaMINREX. <http://www.minrex.gob.cu/en/cuban-cultural-delegation-visits-ekiti-state-nigeria> [Accessed 15/10/2012].

¹⁷ 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba'. n.d. <http://anterior.cubaminrex.cu/English/DiplomaticEvents/CubanAmb/2011/CUBAN.html> [Accessed 26/12/2013].

In terms of representation and prominence, Obini Batá continues to be the most successful all-female group specialising in batá drumming. They have received national and international acclaim. Nearly three decades after the group formed they continue to inspire headlines from the local and global press such as “Female Drummers Defy the Male Chauvinism of the Gods” (The Farber Foundation 2009)¹⁸, “Female Cuban Drummers Break Into the ‘Boys Club’ of Cuban Percussion” (Castellanos 2014)¹⁹, “Six Women Dare to Play the Batá Drums” (Martí Noticias 2016)²⁰ and “Women drummers break barriers in Cuban percussion” (Rodríguez 2014).²¹

Despaigne (pers. comm., 30/08/2014), the group’s founder and director, states

If I were to talk about Obini Batá in the religious aspect, I would say that Obini Batá has reclaimed the role of women from the very root. We have become flag bearers, which expose the importance of women fighting this long-standing ancestral *machismo* that exists. Because women are the cause of everything within the religion [...] When we Obini Batá perform, playing those drums [batá], we reclaim a space for women, here she is validated in salsa as well as from the religious viewpoint.

¹⁸ Anonymous ‘Female Drummers Defy the Male Chauvinism of the Gods’. 2009. The Farber Foundation. 2009. <https://www.cubanartnews.org/2009/12/16/female-drummers-defy-the-male-chauvinism-of-the-gods/> [Accessed 27/04/2018]

¹⁹ Castellanos, Mellisa. 2014. ‘Female Cuban Drummers Break Into the “Boys Club” of Cuban Percussion’. Latin Post. 2014. <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/14367/20140607/female-cuban-drummers-break-boys-club-percussion-once-dominated-macho.htm> [Accessed 27/03/2018]

²⁰ ‘Seis mujeres cubanas se atreven a tocar tambores Batá’. 2016. Radio y Televisión Martí | Martinoticias.com. <https://www.martinoticias.com/a/cuba-mujeres-se-atreven-tocar-tambores-bata/127234.html>. [Accessed 4/05/2018].

²¹ Women drummers break barriers in Cuba percussion | Reading Eagle - LIFE (<http://readingeagle.com/life/article/women-drummers-break-barriers-in-cuba-percussion>) [Accessed 4/05/2018]. This article was also published on news websites in India, Canada, Italy and the USA (The Hindu 2014; The Canadian Press 2014; Reading Eagle 2014; Naples News Daily 2015).

In addition, Hagedorn (2015:186) claims the group are feared because their

musical expertise, religious knowledge, and Afro-Cuban heritage might propel them into the center of the very sacred space from which they have been excluded, thereby amplifying the feminine voice so that it must be heard alongside the masculine in *fundamento* batá performance.

Hagedorn explicitly claims the group threatens the sacred realm via secular performance. Despaigne on the other hand made it very clear to me that she does not aspire to play consecrated batá. However, there is a difference between what Despaigne aspires to and what her activities may lead to. Although Obini Batá have played batá in religious settings in the past, their performances are predominately confined to secular and artistic spheres (see later in this chapter).

When all-female batá groups first emerged, the majority of Cubans would never have seen women play batá, so the sight was a novelty. Many believed women were not physically and mentally strong enough to take on the task. For example, Hagedorn (2001:96) proposed that, “Most women do not develop the muscles in their shoulders, arms, and wrists necessary to play these drums for the long stretches at a time required for ceremonial drummers.” Campos adds that one of the reasons women were prohibited from playing batá was “a physical reason because men have more strength and resistance” (pers. comm., 12/2/2012).

Beyond challenging gendered stereotypes that women are not strong enough to play batá and clarifying the boundaries between taboos surrounding secular batá drums in secular settings, I have not seen any empirical evidence to suggest that Obini Batá and all-female groups like them continue to challenge what Despaigne calls

“ancestral machismo” (pers. comm., Despaigne 30/08/2014). The members are trained to sing, dance and drum through institutional programs, rather than being born into musical religious lineages, like Socarras or Pedroso. The members of the group, therefore, have had limited access to the nuances of batá music.²²

During my fieldtrips to Cuba, whenever I explained to ritual drummers what my research was about, I would invariably be informed about the all-female group Obini Batá. Whilst some drummers, such as Bolaños, espouse their batá skills, other drummers like the late Olúbatá, Ahmed Díaz (pers. comm., 29/08/2014), had a different perspective.

With all respect, as a musician, as a *tamborero* [drummer], as a man and human being they deserve my respect because they achieved something interesting. But there is something missing for me, there is no clean definition of sound maybe because they lack dedication. This doesn't mean that women can't play because before Obini Batá there was Amelia Pedroso's group [*Ibbu Okun*] and they played really well. Amelia was a singer but she also knew the *tambor* very well. If you were playing with her and you hit a wrong beat she would look at you and say, “eh? What's happening?”

Díaz's comment suggests there is a differentiation between knowledge gained through ritual exposure and secular artist practice. Nonetheless, at odds with the assertions made by the group's director, press and some academic sources, I argue that by self-segregating, employing “hyper-sexualised” tropes, restricting themselves primarily to tourist performances, and (perhaps most important of all) not playing batá

²² Despaigne became initiated into Santería in 2008 (Hagedorn 2015). Adonay de Armas Hactor, who was the director of percussion of Obini Batá when I visited them in 2014, was undergoing her year of wearing all-white attire following initiation. In addition, Despaigne explained that she finds a lot of her performers from AfroCuba, a program set up by the CFNC.

to the same virtuosic and knowledgeable standard as their male and female peers, all-female batá ensembles like Obini Batá reinforce as opposed to dismantle patriarchal power structures and reinforce stereotypes about female limitations. I use the term “hyper-sexualised” to describe the types of actions where distinctive ways of acting intensify aspects of womanhood and heterosexuality (an area I discuss in more detail later in this chapter).

Despite their state sponsorship, all-female folkloric groups such as Obini Batá, Obini Oñi and Obini Aché still do not have access to the immersive pedagogical processes young male drummers are entitled to through religious channels. I have met many female batá players who possess all the necessary skills to be great batá players; however, without the relentless daily immersion of hearing and playing alongside expert players, their musical potential is capped and the glass ceiling is resolute. Korsmeyer (2004:59) reminds us that “Feminist scholars have sceptically observed that social factors play as influential a role as inborn talent in selecting mostly male artists to stand in the ranks of geniuses.”²³ As a result, professional all-female batá groups are rarely able to compete with the level of excellence that is ubiquitous among male drummers in religious and folkloric settings.

Female groups like Obini Batá often pay for expert batá tuition but their limited funds mean they cannot afford a full-time teacher. Only those women who are from religious musical families such as Socarras, the Pelladito sisters and their cousin Yaima Pelladito from Matanzas are able to learn from immersion and other family members. Meanwhile, other women rely on paying for batá tuition or knowledge being passed on from friends or one member to another within the group. Despaigne (pers. comm., 30/08/2014) explains:

²³ See also Pickering and Negus (2004) and Paliyenko (2016).

I always try to ensure that an *olú* Añá [*omo* Añá] or *olúbatá* gives the classes. If a girl joins at a moment when we don't have a teacher, we teach her what we know, what we have already learnt. The phrases, everything. But I always have a teacher who I pay to give classes to the group [...] And I try to ensure that the girls experience a variety and learn a bit from everyone. In my opinion this works better for the show.

When I rehearsed with Obini Batá in 2014 over a three-week period, the group did not have a male religious drummer teaching them, even though there was a new member who had recently joined.²⁴ Instead, members taught one another the batá rhythms. The problem with this method, as I witnessed, was that musical misunderstandings and inaccuracies are sometimes passed on to the younger players. For example, I noticed one member from the group teaching another a common batá rhythm called *chachalokefun* on the *segundo* (middle drum) without a muted tone on the *boca* (larger drum head). I became aware that this tone was also missing throughout all their subsequent performances even though it forms a crucial element of the drum melody.

I propose that the state has used Obini Batá's performances strategically to present to the foreign public a specifically crafted representation of female folkloric performance, which suggests that sacro-socio issues of gender inequality have been resolved. However, according to the majority of Cuban women with whom I spoke,

²⁴ I rehearsed with Obini Batá three times for several hours at a time over three weeks: 8th, 14th and 21st August 2014. I performed with them at the Yoruba Association on the 23rd August 2014.

they continue to feel marginalised in religious and social sites and remain a minority in traditionally male professions.²⁵

Obini Batá's image becomes essential to the state not only for defining an imaginary of womanhood within Cuban folklore (discussed in the following text), but also as a means for differentiating between state-sanctioned groups and “street” folkloric performances—groups who are not supported by the government and who perform independently. As Despaigne (pers. comm., 31/08/2014) explains,

Not all the folklore groups are working with the same mindset and our outlook has resulted in a lot of rejection and criticism from folklore groups in the street. They've said 'we don't know how to play', they've said 'we are the fakes of folklore' [...] It's that we prioritize certain things, above all, our image, we take care of it and this sometimes means that other groups call us fake [...] It's not the kind of folklore that the tourists come looking for, the type that is performed in the *Callejon de Hammel*, in the *Palacio de la Rumba*.²⁶ We don't agree with that, not at all.

Here Despaigne highlights a connection with a perceived hierarchy of status among folkloric groups by referencing the importance of image and a distinction between her group and those groups that perform on the “street.”

²⁵ Although Cuba has made significant advances in tackling gender-equality issues, it still does not have laws in place that tackle domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, which according to the report continues to be a problem. See Centre for Democracy in the Americas. 2013. 'Women's Work: Gender Equality in Cuba and the Role of Women Building Cuba's Future.' <http://www.democracyinamericas.org/cuba/cuba-publications/womens-work-gender-equality-in-cuba-and-the-role-of-women-building-cubas-future/> [Accessed 1/02/2014].

²⁶ Callejon de Hamel is a public space where several folkloric groups perform to tourists every week (See Plate 4.13). Palacio de la Rumba is a live music venue attended by Cubans and tourists where groups that are not supported by the government regularly perform.

Obini Batá, Aesthetics and Tradition

Obini Batá are an anomaly in that they claim their show represents “the most traditional way” (pers. comm., 30/8/2014). Yet their glamorous, animated performances defy social constructions of traditional secular *batá* both in terms of them being an all-female group and the aesthetical judgements they make in representing these traditional values. One of the most striking aesthetic differences between their performance and that of most traditional folkloric drumming groups is the way they play drums. Obini Batá were the first to introduce playing *batá* on individual stands for each drum, and playing *congas* seated with their legs crossed in a side-saddle position (see Plate 4.2).²⁷ This is despite the fact that *batá* and *congas* are traditionally played with the drummer seated with legs apart.

²⁷ See also Cowling (1983) and Baker (2012) for discussion about women having to play cello ‘side-saddle’ to prevent them playing with their legs open.



Plate 4.2: Obini Batá in a rehearsal playing congas with their legs crossed.
(Photo by Vicky Jassey 8/08/2014)

During my field research I saw Cuban women perform on batá in Havana, Cárdenas, Cienfuegos and Santiago, including groups and individuals such as Batá Show, Afro America, Rumba Morena, Obini Oñi, Obini Ache, Obini Batá and Nagybe Pouymiró and Regla Palacio. Sometimes drummers play three batá tied together on individual stands; a technique Pouymiró has utilised for her solo performances (Plate 3.6).²⁸ When Obini Batá began performing they played batá seated but with legs crossed (Plate 4.3). Then they incorporated the use of individual batá stands (Plate 4.7; 4.11; 4.12), which has been adopted by two other all-female groups, who are related: Afro America (see Plate 4.4) and Batá Show (although when

²⁸ Playing three batá tied to a stand became popular after this style of playing was adopted by Octavio Rodriguez in the group Mescla. It has since become a feature for some Cuban popular music bands such as Irakere and Orchestra Revé.

I saw Batá Show perform in 2015 and they did not use stands (Plate 4.5).²⁹ Other all-female groups, meanwhile, play batá in the traditional seated position (see Plate 4.6; 4.8; 4.13). As I have never seen men use individual stands for single batá drums, I suggest this style of playing has become gendered and associated only with female secular batá performance.



Plate 4.3: Obini Batá (from left): Eva Despaigne, Deborah Mendez Frontela, Mirtha Ocanto. (Photo courtesy of Frontela. Circa early 1990s)

²⁹ To see the group Batá Show playing using stands follow the link to view a promotional video on Youtube. *Presentación Del Grupo Femenino de Tambores Batá*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hwHwKkk92s> [Accessed 16/08/2016].



Plate 4.4: Afro America performing at La Palacio de La Rumba, Havana with Justo Pelladito (Photo by Vicky Jassey 19/08/2015)



Plate 4.5: Batá Show performing at the Mella Theatre, Havana with Dayami and Iris Pelladito. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 18/08/2015)



Plate 4.6: Obini Oni performed part of their show for me during my visit to Cárdenas. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 13/09/2015)³⁰

In 2014 I was invited to perform with Obini Batá at the Yoruba Association. My biggest challenge, in preparing for our performance, was learning how to control the batá stands. Initially, each time I played the batá, with one foot on top of the frame to hold it in place, it would vibrate across the floor, leaving me sometimes facing in completely the wrong direction. Every time we stopped, I had to move the stand back into position. What also made it made it very difficult and insecure, compared to playing seated with the drum strapped to my thighs, was the fact that the drum wobbled from side to side from the force of hitting it horizontally. However, it was

³⁰ Interestingly, the women playing batá in Plate 4.6 have their left foot (on the small end of the batá) further back than their right foot; this position is opposite to that of most male ritual drummers, who often have the foot on the larger side of the batá end (most often on the right) positioned slightly back. (See Plate 5:1)

clear that these techniques could be mastered over time, as although the stands of the other women did wobble, the drums appeared to stay in place. Despaigne (pers. comm., 31/08/2014) explained that these modifications were introduced for “a touch of feminine distinction” and to make it easier for the drummers to switch between drumming and dancing.³¹

I was unable, however, to grasp the technique of playing a conga sidesaddle and as a result I was moved to a different instrument for that section of the show. Whereas I could see how playing batá on a stand could be useful for moving from one role to another, which the group did throughout their show, I could not see any reason apart from aesthetics for playing a conga side-saddle. This way of playing a conga hinders the drummer because the drum is not secure and the sound is affected because the musician is unable to tip and hold the top of the drum forward and manipulate the tone of it by lifting the shell with the legs; a fact that was demonstrated during our performance when one of the more experienced drummers lost control of her conga drum, which rolled off towards the audience.

One all-female group which regularly plays batá and rumba on the “street” is Rumba Morena (see Plate 4.12) Their director, Diunis Valdes O’Farrill, however, was critical of the lengths Obini Batá went to in order to maintain their image. She explained, “how are you going to play a *tumbadora* [conga drum] like that [with legs crossed]. The *tumbadora* has to be tilted so the sound can come out. Why would you do that, to look beautiful?” (pers. comm., 12/08/2015). The answer, I suggest, is

³¹ It was the group’s director Despaigne, who invited me to rehearse and perform with Obini Batá. During rehearsals and the performance, I found the other group members to be unfriendly towards me. I got the impression that Despaigne’s reasons for inviting me to perform with the group were not shared by the other members, who appeared annoyed by my presence. As a result, I found the experience of playing with them challenging.

complex and tied into sacro-socio-political notions of cultural identity, gender and sexuality.



Plate 4.7: Obini Batá and the author (from left): Eva Despaigne, Adonay De Armas Hactor and Vicky Jassey. (Photo by Wendy Garcia 8/08/2014)



Plate 4.8: Members of Obini Ache, Cienfuegos (from left): Barbara Pérez Campo, Yipsi Najarro Tartabull, Elisabeth Oquendo Otero (director) and Yeni-Elizabeth Martínez Jordan. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 14/07/2015)

As well as employing distinct modifications to the way they play drums, Obini Batá, Rumba Morena and to some extent Obini Ache adopted attire that is not common in folkloric performance. It is quite common for batá drummers in folkloric or sacred performance to be conservatively dressed, often in white. In reference to Obini Batá performances, Hagedorn (2015:189) notes that their attire “represent[s] the antithesis of appropriate clothing at a religious ceremony, and would be questionable attire even for a folkloric performance” (see Plate 4.8-11).³² Another component of their show which is at odds with concepts of “tradition” is the smiles all the performers adopt during performances. These smiles seemed to be staged, as I noticed that during our performance they were dropped when the performers had their backs to the audience or as soon as they left the stage.

Far from “representing the traditional way” (Despaigne pers. comm., 31/08/2014), these tropes—batá stands, legs crossed, smiling and costumes which include plunging necklines, short skirts and see-through black lace—appear to be a departure from traditional secular or folkloric batá performance. These divergences may be employed to heighten their femininity and sexuality. Koskoff (2014:37) identifies how cross-culturally women’s actual or perceived sexuality can affect their musical performance. In Cuba, heterosexuality is prized over male effeminacy or female masculinity. Woods notes, that in many musical traditions, a woman’s musical success is often dependent on her ability to link the economic and erotic interests of the dominant culture (1980:295). Alexander argues that colonial, hegemonic classifications of masculinity and femininity in Latin America “insinuated themselves

³² In 2015, I also saw the group perform their first set on batá in gingham dresses and headscarves evocative of ritual attire. They then changed into more revealing outfits later in their set. This could indicate that they have modified their aesthetic approach, especially for the more traditional batá-oriented part of the set that takes place at the beginning.

throughout the variety of political, economic, social and cultural structures in history” (1994:11).

Hagedorn (2015:187) notes that Obini Bata’s aesthetical tropes disassociate them from “the religious context” and align them instead with cultural output via the tourist industry. She goes on to suggest that “this impression is heightened by the miniskirts and high heels, which could be interpreted as a surprising reference to *jineterismo*, or the exchange of sex for money” (187). All-female groups that adopt tropes that are stereotypically gendered and sexualised, such as those listed above, do so, my analysis shows, clearly to distinguish female-secular-artistic practice from that of male-sacred-ritual and secular drumming aesthetics. Separating these domains neutralises any notion of competition and serves to carve out a safe musical space away from the critical male gaze. This is possibly a reaction to the fierce criticism female batá drummers experienced when they first became established.³³

My research data also suggests that hyper-sexualisation in female batá performance such as Obini Batá’s may be a strategy to disassociate from being labelled as lesbians, an area I expand on in the following text. That Obini Batá’s members seem to know their place in relation to the atheist state and the male religious drumming spheres may have been the key to their survival and rise to international success.³⁴

³³ A demonstration of the critical male gaze is cited in Hagedorn (2001:91) who notes that Obini Batá “once made the mistake of asking the forgiveness of the *oricha* añá [sic] during a performance at an Italian restaurant in Old Havana. They thus incurred the wrath of the entire male bata drumming community in Havana.”

³⁴ It is worth noting the ideological disparity also among prominent female *Nueva Trova* composers who were able to “integrate into government-supported *trova* institutions by adopting a masculine, revolutionary aesthetic” that was later adapted to feminist themes (Graper 2014:iv).



Plate 4.9: Obini Batá's original members (from left): Eva Despaigne, Dayami Pelladito, Deborah Mendez Frontela, Mirtha Ocanto (circa 1996. Photo courtesy of Frontela)

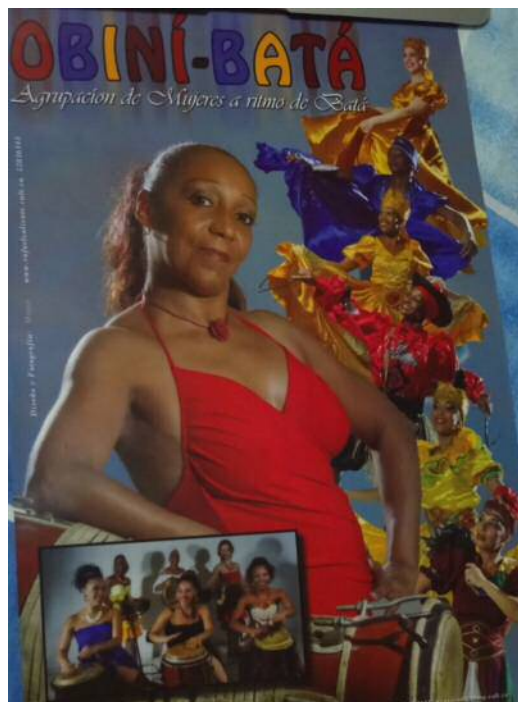


Plate 4.10: Poster of Obini Batá with Despaigne in the centre (Courtesy of Despaigne 2014)



Plate 4.11: Obini Batá performing at the Yoruba Association. (Photo courtesy of Kosa Music n.d.)



Plate 4.12: Obini Batá performing at the Yoruba Association (Photo from video by Vicky Jassey 5/09/2015)



Plate 4.13: Rumba Morena performing at Callejon de Hamel, Havana. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 30/08/2015)

Female Batá Drummers, Lesbianism and Heteronationalism³⁵

The “hyper-sexualised” tropes employed by Obini Batá also counterpoint any associations with masculinity derived from the activity of drumming, as well as define concepts of heteronormativity. Often during my field trips to Cuba when I spoke with male and female ritual musicians, it was often suggested that women who play batá are lesbians.³⁶ However, I have not found any evidence to substantiate this claim. For example, batá drummer and founder member of Obini Batá, Deborah Frontela, for example, explained that when she first began performing with Obini Batá in the 1990s, men accused her of being a lesbian. Frontela (pers. comm., 19/08/2015) told

³⁵ I have chosen to use the term ‘lesbian’ (S. *lesbiana*) to describe Women who have Sex with Women (WSM) because this was the term most often used by my field respondents.

³⁶ Respondents include Despaigne, Frontela, Pelladito and Guerrero. See also Vincent (2004:190).

me that during one performance with Obini Batá, she was reproached by a man for being lesbian “and I had to explain to him look, you’re wrong I like men! [I am heterosexual and attracted to men].”

An association between female batá players and lesbianism, I believe, has stemmed from two sources. The first is related to the success of the all-female group, Ibbu Okun, who went on to enjoy international success until the lesbian group’s director Amelia Pedroso’s untimely death in 2000. The second reason female drummers have been associated with lesbianism is connected to how certain musical activities and instruments are gendered (Doubleday 2008; Koskoff 2014). Although a stereotypical view, women participating in activities considered to be masculine can be assumed to be lesbian by some people. Playing drums in public spaces, combined with the female prohibitions associated with *fundamento*, can associate women who play batá with masculinity, and therefore their sexuality is called into question (Argyriadis 2003; Morad 2015). As Allen explains, women who are assumed to be lesbians in Cuba are not perceived as ‘real women’ in the same way sexually passive (penetrated) men are not considered ‘real men’ (Allen 2011:11,113).³⁷ He notes that (2001:11),

The discursive disregard for sex between women is likewise about gender as much as it is about sex, evidenced by the misogynist view that ‘real sex’ cannot take place without penile penetration.

Furthermore, drawing on Dianteill (2000), Morad (ibid:60) identifies two ‘social-sex’ categories in the spiritual Santería community: Feminine and Masculine. The

³⁷ See also Chapter 5.

masculine category also includes masculine lesbians. It is worth considering that if women who play batá are considered lesbian and categorised as masculine by some in the community they perhaps are, therefore, also not considered as posing the same kind of threat to the heterosexual masculine status quo as a heterosexual woman might.

An association between female batá drummers and lesbianism has led to anxiety among some heterosexual female drummers. Despaigne (pers. comm., 31/08/2015) explains that

I don't have to act like a man for them to pay attention to me. No, I am a woman [...]
I have already explained to you that this isn't the case for many female groups who wear men's costumes and things like that, horrible things, or are lesbians for example, in order to get recognition.

Although it was not made explicit, it is possible that Despaigne is referring here to Pedroso's group Ibbu Okun. The groups were in direct competition with each other (and remain so) in their competing claims to be the first all-female batá group, which may explain why Despaigne distances herself from any connection with lesbian batá drummers. Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that Cuba is a state that privileges heteronormativity (see later in this chapter and Chapter 5). As Obini Batá is state-funded, they may feel it is essential to maintain a clear disassociation with same-sex practice. However, Despaigne was not alone in this distancing of the group from any same-sex associations. Pouymiró, a female *batá* player and leading campaigner for women's rights to play consecrated drums, called same-sex practice "impure" and "unnatural," whilst complaining "that *La Ocha* [Santería] is full of gays" (pers. comm., 06/08/2014).

Another example associating women, batá and lesbianism emerged during my field trip to Cuba in 2015, when I met the female partner of one of my male batá teachers during a *tambor*. The woman was a folkloric dancer and ex-batá drummer.³⁸ I assumed my teacher, her partner, may have told her about my research because within a minute of meeting her she began telling me that she had been a batá player with an all-female batá group. She went on to explain that she had been forced to leave because she had not been paid properly and was being sexually harassed by the female director of the group, who she claimed was a lesbian. I had no way of corroborating her story. Furthermore, I was aware that a dispute between the two parties could be at the root of why this ex-member wanted to damage the reputation of the group's director by naming and shaming her, possibly through the publication of my work. However, the story highlights the insidious nature of "outing" people in a society where heteronormativity remains a highly prized commodity.

Calling into question a musician's sexual identity, it appears, can be perceived as more scandalous than criticizing their musical and creative abilities (see Chapter 5). This association between lesbianism and batá drumming extends beyond Cuba. Elizabeth Sayre (pers. comm., 9/08/2016), a US *santera* who has been playing batá and ritual music for twelve years, explained:

I know other women percussionists who are older than me, and who are straight, who have been in the Afro-Cuban environment and they have had an anxiety; they don't want to be perceived as gay. They are perceived as gay because they are playing drums, because they are outspoken, because they are strong, so they get interpreted as

³⁸ As this is ethically problematic, I have chosen not to disclose the protagonist's identity.

gay, and they really don't like it, or they are anxious about it, and they try to do other things to counteract it.

The lengths some female drummers have been compelled to go to in order to disassociate from connections with lesbianism should also be considered within the praxis of Cuba's heteronationalist discourse (Gosine 2005).

Sexuality, Allen reminds us, stands "at the nexus of ideas of culture, nationhood, and race in Cuba" (Allen 2011:58). Historically, Cuban sexual values have stemmed from both Iberian and African traditions. European influences have placed worth on family honour and racial purity. Such principles, Hamilton (2012:23) claims, "fundamentally shaped sexual values and practices, reinforcing the power and privilege of upper-class white men, while stigmatizing Afro-Cuban women in particular."

Radical changes in sexual practice could be seen following the revolution in 1958. Legislation was introduced which outlawed homosexuality and prostitution, and protected the family, motherhood, and matrimony, placing heterosexual couples at the centre of the family unit (ibid:34). Meanwhile, masculine identity was being profiled as the 'new revolutionary man', whose quintessential qualities were bravery, sacrifice, heroism and hard work (Hamilton 2011:51). Sexual identity became a state concern with some aspects of sexuality being criminalised, which Alexander identifies "as a technology of control, and much like other technologies of control becomes an important site for the production and reproduction of state power" (1994:6). Although there have been significant developments in gay rights in Cuba over the last decade, stigmas that are promulgated by state policy persist.

As mentioned earlier, Cuban batá drummers are predominantly Black or *mulato*.³⁹ It is against a backdrop of sexist and racist constructs of patriarchal slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and heteronationalist discourse in Cuba (Beliso-de-Jesús 2015a) that heterosexual and/or ‘in-the-closet’ lesbian female batá players find themselves having to define and defend their sexual identity in order to benefit from the privileges a heteronormative identity affords.

Women, *Aberikulá* and Religious Performance

I had neither witnessed nor heard about women playing batá in a ritual setting apart from in London (see Preface) until I began this study. I was, therefore, surprised to hear that many female batá drummers with whom I spoke talked about performing on batá in religious ceremonies. Musical rituals using *aberikulá*, although once quite common in Cuba, are now extremely rare (pers. comm., Javier Campos 20/07/15; Rodríguez 21/12/2015). In fourteen years of visiting Cuba I have only ever seen two ceremonies using *aberikulá* batá. Most *aberikulá* ceremonies are now confined to *el día de medio* (the middle day of a *santero*'s initiation) and occasionally for a *cumpleaños de santo* (a celebration of the day a devotee was initiated). The associated prestige and religiosity of *fundamento* batá means that although much more expensive to hire, they are by far the preferred ritual instrument. However, sacred and profane batá can look the same, (as in Plate 4.13 - 4.14) and like *fundamento*, *aberikulá* can bring down the *orichas* to possess the bodies of devotees.

³⁹ There are some cases of White women playing batá professionally, but they are rare. Two examples are: Yuko Fong Matos, a Japanese woman, who worked with Obini Batá from 2006-2010 (pers. comm., 22/09/2015) and, in 2015, a young White woman, Eleani Aguilera, who has recently joined the group.



Plate 4.14: Women playing consecrated batá in Santiago (from left): Caridad Rubio Fonseca, Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró and Anais López Rubio. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 9/7/2015)



Plate 4.15: Aberikulá batá being played in a tambor with drummers (from left) “Cocu” (full name not known), Joan Argüelles González and Odelkis Socarras.

There is a diversity of opinions among *omo* Añás with whom I have spoken as to whether it is profane for women to play *aberikulá* in religious ceremonies. I have been told by three Cuban ritual drummers they believe it is profane for women to play non-consecrated drums in Santería rituals (pers. comm., Díaz 29/08/2014; pers. comm., Campos 20/07/15; pers. comm., Pelladito 4/08/2015; see also Routon 2008). For example, Pelladito explained, “women are not allowed to play even if it’s *aberikulá* because the context is religious” and non-consecrated batá played in a ceremonial context contain “a percentage of *fundamento*” or sacredness (pers. comm., 4/08/2015). Campos and Díaz both claimed part of the reason it was taboo was because they had never seen women play in a ceremony. Alberto Villarreal adds that “female ceremonial batá drummers are anathema to Santería” (quoted in Hagedorn 2001:88). Conversely, Bolaños (pers. comm., 26/08/2014) explained that “If it doesn’t have *fundamento*, nothing will happen, they can play it, but I’ve never seen it.” Other batá drummers, such as Rodríguez and López, dismissed the idea that it is profane for women to play *aberikulá* in religious ceremonies as a sexist prejudice.

For many female batá drummers knowing how to navigate the blurred line between the sacred and profane was the key to having access to playing batá drums. Socarras (pers. comm., 31/08/2014), who grew up in a family of ritual batá drummers and was informed by her experience of batá in both secular and religious contexts, clarified

I live in a world where you have to have respect and know where you can go. I understood from the beginning what the rules were from my father, brother and then my son. Although, it would be a dream to arrive at a place where women can play *fundamento*.

Socarras explained that she knew never to cross the line by playing *toques* that were considered ceremonial like the opening and closing ceremonies in a *tambor*.⁴⁰

Regardless, several female batá drummers admitted that, although infrequently, they have played *aberikulá* in rituals.⁴¹ Despaigne (pers. comm., 31/08/2014), for example, describes that

There are *santeros* who throw a party featuring the batá drums, it's not that we play the religious drums [...] They call me to play for the *cumpleaños de santos*.

However, Despaigne (pers. comm., 31/08/2014) made it clear that while she has little interest in playing batá ceremonies, if she does get asked to play, she always uses batá stands.

Our stands are a defining element. So that they [male ritual drummers] can't say we are showing disrespect, or that we are making a mockery out of the consecrated drums, because *omo Añás* have to know what his drum is made out of, how it's made, what it has and hasn't got inside it. When they see Obini Batá's drums they can't say anything because they know they are one hundred percent authentic *aberikulá* drums with metal keys.⁴²

⁴⁰ These are called the *oru seco* and *oru egun* respectively.

⁴¹ Female drummers who admitted to playing in religious ceremonies include Eva Despaigne, Adonay De Armas Hactor (Obini Batá member), Aleida Socarras and Amelia Pedroso (former Ibbu Okun members) (Vincent 1998) and Yaima Pelladito (former Obini Aberikulá member).

⁴² *Fundamento* drums never have metal tuning keys or stands.

Despaigne highlights the importance of other people being able to clearly identify that they are performing on *aberikulá*. Presumably this is to protect them from the rumour-mill, accusing them of crossing religious gendered boundaries.

During my 2015 field trip I encountered an opportunity to play *aberikulá* in a *tambor* in Havana. Along with my partner David Pattman, I was invited to attend an *aberikulá* ceremony by my teacher Joan Argüelles González. He told me the *tambor* was being organised by Aleida Socarras's son, and there was a possibility that she might be playing.

Ethnography: *Aberikulá Tambor*, Havana 6/08/2015.

We arrived at the bus stop, our designated meeting place on the outskirts of Havana, and four drummers were sat waiting with batá on their laps (Plate 4.16). Pattman and I joined them while we waited for the *akpón* Juana “Yayma” Pimental Machado, to arrive. After all the greetings had been dispensed Odelkis Socarras began talking about the recent news he had heard that women had begun playing Añá in Santiago and that one of these women had contacted his mother, asking her to “prepare herself to become initiated to Añá.” (pers. comm., Socarras 6/08/2015). While Odelkis Socarras talked he addressed only the five male initiated drummers in our group. However, I stood there and listened while he expressed his anger over these recent developments. The other drummers, I noticed, did not really participate in the conversation but listened respectfully. Finally, the singer arrived and we walked the short distance to the *tambor*. The first part of the ceremony, the *oru seco*, had taken place in front of the altar and while we waited around for the *oru cantado*, the second section of the ceremony, I heard the news that Aleida Socarras was not going to make

it and I was disappointed not to see her play alongside her son in a ceremony. I found myself then weighing up my chances of being asked to play.⁴³

I had heard that if you are a new drummer in a group it is good etiquette not to ask to play. Instead you wait to be asked, usually by someone who knows and trusts your musical ability. If I were going to get an opportunity to play, this part of the ceremony would be it, as traditionally it's the only part of a *tambor* where novices are allowed to sit down and play. I had already heard one of the drummers talk about playing the *okónkolo* (the smallest drum), so this cut my chances in half as the only other drum I knew well enough to play was the *segundo* (the middle size drum). When it was clear we were starting again, everyone went into the main room. By the time I entered, Odelkis Socarras had taken the *iyá* (the largest drum), another drummer the *okónkolo*, and a child of about seven years picked up the *segundo* and had sat down with it grinning proudly at everyone. He clearly didn't know how to play it and everyone laughed at his self-assurance.

I saw González take the drum from him and go to sit down and I let out my breath in disappointment. Then just as he was about to sit, he changed his mind, turned around and offered the drum to Pattman, again my heart sank. Then I heard Pattman say "Vicky?" When I looked up González was smiling at me and was gesturing for me to take the drum. I froze and the room went quiet. I checked to see if González was making fun of me, something friends had done many times with *fundamento*, pretending to offer me the drum in jest because they knew I liked to play. But he looked serious and knowing this could be the only opportunity I would ever get to play in a ritual setting, my heart went into my mouth as, to everyone's astonishment including my own, I took the drum (Plate 4.17). Once I had the drum strapped on I noticed a man was standing so close to my left hand I could not hit the drum properly in order to play. I had to ask him politely to move away. It was only

⁴³ See the references to sections of a *tambor* in Chapter 1.

afterwards I saw the irony of this gender reversal and I had to smile. Almost as soon as I had started playing, I noticed several people took out their phones and began filming me playing, one of them being my teacher González.⁴⁴ Once we had completed the *oru cantado* I took off my drum and went outside. To my astonishment I was congratulated not only by the drummers but also by many of the congregants as well. This included elderly male and female devotees, who I was sure would be disapproving of my playing batá in a ceremony. Later in the *tambor* I was offered the chance to play one more time and during this sequence one of the initiates entered into trance.



Plate 4.16: Waiting at the bus stop (from left): David Pattman, Joan Argüelles González, Juli (full name not known) “Cocu” (full name not known) and Odelkis Socarras. (Photo by Vicky Jasse 6/08/2015)

⁴⁴ A short clip of me playing in this *tambor* can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mALkIT07jCs&feature=youtu.be> [Accessed 21/01/2019]



Plate 4.17: Playing *aberikulá* at a *tambor*, Havana (from left): “Cocu” (full name not known), Odelkis Socarras and Vicky Jassey. (Photo by David Pattman 6/08/2015)

The experience of playing in a *tambor* left me wondering whether the ease with which these devotees and drummers accepted a woman playing *batá* in a ceremony was a sign that attitudes had dramatically relaxed? I also wondered whether my privileged position as a musician/ethnographer was a direct agent of such change? I was asked to play primarily because of Pattman’s intervention. Would I have had the same opportunity without his relative ‘insider’ influence affecting the manner in which events played out? Whilst these questions are impossible to answer, it is clear that although Odelkis Socarras made it known he was unhappy that women were playing *fundamento* in Santiago, this news did not impact his decision to allow me to play his *aberikulá* during the *tambor*. On the contrary, he actively encouraged me, which demonstrates that for him at least, women playing *aberikulá* in a *tambor* is not considered a threat and there is a distinct line between women playing *aberikulá* and *fundamento* regardless of whether it is an artistic or religious setting.

The importance of playing in ritual settings alongside professional drummers, for anyone wishing to develop their batá-playing skills, cannot be underestimated. However, these kinds of opportunities are seldom available to women. Yaima Pelladito is a professional *akpón* and batá drummer from Matanzas (Plate 4.18), and one of the most accomplished female batá players I encountered in Cuba. Like Aleida Socarras, she comes from a religious musical family, her grandfather was a founder member of the folkloric group Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and her father is a dancer and percussionist.⁴⁵ Born in 1984, she learned to play all three batá drums from the age of twelve from the late Daniel Alfonso. As I have argued above, she confirmed that women are unable to reach the same musical level on batá as men because they are unable to access the playing of batá in a religious environment. She explained that men play differently in a tambores (pers. comm., 15/09/2015),

because there is more pressure [...] If you [women] could be more inside you would develop more. I have developed because I sing in a *tambor*. But if I were able to play [*aberikulá* in ceremonies] I would have even more knowledge.

⁴⁵ Yaima is also related to Justo and Geraldo Pelladito.



Plate 4.18: Yaima Pelladito. (Photo by Aliesky Pérez López 16/09/2015)⁴⁶

Pelladito talked warmly about a couple of experiences she had playing *aberkulá* in religious ceremonies, once for an *iyanífa* initiation in Matanzas with her former all-female group, Obini Aberikulá.⁴⁷ Another time she played *aberkulá* in a *tambor* with her male colleagues in Sancti Spíritus. Pelladito said she prefers playing with men because they play to a higher standard.

The lived experiences highlighted above demonstrate that women do perform on *aberkulá* in ritual environments in both mixed and segregated gender formations, despite the disagreement among male practitioners as to whether this act is considered profane. Nonetheless, although the opportunities are few for these women, these

⁴⁶ Note the difference between the drumming position of Pelladito, who assumes a more conventional posture, and that of many of the women pictured earlier in the chapter.

⁴⁷ This ceremony was for the initiation of women into Ifá conducted at the *casa templo* by Ernesto Acosta.

accounts demonstrate there is a willingness to allow, accept and even encourage women performing on *aberikulá* in a ritual environment by some male ritual drummers and parts of the religious community. Women who come to batá drumming from a folkloric environment are even less likely to be able access playing batá in ritual settings than those who grow up in religious musical families.

It is also clear that even among those female batá drummers who are neither interested in nor campaign for women's right to play *fundamento*, most are prepared to play non-consecrated batá religiously. As women playing *aberikulá* for *tambores* is almost certainly a development that has emerged following the formation of all-female artistic batá groups since the 1990s, as Villamil predicted, there is a significant movement from the artistic setting towards the sacred.⁴⁸

Female Agency in Oricha Musical Performance

Ethnography: *Tambor* with Naivi Angarica, Havana 16/07/2015.

When I arrived at the address of the *tambor*, a group of men were unloading several drums from an open-top lorry outside an apartment on *Calle Infanta*. It was impossible to miss Naivi Angarica among the throng of people outside the house in her bright green and yellow figure-hugging outfit (Plate 4.18). On seeing me she came over, greeted me, and took me into the house where a huge mural of Yemayá, depicted as *la virgin de Regla*, looked down over us. The *tambor*, I found out, was to be a triple *tambor* using two sets of batá and a set of consecrated *bembé* drums from Matanzas. I had never seen a triple *tambor* before or a ceremony using *fundamento* and *bembé* drums; because of this, I assumed the *tambor* to be a prestigious one.

⁴⁸ See the thesis Conclusion for a discussion about the movement of female batá practice towards religious domains.

Once the *oru seco* was complete, ten drummers with their ten drums arranged themselves around the cavernous room (Plate 4.19). Angarica's deep voice suddenly filled the room declaring that the *oru cantado* (a drumming and song sequence at the early stages of a *tambor*) had begun. As the *tambor* progressed, the room filled with devotees who all began moving as one in time to the drumming. Angarica's voice soared over the top of the rhythms and through us, the essential link connecting the drummers, the dancing congregation and the spirit world all of whom were being propelled forward on a mounting swell of musical religious energy. Angarica, a formidable green and yellow beacon of female power, had the entire room at her command. Several dancers showed signs of moving into a state of possession and Angarica began raining down songs on their heads, cajoling the *oricha* to fully mount their bodies and enter the corporeal realm. The drumming further intensified and the whole focus of the room now centred on one dancer whose movements had become erratic and violent. The congregation formed a protective circle around the dancer and Angarica now focused all her attention on him as she sang persistently into his face. He rubbed his head aggressively as if trying to stop the music from entering him and taking over his body. After one final frenzied movement the dancer lurched forward onto the floor and prostrated himself in front of the drums. Angarica gave a sign to the drummers to stop playing. The *oricha* had arrived.



Plate 4.19: (from left) Naivi Angarica and Vicky Jassey (n.a 16/07/2015)



Plate 4.20: Naivi Angarica singing the *oru cantado* in a triple *tambor* with two sets of *batá* and one set of *bembé* drums, Havana. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 16/07/2015)

One area where Cuban women can garner agency in batá performance is as an *akpónes*. This is a position of status within the religious music sphere, which according to Miniconi (pers. comm., 04/02/2016),⁴⁹ is reflected by the fact that their *derecho* (payment for religious services) is normally higher than that of batá drummers, in Havana at least.⁵⁰ *Akpónes* are required to know not only a vast corpus of religious songs and prayers but also their ceremonial context. As they lead the ceremony, they conduct specific rituals and direct the congregation as well as coax the *orichas* to mount the bodies of their devotees. Female *akpónes* disrupt any generalised notion that women are subordinate in the ritual musical space. Mohanty (2003:33.37) reminds us of the contradictions “inherent in women’s location within various structures” and the need for historically specific generalisations that are responsive to the complex realities of lived experience.

Some women become batá drummers or *akpónes* following a career as folkloric dancers. Angarica was no different; she became a dancer for a folkloric group at the age of fourteen. Although she was interested in singing, the director told her that he “didn’t want women singing in *tambores*.”⁵¹ However, shortly after joining the group, she became pregnant and could no longer dance (pers. comm., 21/07/2014).

I said to myself if I can’t dance I will dedicate myself to singing. I listened and listened to Amelia [Pedroso] in *tambores*. Domingo Pau gave me a disc to listen to

⁴⁹ Miniconi is a French batá drummer who lived in Cuba drumming in rituals for eight years and worked with the ‘Los Chinitos’ (López) family.

⁵⁰ Vincent ([Villemastour] 2006:144-145) was told at the time of her research that unlike batá drummers, *akpónes* in Matanzas were not paid.

⁵¹ Yayma Machado and Martica Galarraga were also folkloric dancers before becoming *akpónes*. The majority of Obini Batá members were also dancers before becoming drummers.

and my brother Papito started singing with Papo Angarica so I asked him for help. I learnt in the street. Nobody would teach you in those days. I didn't learn in a formal way.⁵² Andrés Chacón was the one who encouraged me: he said, 'you can do it and you're going to do it'. One day someone came looking for Amelia [Pedroso] to sing a *tambor* at Andrés Chacón's house. Chacón said 'I know who you're looking for to sing in this *tambor*' and he put me to sing. This was my first experience of singing in a *tambor*.

Angarica explained that when she was growing up there were only two female *akpónes* that she knew of; Amelia Pedroso and a woman called Moraima who was also the wife of *akpón* Lazaro Pedroso.⁵³ Following Amelia Pedroso's death in 2000, Angarica was asked to join the all-female batá group Ibbu Okun, for which she had to teach herself to play *itótele* (middle batá drum) and sing lead, so she could take Pedroso's place in the group (pers. comm., 21/07/2014).⁵⁴

Although there is no direct prohibition against women becoming professional ritual singers, compared with men there are still very few. Vincent ([Villepastour] 2004:144) notes that according to her sources, women made up half of the *akpón* community until around the 1950s. Juana Yayma Pimental Machado, a professional *akpón* in Havana, said she believes there are fewer women *akpónes* than men because of the taboos associated with batá drums and because you have to confront a lot of problems with *machismo* in the ritual environment. She added (pers. comm., 1/09/2015),

⁵² Angarica points out that, like the majority of ritual musicians, she did not attend Cuban Institutes such as ISA or CFNC to learn her art, unlike the members of Obini Batá who are predominantly from these establishments.

⁵³ Lazaro Pedroso was Amelia Pedroso's uncle.

⁵⁴ Although Angarica shares the same name as the great "Papo" Nicholas Angarica, she explained she is not directly related (Angarica pers. comm., 21/07/2014).

Not all men or drum owners permit you to sing with their drums, they can make your life difficult or take advantage of you because you are a woman. So, you have to toughen yourself up. Don't think it is easy. There comes a point though, after a lot of study and struggle, you reach a certain level, little by little you impose yourself, then they may help you [...] It has changed a lot, without breaking the rules—I never touch the drum or get close to the drum—there are more opportunities for women.

Although the ritual musical environment can initially be hostile towards women, some can become accepted and go on to wield considerable power within ritual musical spheres. This process takes place regardless of their gender. Perhaps the main difference between men and women in this regard is that men can find it easier to enter the ritual musical environment in the first place. A further reason why so few women take on the role of *akpón*. Vincent ([Villegastour] 2004:144) suggests also that “the presence of a female *akpón* possibly changes the all-male solidarity one can observe among groups of musicians whereby a male *akpón* is ‘one of the boys.’” In addition, Vincent (ibid) alludes to a connection between the dominance of male ritual singers and the rise of male *obá oriatés* (an *obá oriaté* is the man who leads initiations ceremonies, including the songs and divination), many of whom also became *akpónes* (see Chapter 2).⁵⁵

Another group of women, who disturb any generalised concepts of women being subordinate to men in ritual music spheres, are the Pelladito sisters Dayami,

⁵⁵ Many renowned *akpónes* such as Lorenzo Peñalver ‘Cusito’, Ruben Bulnes, Javier Piña Marquis and Michael Aguilar Guerrero are also *babalawos* or *oba oriatés*. The status their dual ritual role affords them, which is available only to men, is another factor marginalising potential female *akpónes*.

Eneida, Tami and Iris (Plate 4.21). They come from a lineage of ritual musicians from Havana and are related to Yaima Pelladito above. This group of women perform *güiro*, an alternative ritual drum ensemble to batá, several times a week in their neighbourhood of Guanabacoa (see Chapter 2). Dayami, the eldest sister, explained that they are inundated with work and complained that sometimes they have to play two ceremonies a day (or ten hours of playing) which, she explained, is physically and mentally exhausting (pers. comm., 9/08/2015).

The Pelladito sisters also play batá and other African-derived religious percussive music. Dayami explained that because of the taboos associated with the batá they do not use *aberikulá* ritually. They, like Socarras and Yaima, have had privileged access to learning ritual percussion-based music because of their family lineage. They learned from their father and also from their uncle, Justo Pelladito, in the early 1990s when they formed a group called *Batá Show*. The Pelladito sisters provide yet another example of female folkloric drummers moving from artistic to religious domains. Although they are the only women I met in Cuba who were professional ritual percussionists, they form part of a growing movement of women who stand at the frontier of change aspiring to straddle the secular and sacred musical worlds.

The group stand apart not only because it is unusual to see women performing *oricha* music ritually and so prolifically but also because they perform in a mixed-gendered setting along with their father Geraldo Pelladito and cousin Feliu Torres. Their music exudes sincere warmth and it becomes clear that the atmosphere is egalitarian, as the constant swapping of instruments throughout ceremonies is not defined by gender or age. Despite being an anomaly in Cuba, their success, measured by the fact they manage to make a living and are in constant demand to play in their

local area, demonstrates that there is a place for multi-gendered-intergenerational ritual drumming groups.



Plate 4.21: Pelladito Family at a *güiro* ceremony. (Photo by Bex Wade 20/05/2016)

Summary

My research has identified two socio-political factors that have played a significant role in the emergence and proliferation of all-female batá groups in Cuba from the early 1990s: the introduction of formalised mixed-gendered batá training in state-run educational settings since the mid-90s, and second, the economic hardship of the *período especial*. While the state is active in promoting selected all-female groups, such as Obini Batá, as models of socialist female emancipation, female folkloric

musicians continue to be deprived of the immersive batá training that is available to boys and men in rituals contexts. Sacro-socio restriction impedes women's ability to match the virtuosic standards ubiquitous among male ritual drummers in Cuba.

Obini Batá play a substantial role in defining the image of female batá performance in the Cuban imagination promulgated by the state and international academic and popular publications. While Obini Batá do not speak for or represent female batá drumming in Cuba as a whole, their approach and popularity has influenced other groups. Obini Batá specifically incorporates aspects into their show that they believe define a heteronormative identity in order to distinguish their performance style from that of male sacred batá performance and "street" performance. A further example of '*Tambor Reverberations*' impacting the female secular domain is the critical male gaze and the state's propensity to eroticise batá performance and the black female body for the purpose of attracting tourists.

Cuba's heteronationalist predisposition, which has either persecuted or stigmatised same-sex activity, has led to an anxiety among some heterosexual female drummers who feel their sexuality has been misrepresented. A need to reinforce a heteronormative identity against accusations of lesbianism has led to the need for some groups to introduce "hyper-sexualised" tropes that can be read as heteronormative scripts, such as playing batá on stands and playing congas side-saddle. Furthermore, because of the lack of immersive musical training, available to most Cuban men who wish to learn batá, female groups are seldom able to match the musical standard of their male professional counterparts creating a discrepancy between male and female musical standards. In addition, while female groups continue to self-segregate, male and female performance is polarised. Collectively,

these factors, I argue, rather than subverting gender asymmetry as numerous publications have claimed, perpetually reinforce the status quo.

The empirical evidence collected for this study suggests that there is a significant progression of female Afro-Cuban folkloric artists who later in their careers go on to perform in ceremonial contexts. Although I have encountered contradictory views among male ritual drummers as to whether women performing on *aberikulá* in *tambores* is profane, for some drummers like Odelkis Socarras—one of the younger generation of *omo* Añás in Havana—the distinction is clear. Odelkis Socarras and Bolaños believe women can play in any kind of religious or artistic setting as long as they are playing *aberikulá*. Although women playing *aberikulá* in a ritual is still infrequent in Cuba, female batá drummers have been playing batá in religious settings since the 1990s. The growth of female batá performance and the trajectory that situates women's artistic batá performance as moving from the secular to the sacred sphere, my research shows, are a direct result of government support for all-female batá performance groups. Finally, by providing several examples where female *oricha* musicians are empowered within ritual musical spheres, I present instances of disruption to generalised notions of gender asymmetry. I demonstrate how agency and status for some female ritual performers, such as Angarica and the Pelladito sisters, can be negotiated based on religious and familial musical linages, dedication, knowledge and skill.

In Chapter 5, I move into an examination of the role of sexual identity in defining ritual roles in Regla de Ocha. I explore issues of masculinity and heterosexuality in relation to the Añá fraternity and investigate the taboo which prohibits Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) from playing *fundamento*.

Chapter Five

‘Maricónes’, ‘Bugarrónes’, ‘Hombría’ and Añá:

Masculinity and Sexuality in Cuban Batá Performance

Olúbatá Carlos Aldama is one drummer among many who maintains that “Drummers/*omo* Añá must be *men* (heterosexual, *tienen que ser hombre*)” (Vaughan and Aldama 2012:29; emphasis mine). Aldama’s definition, which includes reference to both gender and sexuality, highlights that for many *omo* Añás, men who engage in same-sex practices are not considered ‘real men’ and are profane in terms of Añá, placing them in the same category as women.⁵⁶

Musical performance provides a stage where social, culturally perceived identities and ideologies are maintained, reinforced, contested and/or inverted. Music can heighten, suppress or transform sexuality, construct social identities and define access to certain musical instruments and spaces (Doubleday 2008; Koskoff 2014; Morad 2015). This chapter investigates the ideologies that exclude gay men from playing Añá or entering the Añá brotherhood. I consider the legacy of slavery and colonialism in the building of racial, masculine and heteronormative identities in Cuba generally and explore what it means *to be a man* in the Cuban drumming fraternity specifically. I explore some of the sacro-socio-political parameters that define gender and sexuality among batá drummers in Cuba and their subsequent

⁵⁶ For further references to “real men” determining heterosexual religious roles, see also Brown (2003:77) Conner and Sparks (2014) and Matory (2003:422).

impact on ritual performance. Finally, I present new research data on the subject of male same-sex practice as relevant to Añá and the Añá fraternity.⁵⁷

Gender and Sexuality Definitions

In many places in the world, including Cuba, a person's genitalia usually places them in one of two biological sex categories – male or female.⁵⁸ Although, as Fausto-Sterling (2000:235) reminds us,

medical and scientific knowledge about anatomy and physiology acquires gender [...] we cannot understand the underlying physiology of behaviour without considering an animal's social history and contemporary environment.

Concepts of gender, which in many cultures are still limited to a male/female binary, are ascribed to the human body through socially performative acts or 'scripts' that vary across cultures (Butler 1988; Allen 2011). How gender and sexual categories are defined and modified is context-specific as ideologies are contingent on foundational sacro-socio-political values, which are constantly evolving and vary from one culture to another (Lewis 2003, 2005; Allen 2011; Hamilton 2012). Issues, such as stigma, oppression or violence, can arise when one's gender does not conform to one's ascribed biological sex.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Morad's (2015:167) groundbreaking research on gay musical spaces in Havana was the only published work I have been able to source that explored the topic of gay men and Añá.

⁵⁸ There are, however, many cultures that have more than two gender categories such as the Hijra from South East Asia, the Chuckchi of Siberia (Ramet 1996:165) and the Samoan Fa'afafine, to name a few ('Intersections: Redefining Fa'afafine: Western Discourses and the Construction of Transgenderism in Samoa' n.d.).

⁵⁹ I acknowledge that biological sex is also not only a binary concept, as at least 1.7% of the population are intersex (i.e., born with aspects of both male and female genitalia) (Fausto-Sterlin 2000:51).

Like gender, sexuality incorporates a range of masculine-feminine-trans-hetero-homo-bi-queer behaviours and identities which can merge (to greater or lesser degrees) and/or interchange. I use the term sexuality broadly to incorporate gender and the erotic, relationships, desires, identities and acts in relation to sexual behaviour “as a symbol, or system of symbols, invested with culturally variable meanings” (Ortner and Whitehead 1981:ix). Although fluid, sexual identity (Foucault 1978:43) reflects national, patriarchal, heteronormative ideologies that are constructed “through multiple positions of privilege (e.g., white heterosexual men) or combinations of privilege and oppression (e.g., white homosexual men or black heterosexual men)” (Hamilton 2012:5).

Theorists (e.g., Ingraham 1994; Seidman 1994; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Warner 2011) have problematised common terms adopted to describe a range of sexual activities and identities. Schippers (2000:747), for example, identifies how hegemonic sexual identity in contemporary Western, industrialised society is defined in terms of a fixed hetero-focused binary that “constructs, naturalizes, and stratifies heterosexuality and homosexuality as two halves that make up the whole of human sexuality.” Sexual definitions, identities and practices, and society’s understandings of them “vary not only across cultures but over time as well” (Fausto-Sterling 2000:12). Contributions by queer theorists to scholarship (e.g., Ingraham 1994; Seidman 1994; Warner 2011) have helped to

conceptualise sexuality as not simply one feature of broader gender relations but as a separate organizing principle in its own right and equally central to the workings of power as gender. (Schippers 2000:748)

In Cuba, Morad (2015:15) explains, gay identity is “a complex concept”

and in the social sphere of Santería identifying male same-sex practice simply as gay or homosexual is misleading. Sexual identity within Regla de Ocha can be based on conceptions related to behaviour and sexual roles.⁶⁰ To explain this concept Morad draws on Dianteill's (2000) 'social-sex' categories: Feminine, which includes effeminate penetrated homosexual males (EPH) and women; and, Masculine, which incorporates men, masculine lesbians, and insertive partners in male-to-male sex (ibid:60).⁶¹ Whilst these definitions go some way to presenting alternative ways of interpreting the relationship between sexual roles and Santería they stereotype individuals as being in fixed categories rather than on a fluid continuum.

The two terms commonly used by *omo* Añás with whom I spoke, refer to male-male sex: *maricón*; a pejorative word meaning faggot or someone who is penetrated and, *bugarrón*; those who only assume the role of an insertive partner in male-male sex.⁶² Both terms comply with the penetrative/penetrated duality outlined by Dianteill and Morad above.⁶³ Morad (2015:17) points out that masculine "penetrators" are "not stigmatized in the way sexually passive (penetrated)

⁶⁰ See Morad (2015:15-32) for "Understanding Cuban Homosexualities."

⁶¹ The term EPH was invented by Morad to try and be more precise about the sexual/behavioural characteristics of the group he investigated: gay men who became possessed by the *orichas*. Morad (pers. comm., 10/09/2018) explained, "previous texts on the subject used terms such as *afeminados*, homosexual, gay, queer, gender fluid, which I felt were too old fashioned or modern/Eurocentric queer-studies oriented." The term EPH, Morad explained (ibid), describes more accurately the qualities these men needed in order to qualify as "mounts" for the *orichas*. His terminology includes three common characteristics for those suitable to be "mounted" which are: "effeminate (behavioral), homosexual (sexuality/identity), and passive/penetrated (sexual role)." As Morad points out (ibid), MSM who are masculine in their behavior and are active only, penetrating sexually, are no more suitable "to be mounted" than hetero-only men.

⁶² The English definition of bugger is "A person who penetrates the anus of someone during sexual intercourse ('Bugger, n.1' n.d.).

⁶³ Morad (pers. comm., 10/09/2018 2015:24) pointed out that the terms *maricón* and *bugarrón* are considered outdated in contemporary Cuba, especially in Havana. It is interesting to note that that within the community of drummers I spoke with these terms are still very much in use. I propose that a lack of interaction between the two groups (for reasons I outline later in this Chapter) could account for why these "old terms" remain in circulation among *omo* Añá drummers in Havana today.

homosexuals men are, who, in the Latino understanding, take the role of women both in social behaviour and in bed.”

It is a commonly held belief that the philosophies underpinning taboos restricting women and male same-sex practice in Añá and Ifá are greatly influenced by ideologies from Abakuá, the male-initiation society (Miller 2009:3), to which many *babalawos* and *omo Añás* belong (Díaz 1990:n.d.; Robaína 2010:242; Villepastour 2004:190). Robaína (2010:242), himself an openly gay *santero*, explains however, the prohibitions restricting gay men from entering the Abakuá cult are not extended to those who “act as the ‘male’ or active partner.” Therefore, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) are not necessarily considered to be gay (See also Díaz 1990:n.d.). López (pers. comm., 28/05/2017), however, contested this notion and suggested instead that the taboo extends to all MSM and not just EPH.⁶⁴ He explained that entry in to the Abakuá cult was dependent on the thorough investigation of a prospective member’s character to check if they have a reputation that connects them with homosexuality or “immoral behaviour” (pers. comm., 28/05/2017). The investigation takes the form of a photo being sent to all the prisons and police stations in all the regions in Cuba to check if the prospective member is known for any homosexual or criminal behaviour (ibid). As Morad and Robaína’s definitions regarding male-male sexual behaviour do not necessarily translate to the field of batá and the cult of Añá, I employ terms that cover a wide range of sexual practices across

⁶⁴ I have chosen to use the terms MSM and gay when talking about the sexuality taboo associated with Añá to encapsulate the wide range of sexual practices between men. According to the respondents with whom I spoke, they did not differentiate between the different sexual roles of gay men, indicating that the sexuality taboo extends to all kinds of male-same-sex practice (apart from “in-the-closet” MSM).

cultural and temporal frameworks such as ‘male same-sex practice’, ‘gay men/males’ and/or ‘Men who have Sex with Men’ (MSM).⁶⁵

Cuba has its own unique set of characteristics or scripts—tropes, behaviours, clothes, mannerisms, languages and the playing of certain instruments—that serve to define a person’s gender, sexuality, place and status in society. Cuban society, Brown (2003:207) explains “has always defined gender narrowly and policed it rigorously.” Masculine characteristics are the essence of *hombría* which, Allen explains (2011:126), are “among the most prized values in society because [they are] always already constitutive of honor, dignity, strength, and bravery, the ‘opposite’ of homosexuality.” For some, *omo* Añás’ demonstrations of heteronormativity, sexual virility, strength, and physical prowess can become exaggerated in an attempt to perform “hyper”-masculine scripts that denote *hombría* or being a *real man*. As I will address throughout this chapter, the construction and performance of *hombría* is an essential requirement for being accepted into and remaining within the fraternity.

Notes on Positionality and Methodology

This chapter discusses at length notions of masculinity and male sexuality in relation to batá performance. It is, therefore, relevant to make explicit the advantages and disadvantages my positionality affords in respect to the narratives I am about to

⁶⁵ The terms MSM and WSW (Women who have Sex with Women) have been adopted in public health discourse relating to sexual minorities (McKenna 1996). However, Young and Meyer (2005:1144) have identified that these terms can “obscure social dimensions of sexuality; undermine the self labeling of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people; and do not sufficiently describe variations in sexual behaviour.” Whilst I am mindful of this critique I have chosen to adopt these terms in this study. Firstly, I have done so because there is currently a lack of resources available to support the detailed identification of variant sexual practices and identities that are connected to Añá brotherhood. Secondly, as this Chapter will demonstrate there is a blanket prohibition against any kind of same-sex male practice within the Añá fraternity.

explore. My role as an ethnographer stands somewhere on a continuum between ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ in relation to Cuban batá performance.

On the one hand I am afforded levels of ‘insider’ social status from travelling many times over the years to Cuba, where I have spent the majority of my time in the company of male ritual performers. As a result, I have developed trusted friendships with a number of respected drummers and drum-owners. During this time, I have engaged in numerous conversations with Cuban ritual drummers about issues concerning batá, gender and sexuality. I also have extensive experience of ritual performances both as an observer and musician and, more recently, completed the preliminary steps into the religion in 2015 (see also Chapter 1).

On the other hand, in many respects my gender, ethnicity, language limitations and religious positioning restrict me from accessing deeper levels of ritual, musical and social knowledge relating to the Añá fraternity, Cuban culture and the gendered and sexual codes and practices related to these areas. I recognise that my gender position impedes a full understanding of the nuances of group aesthetics and male bonding inherent in musical ritual life (Schweitzer 2013; Windress 2017). Furthermore, as this is, to my knowledge, the first dedicated research on the topic of masculinity, sexuality and ritual batá performance, I have not had a subject-specific body of research or secondary sources from which to draw an analysis.

In order to address this gap in the literature, I have included the lived experiences and opinions of *olúbatás* and Abakuá members who have grown up and worked in Havana, such as Irian López and Javier Campos. I have also included perspectives on MSM and Añá from *omo* Añá, Manley “Piri” López and *obá oriaté*

Michael Aguilar Guerrero (an openly gay *akpón* currently working in Havana).⁶⁶

Whilst their collective years of experience as prominent ritual musicians render their views on masculinity, same-sex practice and the Añá tradition a significant contribution from which to begin this research, a more comprehensive study would require the involvement of a larger demographic of drummers and practitioners, which was beyond the scope of this thesis.

Although my positionality restricts me from some areas of cult practice, it also allows me the freedom to ask potentially sensitive questions, which could compromise cult insiders (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:65; Windress 2017:36). My experience in religious musical spheres in Cuba has equipped me to understand and navigate certain cultural codes and boundaries of respect. Perhaps as a result, I do not believe that my questions have at any time been considered inappropriate or offensive.⁶⁷ The same or similar questions from a Cuban or relative ‘insider’ on the other hand could be considered ‘disrespectful’ or construed as challenging the status quo (see quote by Campos Chapter 3:11; Windress 2017:36). Furthermore, as I am not expected to ‘perform’ or conform to the same ‘masculine script’ (Allen 2011:126) required of both Cuban and foreign men entering the Añá social sphere, my relative exclusion provides me with the opportunity to observe more objectively.

Ultimately, faced with this complicated set of methodological problems, I return to a default position. We can only ever understand social worlds from our own

⁶⁶ Manley “Piri” López (b. 1981) is a member of the famous “Chinito” family of ritual drummers living in La Corea, Havana. He is Irian López’s nephew and part of a respected younger generation of Añá drummers. He has worked as a professional ritual batá drummer since the age of about ten. In 2013, when he was thirty-two, he moved to Mexico. I have met Piri López a number of times over the years when he lived in La Corea and in Havana since he moved to Mexico.

⁶⁷ An indication that my respondents did not consider my probing of sensitive subjects inappropriate was their willingness to continue a dialogue with me about these issues over a number of years.

singular unique perspective. I, therefore, do not claim my representations and interpretations to be 'how it is', but merely how I perceive it based on what I have seen, heard and experienced (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Furthermore, although there have been published works dedicated to the role of same-sex-loving men in Santería (Vidal-Ortiz 2005; Robaína 2011; Beliso-De Jesús 2013; Morad 2015; Conner and Sparks 2014), there has been scant attention to narratives concerning masculinity, MSM and Añá (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006; Morad 2014). This research, which is far from exhaustive, draws on observations, experiences, and collected oral accounts, which highlight aspects of sexuality and gender in batá music, a subject area hitherto lacking in the relevant academic literature. My own observations and the reporting of those of my respondents provide neither finite nor conclusive models of truth. Rather, I am offering up a window through which to view and consider this area of study whilst being aware that the glass is tinted by my own distinctive comprehension and preconceptions of the world. So, it is with this understanding that I introduce this chapter.

Many of the topics discussed in this chapter have cross-cultural significance and I do not suggest that the Cuban batá community is unique in its outlook on male same-sex practice. The numerous and complex identity markers of gender, sexuality, race, class and religion in Cuba have therefore resulted in my adoption of an intersectional approach (see Chapter 1) through which to consider and analyse this area of study.

Santería and Sexuality

In comparison with Catholicism - the dominant religion in Cuba up until the revolution, Santería has relatively open attitudes to sex and sexuality (Robaina 2010). Beliso-De Jesús (2013:64) explains that it is acceptable and common for practitioners to openly discuss their sexuality, which forms part of the devotees' religious ethos and praxis. Furthermore, she explains, "Santería sexualities are often contextualized within naturalized religious associations with the different *oricha* also described in sexual terms" (ibid:64).

Orichas are known not just by their gender and kind of power but often also by their sexual nature. For example, Changó, a god strongly connected to the batá drums, is revered in Cuba for his sexual virility and promiscuity. Echú is described as "rampantly sexual, and every male Esu [Echú] figure contains either an upward spike of hair or a spike of iron, to symbolize his constant phallic capacities" (Neimark n.d.).⁶⁸ Furthermore, *patakínes* tell of Ogún's lust for his mother, Yemayá, the sea goddess considered to be the mother of all, whom he raped and with whom he then maintained an incestuous relationship (Barnes 1997:365). Yemayá is believed to offer protection to gay men and lesbians (Beliso-De Jesús 2013:xxii), while the children of Yemayá, Abbatá and Inlé are said to protect persons associated with sexual and gender diversity (Conner 2005:148). Ochún, most commonly known as the goddess of sweetness and love, can likewise "manifest herself as a highly sexualized denizen of the demimonde, the street, the boudoir, and the brothel" (Brown 2003:224). Ochún has also been known as *la santa puta* (the whorish saint) (358), holding important cultural associations with the nineteenth century *mulata* - a sexualised biracial female

⁶⁸ A *camino* (Lit: pathway) or dimension of Echu is Elegua.

type, who straddles zones of social intercourse associated with petty trade and delinquency (358).⁶⁹

The examples above present sexual archetypes which reflect larger societal conceptions about male and female sexuality where the virility of male *orichas* such as Changó, Ogún and Echú is admired. Comparatively, however, the language used to describe Ochún's sexual vigour is associated with prostitution and has very different connotations. Meanwhile, Yemayá's sexuality appears to be neutralised because she is associated with motherhood and gays and is a victim of incestuous rape. With such an array of sexual attributes and references to *orichas* as sexual beings with carnal desires, it is hardly surprising that religious ideologies do not include sanctimonious attitudes with regards to the corporeal erotic pleasure of its practitioners and followers.

Tomás Fernandez Robaína, a professor at the University of Havana, considers Santería "to be the most open of the Afro-Cuban creeds about gender and sexual orientation" (Conner and Sparks 2014:109). Ambiguous attitudes towards sexuality and religious practice can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Aurora Lamar (Oba Tolá) or *La Pimienta* (the Hot Pepper) was a notorious Santería priestess and madam who "owned a brothel and initiated prostitutes" (Brown 2003:102). Lamar was famed for her entrepreneurial "easy payment plan," which allowed even the poorest members of society to pay for their initiation in instalments. As a result, she was renowned for her initiatory prolificacy (102). Lamar was married to a *babalawo*, José Ramón Gutiérrez, who Brown describes as a "*chulo* and

⁶⁹ Allen suggests "In Cuba and elsewhere, difference appears subtly coloured by celebration of the *mulata* as an intervening character with less honour than a white woman but more than the dark-skinned *negra*" (2011:61). See also Acosta (2013) for discussions of representations of Black women and the *mulata* in Caribbean and Brazilian cultural discourse.

prestamista (pimp, loan shark or a strangler)” (ibid:103). Lamar and Ramón both ran a huge home in El Cerro, which was part brothel and part important Ifá and Ocha house.

Although Regla de Ocha is celebrated for its inclusion of diverse gendered and sexually defined groups, there are taboos that prohibit specific sexual activities within its associated practices. In some religious paths, determined by signs of Ifá, there are taboos that in some cases prohibit men performing oral sex on women, or in others forbid same-sex practice between men (pers. comm., López 22/05/2017).⁷⁰

Furthermore, men who are publically identified as gay are restricted from entering the Ifá priesthoods or Añá cults.

Gender, Sexuality and Ritual Roles in Regla de Ocha

Ritual roles and hierarchies in Regla de Ocha, Ifá and Añá are stratified by gender and public sexual identities. How a man is sexually identified publicly decrees which religious roles he has access to. Nonetheless, there is a nascent community of gay devotees and *oba oriatés* who wield a significant amount of power within the religious community.⁷¹ The diagram below explains how gender and sexuality ideologies pertain to hierarchy and ritual functions (Fig 5.1).⁷²

⁷⁰ Both of these concepts, López (pers. comm., 22/05/2017) believes, have been imported from Abakuá practices.

⁷¹ There are suggestions that many *oriatés*, especially in North America, are gay and yet serve in positions of religious authority. (Conner and Sparks 2014:154)

⁷² It was not possible to italicise foreign words in the program used to generate this diagram.

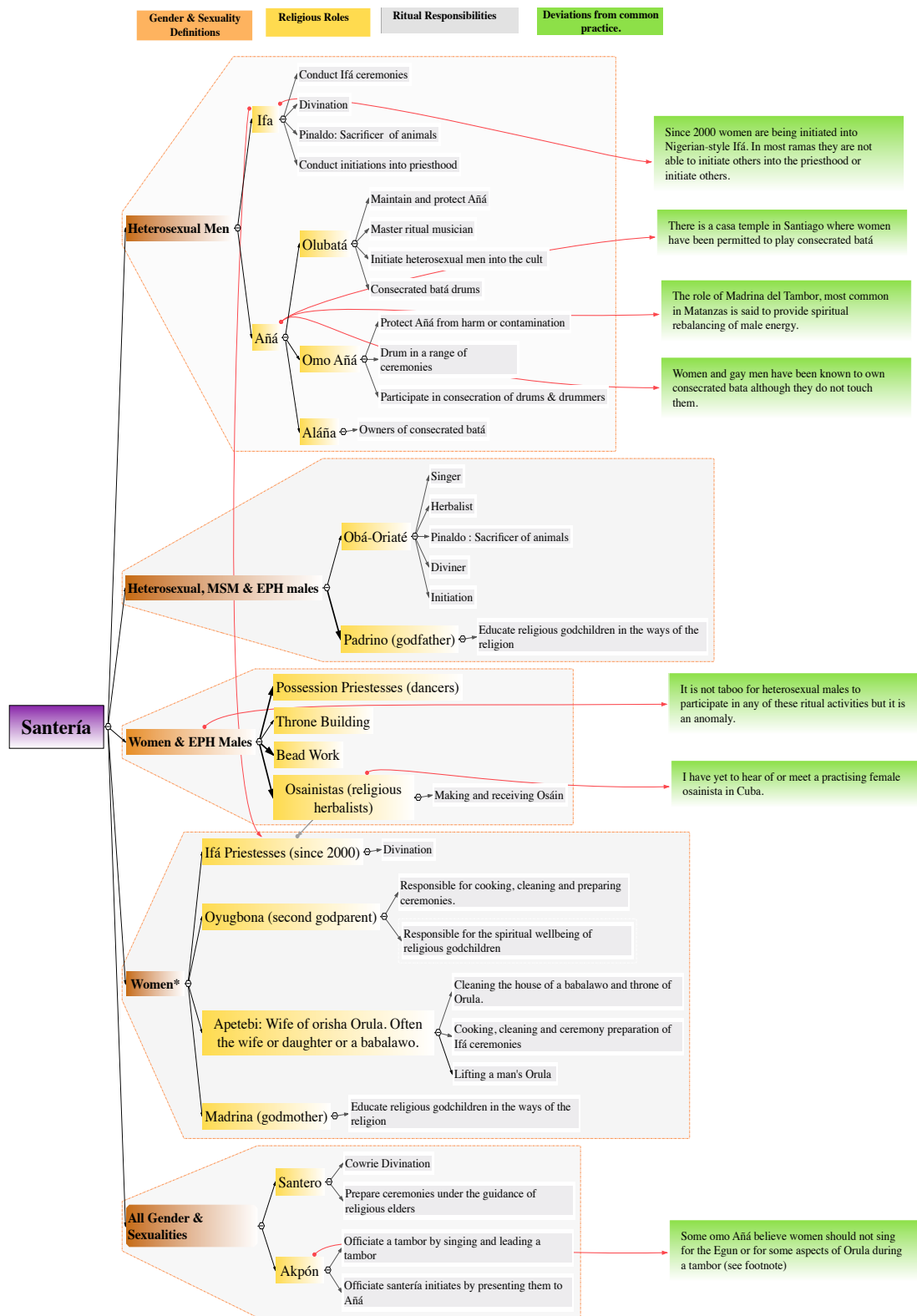


Figure 5.1: Gendered roles in Regla de Ocha-Ifá and Añá ⁷³

⁷³ There is also a disagreement over whether females can be *akpónes* in rituals that are for the Egun (ancestors). Campos (pers. comm., 28/09/2015), for example, claimed this is a prohibition, while Yayma Machado (pers. comm., 1/09/2015), a professional female *akpón*, claims she has often sung for Egun ceremonies.

It is important to note that the above diagram does not represent a universal model, but is an impression of practice in the dominant, conservative, Regla-de-Ocha-Ifá in Havana while I was undertaking my research. Several of these categories, however, can vary between religious communities and, as this thesis attests, can change over time. This particular model identifies a hierarchy based on gender and sexuality in relation to positions of religious authority. A general overview indicates males as dominating religious governance and women prevailing in either creative and/or domestic ritual roles.⁷⁴ I am aware, however, that the categories of Heterosexual Men and Gay Men do not acknowledge the grey area regarding sexual roles and the acceptability of some male-male sexual behaviour within cult parameters, a topic I discuss later in this chapter.

Vidal-Ortiz identifies ritual roles as being categorised by gendered systems of oppression within religious practice where women and gay men have restricted access based on “assumptions of a penetrative sexuality” (2006:64). Beliso-de Jesus (2015:827-828) locates how *odus* (religious texts) in Ifá identify women and effeminate males as ritually embodied within hierarchies of religious power. Cuban Ifá, she explains, “sees any form of spiritual penetration by copresences (*oricha*, Palo spirits, or any other) as a form of femininity or weakness, which excludes unworthy males from Cuban Ifá initiations” (Beliso-de Jesus 2015b:255).⁷⁵ Pérez argues (2016:114):

⁷⁴ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of a shift in female religious authority, especially the role of *oriaté* since the 1930s (Brown 2003:151).

⁷⁵ Beliso-De-Jesus (2014:504) defines copresences as the “multiple energies” of “Orisha (divinities), various spirits, and familial ancestors [that] are recognized as being on, around, and within practitioners’ bodies. They are sensed and felt on the body.”

the most prevalent asymmetry in this [Santería] and other Black Atlantic religions and the one that undergirds the others is the female [and homosexual] body's portrayal as the most receptive material container for the gods' sacred power.

Invariably it is women and effeminate men that are more susceptible than heterosexual men to being *montado* (mounted i.e., possessed) by men and gods (Pérez 2016:115).⁷⁶ Possession mounts “are perceived as both conveying the power of their patron deities and enlarging their religious lineages by ‘carrying’ protégés throughout their religious lives” (ibid:115). Ajibade (2013:970) explains that in Yoruba culture

The term mount is cryptic with meanings. It refers not only to possession, but to the action of a rider mounting a horse that is symptomatic of an extreme form of control and an act of copulation.⁷⁷

The perceived vulnerability of being ‘mounted’ is also an argument used by some in the prohibition preventing women and homosexuals playing *Añá* or even *aberikulá* during a *tambor* (See Chapter 4). Hence, the idea that if a woman or gay man plays *batá* in a *tambor* they are more likely to be mounted than would a heterosexual male. Consequently, it is inconceivable to many ritual drummers that a person could perform their musical responsibilities whilst being possessed by an *oricha* (pers. comm., Justo Pelladito 4/08/2015).⁷⁸ Access to positions of religious authority and

⁷⁶ See Ajibade (2013:970) for a fuller delineation of contemporary descriptions of the Yoruba religious “mount” (*gun* in the Yoruba language).

⁷⁷ For more in-depth discussions on the assumed sexual orientation of men who become “mounts” in Yoruba *orisha* culture see Oyewumi (1997) and Matory (1994, 2003).

⁷⁸ According to Beliso-De Jesús (2015b:258), this is not necessarily the case in Matanzas, where *aláñas* can own *fundamento* and be mounted by *oricha*.

ritual roles in Regla de Ocha, based on gender and sexuality, reflects larger societal hierarchies and notions about submissive–penetrated (read as feminine) and control–penetrator (read as male). These simplistic binaries, however, do not go anywhere near representing the full technicolour of human possibility. Whilst some aspects of Regla de Ocha’s social organisation form part of the human capability to maintain a communal equilibrium, other aspects are rooted in racial and sexual stereotypes from a legacy of slavery and colonialism in Cuba.

Racialised Masculinities in Cuba

Opinions about sexuality, steeped in concepts of morality, are often shared freely among groups of people because they help define who we are and our place within social strata. Throughout my time in Cuba, I heard and participated in many conversations about sex and sexuality, but one conversation stands out. During my field trip in 2015, I was invited to have dinner and play batá socially with a group of Cuban, American and European drummers on the outskirts of Havana. The group was racially mixed and made up of six men and three women, although I was the only female drummer.

Ethnography: A Social Gathering, Havana 6/10/2015.⁷⁹

After a few hours of drumming we finally settled down to eating, chatting and drinking rum. One of the Cuban drummers in our group is a well-known *babalawo* and *olúbatá* (I will refer to him as José), who is known for joking around and drinking a lot. Out of nowhere, he began telling us all that the Black American in our

⁷⁹ This ethnography draws from fieldnotes and memory.

group must have a big penis because all Black men have big penises (he himself is *mulato* of mixed African and European heritage). Whilst laughing, he gesticulated with his hands to show us how big he thought it was. Then, as if arguing with himself, he protested, “No, no it’s probably even bigger than that!” and the space between his hands became wider and wider. Whilst José found his own narrative hilarious, the rest of us, especially the Black American’s girlfriend, shifted uncomfortably in our seats, rolled our eyes, and let out embarrassed sniggers and lame protestations. Someone in the group changed the subject by asking the other Cuban drummer, who was also Black, if he had a girlfriend. Before he had time to answer José cut in, “Yes, he has, and you can always find him hanging out her washing.” Shaking his head vehemently and laughing, the Cuban drummer replied, “No, no, no, that’s not true!”; a playful argument ensued between them as the drummer tried in vain to convince José for some time that he had never hung out his girlfriend’s washing.

Drawing from experience I understand that José’s comments are part of his playful personality, as he is always looking to provoke a reaction in those around him and what he says is not necessarily what he thinks. Nonetheless, his comments may reflect a racialised sexual imaginary influenced by a history of racism in Cuba. Jesús-Beliso (2014:510-511) reminds us that Santería emerged from within a colonial system that was “maintained through violence, repression, and racial ordering, as well as through its countertechnologies of rebellion, sabotage, secret religions, and other resistance.”

Schweitzer (2013:52) explains that “the Añá community in Cuba remains a largely black-centric society.” Discussions concerning this group, therefore, should be framed within a context that considers the way in which racial socio-politics have

constructed stereotypes of black masculinity and its sexuality.⁸⁰ Ritual and folkloric performances “shape a field of relationships” (Wirtz 2014:60) drawn from chronotopic values. Wirtz explains how Afro-Cuban folkloric performances have helped shape part of the Black Cuban identity and culture, and the “social significance in and through interactions, such as those among audiences, performers, and their roles in folklore performances” (61). However, she draws our attention to a “relationship between performance and racial representations,” where amateur groups and professional ensembles characterise stereotypes of African slave figures from Cuba’s past (20).

To unpack the compositions of race, racism, identity, and culture in Cuba it is necessary to understand the processes of exoticisation (Said 1979) and the sexualisation of the Black body (Wallace 1999; Alexander 1994; Moore 1994, 1997; Allen 2011; Lewis 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Hamilton 2012; Wirtz 2014; Morad 2015). I investigate sacro-socio-political constructions of racial identity pertinent to national Cuban identity in general, and batá narratives specifically. In addition, I examine “hyper”-masculinity among members of the Añá brotherhood as a strategy for defining heteronormativity and safeguarding against gay male associations.

A history of negative attitudes and limitations placed on those who engage in same-sex activities, by sections of the religious and political community, has resulted in the social performance of masculine scripts as a means for defining and in some

⁸⁰ Although definitions of race are ambiguous, I have not seen any pale-skinned Cuban drummers performing ritually. The rarity of white drummers is perhaps reflected in the fact that the first white man, Rogelio Ernesto Gatel Cotó “El Gato”, was not sworn to Añá until 1985 (Schweitzer 2013:52). This is in contrast to a large percentage of White drummers from outside of Cuba. There are, however, many *mulato* ritual musicians in Cuba (see Chapter 1 for discussions of racial identification in Cuba).

cases ‘safeguarding’ one’s public heterosexual identity. A paradigm that is paralleled among female batá performers (discussed in Chapter 4).

Whilst devotees of Santería in Cuba come from a wide racial demographic, up until around the 1900s practitioners were predominately of African descent (Palmié 2013:25; Brown 2003). Initially, the White ruling classes associated Santería with witchcraft, murder, cannibalism and human sacrifice (Ortiz 1973; Hagedorn 2001; Palmié 2002; Guerra 2012). The practice of some African-derived traditions and their associated religious drumming have been outlawed throughout Cuba’s history (Brown 2003; Sublette 2007).⁸¹ Attempts have been made by some devotees to ‘Whiten’ some aspects of Santería in an attempt to make *oricha* worship less visible and more acceptable to the critical eye of White hegemony (Koprivica 2010).

Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University of Havana Estéban Morales (2008) identifies how issues of race and racism were thought to have been solved in the early part of the revolution.⁸² Morales argues, however, that the economic crisis of the *período especial* in the early 1990s caused racism to re-surface with a virulence one would expect of a problem that far from being ‘solved’ continued to fester below the surface of social discourse (ibid). Alexander (1994:13) identifies how “Black nationalist masculinity” can lean towards imperial hegemonic masculinity, where loyal and compliant subjects can be knighted, but never enthroned as kings. She adds (ibid:13-14)

⁸¹ See Chapter 1.

⁸² For the full online article see Morales, Esteban. 2008. ‘Challenges of the Racial Problem in Cuba (Temas, No. 56)’. *Temas*, No. 56 2008. [Accessed 28/07/2016]. <http://www.walterlippmann.com/docs2296.html>. See also Clealand (2011) for in-depth discussions of racial politics in Cuba.

[R]escue and indebtedness sometimes sediment as part of the psychic residue of the process of colonization; then respectability might well function as debt payment for rescue from incivility and savagery. But a rescued masculinity is simultaneously an injured masculinity; a masculinity that does not emerge from the inherited conditions of class and race privilege. And it is injured in a space most vulnerable to colonial constructions of incivility. At one time subordinated, that masculinity now has to be earned, and then appropriately conferred. Acting through this psychic residue, Black masculinity continues the policing of sexualised bodies, drawing out the colonial fiction of locating subjectivity in the body (as a way of denying it), as if the colonial masters were still looking on, as if to convey legitimate claims to being civil.

The ignorance about the avoidance of race and racism in Cuba, Allen explains, has left Cubans “ill-equipped to deal with the particular material and psychic trauma in lived black experience” (2011:54). As Allen asserts, “Gender, racial and sexual hegemonies are constituted by national elites and disseminated to the masses as innocuous ‘Cuban culture’ that carries the force of ‘nature’”(54).

Fernando Ortíz was one such national elite at the heart of the construction of Black identity in Cuba. Koprivica (2010:276) argues that Ortiz’s pioneering work has helped us “to understand how economics and the political conditions of Africans stimulated the growth of cultural resistance in religious and musical form.” However, whilst Ortíz’s later work (e.g., 1995 [1940]) gestured towards the horrors of racial violence, it continued to privilege elite Whiteness (Allen 2011:48). In *Cuban Counterpoint: Sugar and Tobacco*, Ortíz (1995 [1940]) situates the ‘masculine’ as “dark tobacco [...] always a boastful and swaggering thing, like an oath of defiance springing erect from the lips.” Ortiz’s racialisation and sexualisation of the Black

body, Allen (2011:49) explains, is epitomised as “virility, sexual power, and sexual aggression” whilst failing to acknowledge the effects of contemporary racism. At the axis of slave-plantation economy, colonial hegemony inscribed racial and sexual identities onto Black bodies. Women’s bodies are characterised as “unruly sexuality, untamed and wild” (Alexander 1994:12), while Black masculinity is “feared as the hypersexualized stalker.” These depictions were summarised by Ortíz ([1973] cited in Morad 2014:174) “The dancers go crazy, the music, the dance, etcetera. And the religious festivity often ends with an orgy.” Beliso-De Jesus (2015b:56) identifies how “blackening bodies,” which emerged from “Santería’s somatic schema of copresences,” formed within a “complex racial-historical matrix situated within specific ontologies of violence, power, and religious inspiration.” It is against this historical backdrop that we see the identities of Black ritual drummers dramatised.

Holding the Fire: *Hombría*, Rites of Passage and the *Añá* Fraternity

While the conversation about penis size in the previous text was expressed with humour, Allen (2011:49) indicates that this preoccupation among Cuban men relates to insecurities around masculine identity.⁸³ Moreover, Rosendahl (cited in Hamilton 2012:110), identifies the notion that men bragging to other men about sexual virility, not doing housework, or having numerous mistresses, performs the function of male

⁸³ Wallace (1999:73) identifies that while a misconception about Black men being well-endowed is a racist notion, during the period of the Civil Rights movement it was an identity that suited a majority of Black men who subscribed to the notion. Fanon (2008:116-117) identifies the differences between a Black man’s life experience and “interpretation of the Negro myth.” He locates processes of interpellation (Althusser 1971), where blackness gets called into being via hegemonic White interpretation of Black essentialism. These processes are then folded back into constructions of Black identity and inform lived experience (see Beliso de Jesús 2014:514).

bonding. *Hombría* and male bonding in the Añá brotherhood and the Ifá priesthood are explicitly played out in ritual and public behaviour. Performances have been strongly influenced by male bonding and initiation rites of the mutual aid society of Abakuá (pers. comm., López 28/05/2017; Campos 4/3/2018).⁸⁴ One example is the *juramento* ceremony, a rite of passage for heterosexual men into the Añá fraternity.

Although some aspects of the *juramento* ceremony are openly discussed, many of the details are known only to those who have participated in the ritual. In addition, the ceremony itself can have a diversity of procedures that vary from one Añá community to another (pers. comm., López 2/08/2015). One component of this ceremony is the *penetencia* (penitence). In Añá and Ifá initiation rituals the *penetencia* requires an initiate to undergo an activity of endurance and physical pain.⁸⁵ Initiation rites, we are reminded, give “an outward visible form to an inward and conceptual process” (Turner 1967:96) and can be a process for growth, individuation and social bonding (Turner 1967; Mahdi, Foster, and Little 1987; Schweitzer 2013; Windress 2017). Bernstein (1987:135-6) argues for the importance of male initiation rites and warns that the modernisation of society has led to a “weakening” of male-initiation rites of passage into groups where “masculine mysteries” are learned and “positive masculine ego development” takes place. However, he also warns that men

⁸⁴ The influence of Abakuá ideologies and practices concerning *hombría* in Cuban society generally and Santería specifically have been noted by several scholars and respondents (Villepastour 2006:190; Conner and Sparks 2004:125; López pers. comm., 28/05/2017; Campos pers. comm., 14/01/2018). López, who was initiated as an Abakuá member at the age of sixteen (over forty years ago), indicated that Abakuá masculine ideologies have strong influences on Ifá and Añá. This interrelated dialogue is poignant especially as many *omo* Añá are also Ifá priests and Abakuá members. However, Abakuá’s influence on Cuban society and religious brotherhoods remains an area for further research.

⁸⁵ Many rituals can involve a form of *penetencia* such as the ‘crowning’ ceremony of a new *santero*, but as far as I am aware, they do not involve any form of physical pain.

can use these groups to avoid confronting their fears of women and as a result “may find themselves stuck in them” (ibid:143).⁸⁶

Although initiation rites are often associated with the transition from adolescence to manhood, in the context of the Añá and Abakuá fraternities and the Ifá priesthood this is not necessarily the case, as although boys can be initiated, males of any age can also undergo the ritual. However, the rite of passage does represent a transitional process that men enter to pass from one state to another. Although these ceremonies represent a transition from the profane to the sacred (Gennep 2013:1), they also ritualise and symbolise a passage into manhood. Serving a ‘penitence’ that involves physical or physiological discomfort in order to be accepted into a male-only group is a cross-cultural practice not limited to Cuba (Mahdi, Foster, and Little 1987:137). Turner (1969:96) refers to “liminal phenomena” where such rites present a

moment in and out of time, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.

It is within these transitional spaces that new social structures are ‘born’.

Within the Añá brotherhood, methods and degrees of the *penitencia* can vary from one group to another. López (pers. comm., 28/05/2017) however described what he believes to be some extreme examples of initiation practices now being incorporated into the Añá *juramento* and Ifá initiation ceremonies from Abakuá rites

⁸⁶ See also Majors (2005) for discussions of race and rites of passage for boys and adolescents.

of passage.⁸⁷ In one example, López explained how initiates were required to kneel for extensive periods of time before having to walk on their knees for some distance, whilst carrying a heavy object and being beaten with sticks by other cult members (pers. comm., 28/05/2017).⁸⁸ More commonly, initiations appear not to involve being beaten with sticks. In another example he described prospective initiates proving their masculinity by holding burning charcoal. Critical of these practices, López (pers. comm., 28/05/2017) explained that “there will always be someone who is so strong-headed they can bear it but that doesn’t mean they will be a good drummer and love the drum.” Most initiates do not necessarily know in advanced what is required of them and are instead led incrementally to comply. These examples illustrate the various lengths men are willing to go to in order to be part of an exclusive group that can play consecrated drums.⁸⁹ These rituals act as a cohesive strategy for social bonding but also harness notions of Cuban masculinity, identity and place in the world (Schweitzer 2015).⁹⁰

Although male scripts which define *hombría* are accepted norms in Cuban society (Allen 2011), there are several reasons why those wanting to enter the Añá brotherhood and those already initiated may feel the need to adopt “hyper” masculine

⁸⁷ It is relevant to note that the Abakuá cult is said to abhor homosexuality and go to great lengths to verify potential members heterosexuality before allowing them entrance to the cult (López pers. comm., 28/05/2017). Initiated members (known as *indisemes*) swear before the sacred drum *Ekue*, not to be effeminate which is considered a serious sin as the “Ekue hates females” (Flores 2001:58). Similarly, concerning gender and *batá* construction even “the wood of the Ekue cannot be from a female tree, because nothing in Abakuá can belong to the feminine gender” (Cabrera 1958:245:16).

⁸⁸ American *omo* Añá Kenneth “Skip” Burney described going through a very similar Añá initiation process in New York (pers. comm., 20/03/2017, Miami). In addition, Alberto Quintero (Villepastour 2015:241) also describes in his first *omo* Añá ceremony “a series of physical onslaughts” at the hands of his Puerto Rican initiators, which he claims was “unheard of in Cuba.”

⁸⁹ In Chapter 3, I explain that it is not necessary for many Cuba drummers to be initiated in order to play *fundamento*. Therefore, the drive to be initiated is not solely in order to drum on consecrated *batá*.

⁹⁰ An interesting area for future research is the initiation of non-Cubans into Cuban heterosexual male-only cults.

tropes that further exaggerate a heterosexual masculine identity. Rumours that identify an Añá initiate as having participated in male-male sex, being too familiar with gay men, or playing batá with men rumored to be gay can lead to members being ostracised from within the fraternity. Hypermasculinity, therefore, becomes a requirement for maintaining an immaculate masculine reputation and improves the chances of entry into and ongoing inclusion within an Añá *piquete* (group of *omo Añás* loyal to a particular set of *fundamento*). Furthermore, the strict segregation of male cults from aspects of femininity in ritual can lead to a pronounced tension around the female body or around men who are open about their male-male sexual activity. An interesting area for future research could be to ascertain the extent to which the sexualisation of the Black body, and hyper-feminine and hyper-masculine identities within male and female batá spheres are connected, or contrast with one another.

As it stands, ‘hanging out the washing’, or other culturally perceived feminine actions, can damage a cult member’s macho reputation and, more dangerously, lead to accusations of homoerotic associations. Allegations that call into question the sexuality of male batá drummers can not only end a professional career but also alienate the support network of priesthoods and brotherhoods, an area I expand on later in the chapter.



Plate 5.1: Añá musicians in El Cerro. (Photo courtesy of Osa Roso 6/08/2015) (from left): Rodney Bravo, Andri Díaz (drum owner and brother of the late Ahmed Díaz) Osa Roso, (next person's name unknown), Rubén Bulnes.

The 'Undefined': Añá and Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)

The relevance of including data in this study concerning the nature of ideologies that exclude MSM from access to Añá became apparent only after I had completed my main fieldwork period in 2015. Initially, I failed to set out this topic in my research objectives because I believed it to be too controversial. I thought that asking questions related to MSM and Añá were taboo and by pursuing this line of enquiry I could run the risk of breaching etiquette. In addition, I was uncomfortable with instigating questions about respondent's sexual identity unless they made it explicit. However, on

analysing the data I had collected from my 2015 fieldtrip, I became aware that respondents often grouped women and gay men together during conversations about female batá prohibitions, and as a result it became glaringly apparent that data was needed to address this vacuum in my research.

In 2017, I was fortunate enough to be able to revisit Cuba for two weeks where, treading very carefully, I was able to collect enough information to at least begin a conversation about MSM and Añá. I wanted to understand what religious ideologies underpinned prohibitions restricting gay men from coming into contact with Añá. I also wondered how gay men who work close to Añá, like ritual dancers or singers, perceive their exclusion and how Añá initiates perceive homosexuality. While this study addresses some issues relating to this topic, its resources were limited. As a result, it remains an area for future academic study.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the history of attitudes towards same-sex-loving men and women and homophobia in Cuba (Lumsden 2010; Robaina 2010; Allen 2011; Hamilton 2012; Morad 2015; Stout 2014). However, it is relevant to highlight some pivotal sacro-socio-political aspects which have underpinned attitudes towards same-sex practice. LGBTQI equality was institutionally condemned in Cuba until the 1990s.⁹¹ Official developments, giving gay people greater rights in Cuba, are relatively recent, and perhaps reflect the effects of gay tourism, which has raised the profile of the gay community by creating campaigns that tackle marginalisation.⁹²

⁹¹ Although women were encouraged into the workplace, the state failed to make institutional changes which educated men into supporting women in family and domestic duties. (Hamilton 2012).

⁹² For example, see the following profile on the Afro-Cuban gay community by Minority Rights Group Organisation. Eastwood, Emma. 2016. 'Afro-Cuban LGBTQI Voices ~ ¡Homofobia No! ¡Socialismo Sí! Identity, Culture, Gender and Sexuality in Today's Cuba ~ Minority Stories'. <http://stories.minorityrights.org/afrocuba-lgbtqi/chapter/afro-cuban-lgbtqi-voices/> [Accessed 9/08/2018].

Hamilton (2012:38) explains that whilst the Cuban socialist regime did not invent homophobia, “It did, however, provide new public arenas for the expression of prejudice against same-sex activity.” Socialist morality identified MSM as counter-revolutionary, associating them with imperial bourgeois decadence (ibid:59). Fidel Castro (cited in Lockwood 2003:107) stressed:

We would never come to believe that a homosexual could embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true Revolutionary, a true Communist militant.

However, Szulc (2017, 2018) points out that connections between communism and homophobia are complex, and not necessarily uniform. Attitudes between communist states vary widely, and most likely are a reflection of underlying culture and the ideologies of the person in power, rather than that of communism itself.

1965-1968 saw the creation of the notorious UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production) work camps, which claimed to rehabilitate social deviants, including: MSM, the corrupt, religious proselytisers and the lazy (Hamilton 2012:40). Those suspected of same-sex activity were reported to the authorities and ostracised from the community, losing their jobs, their houses and access to education (Hamilton 2012:49). Hamilton (2012:41) explains:

UMAP camps were relatively short-lived: they had a definitive and devastating impact on both the individual men sent to them and the wider communities within which they lived and worked.

Systematic institutionalised persecution of same-sex practice remained in place until the post-Soviet Union era, which saw a move towards “a politics of acceptance and even celebration of sexual diversity” (ibid:48).

Fear and misconception of, and discrimination against non-heteronormative practices remain widespread in Cuba generally (Allen 2011; Hamilton 2012), and among the cult brotherhoods specifically. However, same-sex practices and overt homophobia can co-exist because of the historical and cultural distinction between identity and sexual practices (Hamilton 2012:153). In Cuba, MSM who are not EPH are not necessarily seen as a threat because they can still conform to the performance of *hombría*, whereas EPH males, who fail to adhere to a *macho* aesthetic, are perceived as a menace to heterosexual relations and family life (Allen 2011:126; Hamilton 2012:153; Beliso-De Jesús 2015:827). Allen (2011:10-11) explains:

The ‘dangerousness’ and ‘scandal’ of male homosexuality is not men having sex with men [...] but rather it is the failure to perform the strict script of masculinity and *hombría* (idealized attributes, rights, and responsibilities of manhood) that in itself is classed and raced.

Although Santería has historically provided a spiritual safe space where LGBTQI individuals can fulfil important religious roles and engage in communal ritual activity, this has not been extended to their having access to initiation into the Ifá priesthood, or the Añá or Abakuá cults. Same-sex-loving men in many respects fall under the same gender proscription as women in the batá cult, the Ifá priesthood and the cult of Abakuá. They are prohibited from entering the priesthoods and from coming into direct contact with Añá. As some gender ideologies have been imported

from Yoruba beliefs systems, it is relevant to consider how the Yoruba perceive same-sex practice.

According to López (pers. comm., 23/07/2016) the Lucumí word “*alakuata*” translates as lesbian.⁹³ Ajibade (2013:981) explains that lesbians and gay men have been invisible among the Yoruba “due to cultural pressure and denial of fundamental human rights.” Villepastour’s experience among Yoruba religious communities has been that same-sex practice “is neither understood nor acknowledged”: its existence is largely ignored by society as a whole (ibid:189).

In part, the gendered and racialised sexual identities of drummers can be attributed to the wide dissemination of Ortíz’s published works. While Ortíz (1980:104) documented only one version of the batá lineage, he also reflected on race, gender and sexuality, and promulgated strong views on masculinity and sexuality.

There is no question, then, that drummers cannot be Sodomites, áddo dié, as is said in Lucumí. A Sodomite musician, active or passive, by congenital disgrace or acquired vice, can never be consecrated and, if already consecrated should fall into this priestly indignity, he would be execrated and incapacitated and made object for punishment.

Ortiz’s writings were seminal in creating a sacro-historic narrative from which practitioners and scholars alike wrote and cemented beliefs about gender, sexuality and batá.

More recently, in Morad’s (2014:167) study he briefly discusses the relationship between MSM in Santería and batá drummers. Morad notes that gay *santeros* do not openly contest proscriptions that prevent them from playing Añá. A

⁹³ See Chapter 1 for details about vernacular context within Regla de Ocha.

gay religious interlocutor explains: “We don’t want to play them [the batá]. That’s for real men” who “do all the hard work” (Lazaro cited in Morad 2014:167).

Furthermore, they claim that religious segregation based on sexuality is not related to discrimination against gay men because those who get possessed (women and effeminate males) are considered to have “the privileged role” (167). Being a ‘real man’ is a prerequisite for those wanting to be initiated into the reputable branches of Añá.⁹⁴

A lack of literature available regarding MSM who work with Añá could suggest that such a group does not in fact exist. A hypothesis worth considering, however, is that the very nature of the prohibitions and the consequences of being “outed” would necessitate such activity being strictly clandestine. Muñoz (1999) explains that ‘disidentification’ is one strategy practised by those who fall outside of the heteronormative rubric “in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.”

It is interesting to note that even though the gay-male-same-sex prohibition does not extend to MSM playing *aberikulá*, I have never seen a group of openly gay men playing non-consecrated batá in Cuba unlike their female counterparts. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, women have become more publicly critical of their religious subordination over the last thirty years. One explanation may be that Marxist principles were introduced following the Cuban revolution, which in theory supported greater gender equality for women. Feminist ideologies are intrinsic to communism.

⁹⁴ All of my Cuban respondents refer to reputable drummers and drum owners. These people are considered to have a thorough understanding of the musical and ritual traditions as well as to be free from rumours of ‘inappropriate’ contact (as described in Chapter 2) with women or homosexual males.

In addition, a global feminist movement, brought to Cuba via tourism, may also have affected shifts in attitudes. These processes have, therefore, been in motion for longer than the gay rights movement in Cuba. However, as I complete this thesis, Cuba's current leader, Miguel Díaz-Canel, has put forward proposals to change the constitution, redefining the institution of marriage as being "between people without any restrictions" (Mitchell n.d.). If approved by the National Assembly in February this change will lead the way to the legalisation of same-sex marriage, a significant advancement for the rights of gay people in Cuba.⁹⁵

MSM and Being Naked in the Añá Room: A Drummer's Perspective

Some sources suggest that the taboo preventing MSM from playing consecrated batá is connected to a perceived lack of strength and susceptibility to possession (Vincent [Villepastour] 2006:189; Morad 2014:167). Campos (pers. comm., 14/01/2018), on the other hand, proclaimed that these taboos are a result of "discrimination" and "*hombría*" most likely influenced by the close connection between Añá and the Abakuá cult, who as mentioned previously administer strict protocols to prevent openly gay men from entering the fraternity. When I asked López (pers. comm., 22/05/2017) why openly gay men were prohibited from playing Añá, he initially said he did not really have the words to explain why. However, later he went on to say that it was because the initiation process involved men being naked and because "*maricónes* haven't got the same mentality. If one knew that in that situation [whilst being naked in the in the Añá room] they could control themselves, it would be fine."

⁹⁵ See Mitchell, Charlotte. 'Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Backs Same-Sex Marriage'. n.d. [Accessed 18 September 2018]. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/cuban-president-miguel-diaz-canel-backs-sex-marriage-180917162537797.html>.

He went on to express more of his own attitudes towards male-male same-sex practice in Cuba (pers. comm., 22/05/2017).

Among many of them [homosexuals] that were born and raised alongside me, if they don't express it [their same-sex desires] then nobody would know they are gay. They [gay men] will always be everywhere. *Babalawos* that were homosexual and *tamboreros* the same, they exist. There is a system in Cuba of support, if it is my son or my friend, I'll help him. If someone has been born with this [same-sex desire] I don't know if it is a weakness or strength.

López (pers. comm., 22/05/2017) added that his Ifá sign indicates that his “salvation” is through the “*adodís*” (the Lucumí words for *those* who practise anal sex) and “*alakuatas*” (the Lucumí word for lesbianism), and as a result he should never offend them. On the contrary he explained “I should be positive towards them but I was already like that before making Ifá, I already had good relations with them and treated them with respect” (pers. comm., 22/05/2017).

Very little is discussed by *omo* Añás with non-cult-members about their initiation ceremony, as much of what takes place is considered secret. However, López and his nephew, “Piri” López Herrera were candid about their views. López (pers. comm., 22/05/2017) and Piri López (pers. comm., 23/07/2016) openly referred to one aspect of the *juramento* ceremony that involves initiates being naked before others in a designated ritual space called the *cuarto de Añá* (Añá room).⁹⁶ It is during

⁹⁶ In 2016, I asked a mutual friend of ours, *omo* Añá Antoine Miniconi [AM], who moved to Mexico in 2015, if he would seek an interview about MSM and Añá with Piri López on my behalf. In order to avoid ethical infringements, Miniconi ensured that Piri López was aware that the interview questions were mine and he was fully informed about the nature of my research. Piri López agreed to possible publication of his responses. The interview was recorded on 23/07/2016.

this part of the ceremony that they both suggested heterosexual men would be vulnerable to unwanted sexual advances from MSM if they were permitted to enter into the brotherhood.

Piri López (pers. comm., 23/07/2016) claimed that he believed MSM are prohibited from playing Añá because “*no tienen la sexualidad bien definido en sentido de si son hombre o mujer* (they don’t have a defined sex in the sense of being a man or woman).⁹⁷Below is a transcription of the interview Antoine Miniconi [AM] conducted on my behalf with Piri López [PL] (pers. comm., 23/07/2016).

PL: When you’re in the room with *omo* Añás during a ceremony, if someone was a homosexual, they could be enjoying the private parts of those men who are naked. Someone who is not [sexually] defined in that sense may take advantage of a [*omo* Añá] brother.

AM: So it is not to do with playing the drum, it is because of the ceremony?

PL: For me it is about the ceremony, that they can take advantage and they are looking at a person who is a man as well.

AM: Is it a question of intimacy or a question of desire?

PL: I don’t know. It could be because of intimacy because they have that [sexual] weakness they just can’t help looking at people’s private parts. That’s my sense of why they can’t play [...] The good thing that gay people have is they are the first ones who have saved the religion. They are the people who have lifted the religion; they

⁹⁷ Pelladito referred also to an ambiguity around gender and sexuality when he referred to lesbians as being “not here nor there, the same as effeminate men” (pers. comm., 4/08/2015).

are religious people and they have a lot of knowledge. They are people who go to a *tambor* and they do it from the heart. Like all other human beings, there is a lot of gossip though. Perhaps there is a drummer that they [the homosexual] like, but can't go with because he is a [heterosexual] *man*, so they [gay men] start to gossip about the drummer saying he is a *maricón* (faggot) and that is how it is in the *tambor* scene.

Both López and Piri López claimed that in the cult of Añá any form of same-sex activity between men is not accepted. Piri López clarifies,

PL: A homosexual is the one who takes it from the male, the *bugarrón* is the one who gives it to the homosexual.

AM: So there are *tamboreros* batá drummers who are *bugarrónes*?

PL: Yes, there are many more than homosexuals!

AM: Is that accepted?

PL: No, they hang out with that clan. They are not accepted within the *tambores* of the respected men.

While Piri López highlights the important contribution gay religious practitioners have made to Santería, he also insinuates that the group is responsible for malicious rumours. Furthermore, he makes a distinction between MSM and “respected men.” Meanwhile, although López stresses his “respect” for gay people, he still questions whether their sexuality is a “strength or weakness,” indicating that there is some doubt (pers. comm., 22/05/2017).

The paradox is, on the one hand, that the predominately female and male homosexual communities in Regla de Ocha pose a threat to Añá through the possibility of contamination, and on the other hand, that a high proportion of religious participants are gay, and it is their demand for consecrated batá ceremonies that keeps the cult active, thriving and powerful. The tensions expressed by drummers regarding non-heterosexuals, I posit, reflects a history of homophobic and heteronormative discourse, which has depicted MSM as sexually deviant, resulting in several commonly held misconceptions. MSM, of course, are not sexually attracted to every man (naked or not). Such stereotypes, along with cross-cultural notions that can position female sexuality as out of control (Koskoff 2014:82-83), seem to be at odds with the idea that “real men,” with their abundance of sexual attraction and virility, are always in control of their own sexual impulses.

Rumours of Gay Men Who Own or Play Añá

Considering the strict cult taboo against MSM and Añá, I was interested to know if there is any evidence that there are men who engage in same-sex practice and work with Añá. In Morad’s peripheral enquiry, some drummers suggested there could be, but “[n]ot if they are openly gay” (2014:147). I often heard batá drummers talk about MSM who are rumoured to own or play Añá in the community. However, I was unable to meet and speak with any openly gay drummers. Presumably, if this group does exist, the stigma associated with their sexuality being disclosed means they are unlikely candidates for academic research as things stand. Evidence of their presence is based, therefore, on hearsay, as Piri López (pers. comm., 23/07/2016) demonstrated when I asked if he knew of any gay *omo* Añá working in Cuba:

PL: There is a lot of gossip [...] and things happen like people know that someone is gay and they let them play [*fundamento*].

AM: But have you seen them?

PL: Personally no, I have never put myself in that scene and apart from that my family has always protected me. I've always managed to avoid these things because I've always been with people who are *bien definido* (well-defined heterosexually).

Piri López went on to suggest that there are also gay *piquetes*, groups of *omo* Añás, who regularly work together, playing for homosexual religious houses. However, I have been unable to substantiate this.⁹⁸ Rumour and gossip (often used synonymously), Feinberg et al (2014) explains, promote cooperation that enables “group members to contribute to the public good.” Feinberg et al (2014) also explain that the spread of representational information about others can also lead to ostracised individuals responding to their exclusion “by subsequently cooperating at levels comparable to those who were not ostracized.” In short, rumour and gossip can be a social strategy for homogenisation.

Schweitzer (2013:62) explains that rumours of ‘inappropriate contact’ between homosexual men and Añá can have a profound negative affect on the ascribed ‘respectability’ of both the drummers and the Añá drum-sets within the drumming and religious community, in turn impacting their employability. Many of the ritual batá

⁹⁸ There was an example of the rumour-mill at work during my field trip in 2015. When I visited Bolaños a few weeks after my field trip to Santiago, he had already heard that women had played Añá in Santiago and said it was Buenaventura Bell who sanctioned it. Even though I explained to him that it was in fact the *babalawo* Orozco Rubio who had sanctioned it, he did not appear convinced. (See Chapter 3 for a full description of this story).

drummers with whom I spoke often referred to a list of named drummers and drum owners who they considered to be ‘reputable.’⁹⁹ This group, they explained, is considered to have a thorough understanding of the musical and ritual traditions as to well as to be free from ‘contamination’ from sexual contact with MSM or women. Miniconi (pers. comm., 04/02/2016) provided an example of how stories about drummers’ sexuality can spread among the Añá community in Havana. He explained that when he was ‘sworn’ to Añá he was issued with a list of drummers and sets of Añá considered to be disreputable. Their disrepute could be based on not possessing the appropriate musical or ritual knowledge, being considered gay, or being linked with MSM. Miniconi was told if he played with anyone on the list he would also be blacklisted and denied access to playing with all the ‘reputable’ Añá houses.¹⁰⁰ It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that a consistent, recurring theme throughout the conversation with Piri López was an emphasis on how his family protected him from any kind of social contact with gay men.

The story of a gay *babalawo* and drum owner (I shall call him Roberto) surfaced during several conversations with *omo* Añás in Havana (Campos pers. comm., 20/07/2015, 22/09/2015, 4/03/18; López 22/05/2017). His story provides another example of attitudes towards male same-sex practice and Añá. This is the story that was relayed to me: Roberto was said to be the grandson of a famous *babalawo* and was initiated into the Ifá priesthood when he was eight years old, even though it was already clear that Roberto was gay. Although there is a taboo against gay men entering the Ifá priesthood, his grandfather was apparently convinced

⁹⁹ I have not seen a written list of reputable drummers; however, I have heard drummers refer to an inner circle of *olubatás* they respect. Not surprisingly these names differ from one narrator to another.

¹⁰⁰ Miniconi was sworn to Mayito Angarica’s drums in 2004.

Roberto's sexuality would change to heterosexual and so continued to allow him to practice as an Ifá priest. Roberto's sexuality, however, did not change and he still continued to practice as a *babalawo*. Later he brought a set of consecrated drums (rumored to be from a gay drum owner in Matanzas) for his five-year-old nephew. Although Roberto never played nor was seen in close contact with these drums, there was great controversy over an openly gay man receiving a set of Añá.

Campos explained that from 1987 to 1990 the dispute divided the Añá community in Havana (pers. comm., 20/07/2015).

I remember that one time in Havana they prepared Añá drums for a homosexual and all I heard was, 'we are gonna get him, take the drums away and break them and dump them in the ocean' ... it was never done! But the best part is that the guy, the owner of the drums was homosexual, but the ones to play those drums were straight guys. So, many people were saying, 'So, why do you want to mess with him if he doesn't play the drums? Straight guys are the ones playing them.' People would come to him [the drum owner] and he would say, 'These drums are not mine, they are my nephew's and he is a kid. I just paid for the drums. I don't touch them. There are men here to play these drums.' Honestly, I never saw that man play, never.

Campos' statement indicates that the prohibitions restricting gay men from Añá are, as for women, aimed at the act of direct contact. If Roberto did not play or touch the drums, as far as Campos was concerned, there was no issue with him being the owner of a set of consecrated batá. However, as Campos would soon experience, not everyone in the brotherhood conceptualised the prohibitions restricting gay men in the same way.

Campos was a regular drummer with Roberto's set of *fundamento* for a number of years until one day, after a disagreement in a *tambor*, he decided no longer to work with Roberto's batá. However, when he began to look for alternative people to work for, he found himself alienated from the 'reputable' community of batá drummers because he had played a set of drums considered by some to be 'contaminated' or '*sucio*' (dirty). For many in the community a gay man owning batá contravenes a tenet of the tradition. It was only after a considerable amount of time being ostracised that Campos found his way back into the community. He explained that the day he was accepted back in he had been invited by a friend to play the consecrated batá of Andrés Chacón at a *tambor*. During the *tambor*, Chacón, who had heard about Campos' association with Roberto's drums from another drummer, stopped him playing and made him stand. Chacón then asked him whether it was true that he had "played those drums?" Campos explained that he had, "but not anymore." Chacón replied that providing it stayed that way he would give Campos a second chance. From this time Campos began working with Chacón's set of *fundamento* (Campos pers. comm., 4/03/08).

The above story highlights the sensitive nature of associations between MSM, Añá and the brotherhood. Although Campos claimed there was no direct contact between the set of *fundamento* and their gay owner, these drums were still thought of as 'contaminated' or '*sucio*' (dirty) by the majority of *omo* Añás in Havana. Any drummers that played these drums, by association, had also become '*sucio*'. Campos' experience emphasises the severe consequences for heterosexual or 'in the closet' gay or bisexual ritual drummers, whose livelihoods depend on playing consecrated batá. If they are seen to associate too closely with men who are open about male-male sexual activities, they run the risk of being ostracised.

A further point highlighted in this story is the growing popularity of initiating young boys into Ifá and Añá before their sexuality has necessarily been determined. I have witnessed, on numerous occasions over the years during my visits to Cuba, juvenile boys who play batá being initiated into the Añá fraternity. However, as Ortíz claimed, “The drummers of Batá-ña [sic] cannot be children, but adults in full maleness” (Ortiz 1980:104), suggesting that either the absence of young boys working with Añá was just among his small group of informants or that this is yet another recent development. Male batá drummers who want to participate in same-sex activity carry the burden of either leaving their support network and career, or leading a double life, constantly in fear that the rumour-mill will one day catch up with them.

López suggests there have been a number of *babalawos* and *omo* Añás who have ‘come out’ after being sworn. He went on to explain that within his community in the neighbourhood of La Corea, “we make Ifá when boys are adolescents when it is clearer whether they are men or not [...] and that is how we do it with *tamboreros* also” (pers. comm., López 22/05/2017). Additionally, López pointed out, “there are cases of someone in their thirties realising they are gay,” confirming that a person’s public sexuality may be different from their private sexual identity and shift over time. No doubt being excluded from a group you have belonged to for many years has a significant physiological and economic impact.

The threat of ostracisation for ritual drummers considered to have inappropriate contact with MSM not surprisingly leads to a lack of contact and integration with non-heterosexual groups. This separation, I believe, leads to a polarisation and fear of the ‘other’. Even a rumour of such an alliance can be severely detrimental for drummers, thus creating a need for some to distance themselves from any homoerotic associations. The threat of violence towards MSM and derogatory

rhetoric becomes part of a hypermasculine ‘script’ expected of ‘real men’ as it serves to distance drummers physically, rhetorically and metaphorically from ‘contamination’ with MSM. Bolaños (pers. comm., 3/08/2015) provides an example.

Now, at this moment, there are effeminate people who have *tambor de fundamento*. They have the money and they pay for it. They have the *fundamento* in their hands and they shouldn’t. But the person that did it for them is the guilty one. If an effeminate person comes here with 20,000 CUC¹⁰¹ wanting a drum he’d be off back down the stairs, not on his feet but on his hands; it is disrespectful. But someone will do it to get the money. That’s not my problem. I say, ‘This is no good, full stop.’ But they don’t come near us, not even the drummers who play with them; if they get close to us, no, go away. But they have it, so who’s going to say they don’t. So, if they can own a *fundamento*, I don’t doubt that the same could happen with a woman.

Bolaños, whilst clarifying the existence of gay drum owners, also indicates his distaste at the idea, and suggests that both women and homosexuals are infringing the ‘respect’ of the cult.¹⁰²

In Campos’ earlier quote he also demonstrates how the underlying threat of violence, for those seen as contravening the gender and sexual taboo, can be aimed not only at the transgressor but also the drums themselves. However, I have not heard any accounts of where this has actually happened. Threats of this nature, nonetheless, send a clear message about the possible consequences for gay men who attempt to work with Añá. This highlights a potential for violence and defamation, which can

¹⁰¹ Approximately £15,000 in September 2018.

¹⁰² Pelladito expressed a similar belief earlier in this chapter (pers. comm., 4/08/2015).

cause humiliation and financial loss. Indeed, this study reveals a paradoxical relationship within Santería that both celebrates and marginalises same-sex activity. Furthermore, I illustrate the ambiguous and contentious nature of prohibitions restricting MSM from entering the brotherhood and the potential consequences for those who do not stay within Añá's heteronormative boundaries.

MSM and the Role of the *Akpón*

Whilst openly gay males, like women, cannot be drummers, they can take on the prestigious role of *akpón*, the lead singer and ritual officiator in a *tambor*. Some of the most renowned *akpónes* to date were known to be gay, such as the late Lazaro Ros, Amelia Pedroso and Pedro Saavedra. According to one drummer, the role of *akpón* is considered higher in status than that of the drummers based on the fact that they receive more money as it is perceived to be a much harder job (pers. comm., Minconi 23/03/2016).

Michael Aguilar Guerrero is a highly successful openly gay *akpón* and *Oba oriaté* who lives in Pogolotti, Havana. His brother, Lekiam Aguilar Guerrero, is also a *batá* drummer currently living in Mexico.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Guerrero (pers. comm., 24/05/2017) explained that he and his family were aware of his sexuality since he was a small boy. As a result, he was sent to a psychologist, who told his family that his sexuality would not change. Guerrero explained that his mother fully supported him (his father passed away when he was young) and counseled him “*tienes que ser fuerte*” (you have to be strong) so he could look after himself in a predominately Black macho community. As a result, his mother sent him to learn judo, boxing, swimming and wrestling.



Plate 5.2: Michael Aguilar Guerrero in his home in Pogolotti, Havana. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 24/05/2017)



Plate 5.3: Room where Guerrero keeps his *orichas*. (Photo by Vicky Jassey 24/05/2017).

Guerrero was initiated into Santería when he was six, and although he was initially interested in becoming a folkloric dancer he explained that his *oricha* Eleguá (through the medium of divination) told him he could not dance because he “was going to do more than dance.” He explained “I love the drum but I couldn’t play, out of respect [...] homosexuals who like music can’t play Añá because of the problem of penetration and sex with one another and the taboo that is in the earth” (ibid). He went on to explain: “There is no taboo against them [homosexuals] playing *aberikulá*,” but he was not aware of any that do “because they are not motivated, because of the taboo” (ibid). Women, he explained, “are more daring than homosexuals and whatever women choose they are going to do it better than man.”

I asked Guerrero if he had ever been asked to move away from the drums while he was working at a *tambor*. He replied, “no, life is about respect and I respect the system a lot.” However, he did say that he had experienced prejudices because of his sexuality but usually only when he arrived at a *tambor* to work and was not known: “in the beginning it’s like that until you develop a relationship with them” (ibid). Guerrero explained that life for religious men who are openly gay is much easier now than it used to be. However, he explained that because of the support of his family and the respect for his talent and that of his brother, he has been much luckier than some of his gay friends who have experienced much harsher persecution in the community.

Summary

This chapter clarifies how masculine scripts in batá performance, defined by sexual practice and identities, operate independently from gender, all the while articulating

nuances of the ‘other’ (Schippers 2000:761). I have demonstrated that male sacred batá performance provides a situation where patriarchal heteronormative hegemony is negotiated and maintained, albeit at times from behind the cloak of ostensibly ‘natural’ or ‘traditional’ aesthetics. Heteronormative religious practice becomes a tool whereby hegemonic parties enact their domination against a historical backdrop of racial violence and colonial oppression (Allen 2011:50). Furthermore, I have exposed an interdependent relationship between practitioners of Santería who openly practice male-male sex and the Añá fraternity.

I acknowledge that the lack of research on the lives of MSM who work with Añá renders it difficult fully to comprehend the extent to which attitudes and practices may have changed or are changing in Cuba. In some cases, the rumour-mill has the power to expose and stigmatise MSM and heterosexuals who work with Añá. As a result, their voices remain silenced by the socio-political cisnormative majority. This study has attempted to bring together a collection of testimonies that probe this silenced space. I have endeavoured to give this area of research some form of representation until the day when sexual difference is not perceived as a threat, and MSM who are close to Añá are in a position to speak for and represent themselves in academic studies.

Conclusion

In the following text I summarise the insights presented in this thesis, examine their interconnectivity, and present a contemporary understanding of gender, sexuality and change in Cuba batá performance. When I began this research, I had a set of already formulated ideas about power, gender and ritual batá music that was locked into aspects of feminist discourse which envisioned women generally and women's batá drumming specifically as universally subordinate to men. However, the data I collected challenged my assumptions as I was forced to think beyond a discourse-centred approach that envisions gender only as an "immutable characteristic of individuals" (Sanday 1993: n.p). I began to understand "the violence—both real and metaphorical—we do by generalizing" as "no woman or man fits the universal gender stereotype" (Fausto-Sterling 2000:107). My field data suggests that rather than being fixated on female-as-subordinate and male-as-dominant dichotomies (Mohanty 2003), there is a need for nuancing concepts of gender in order to fully address the complexities of power dynamics, culture and performativity.

Polarities of Discourse, Social Performance and Sub-Texts

Although my methodology and analysis are informed by existing gender and feminist theories, I agree with Lorber (1993:571), who suggests that "it might be more useful in gender studies to group patterns of behavior and only then look for identifying

markers of the people likely to enact such behaviors.” At first glance batá discourse that asserts dominant narratives and patterns of behaviour regarding gender and sexuality prohibitions gives the impression that the rules of batá drumming are fixed and straightforward, i.e., women and homosexual men should maintain their distance from Añá for reasons of spiritual and physical wellbeing (Chapter 3). Sacro-socio performances which embody and reify these concepts are generally considered to be congruous with the dominant narrative and are enacted through practices such as men asking women to keep their distance from consecrated batá in order to protect the ritual ‘no-go’ zone (discussed in Chapter 3).

My research, however, has revealed contradictory patterns of behaviour or ‘subtexts’ that work in opposition to the uttered and socially performed dominant narrative, thereby presenting a dialectic of antithetical processes. “Ensembles of text” (Geertz 1973:30) expose layers of cultural meaning whereby ensembles of “sub-text” may be oppositional to the dominant narrative and its associated social performances. Sub-texts are unstable as they are the bands of cultural meaning that respond to changing landscapes, inconsistencies and/or impracticalities of a dominant narrative. Sub-texts are the slippages from a privileged narrative that become unintentionally exposed through words, silences, movements, gestures and behaviour.

In Chapter 3, I presented several instances where the dominant narrative that ‘women should not get close to *fundamento*’ is disturbed or opposed by sub-texts that reveal contrary narratives. These examples also demonstrate how belief systems and ideologies which underpin gender and sexuality taboos in batá performance inform social, musical and spiritual organisation of ritual and secular batá practice.

My experience of being asked by an *omo* Añá to move away from consecrated batá is an illustration of behaviour that supports the dominant narrative. Being invited to

move towards the *fundamento* on an earlier occasion by the same person is an illustration of a behavioural subtext that contests the dominant narrative. *Omo Añá* Martínez provided a further example when he talked about the contradictory practice of *omo Añás* asking *santeras* to move away from the *fundamento* during a *tambor*–behaviour that supports the dominant narrative–whilst allowing female *akpónes* to stand close to consecrated *batá*–a ‘silent’ subtext which contests the dominant narrative. This paradoxical practice, Martínez admits, makes him think about and question the dominant narrative (pers. comm., 5/08/2015). His candid admission to me reveals a further example of a rhetorical subtext. Drummers turning a blind eye to the breakdown of the ‘no-go’ zone during a *tambor*, which can result in women getting close to or touching *Añá* (Schweitzer 2013:62), are also examples of silent behavioural subtexts which contest the dominant narrative.

Bolaños presents us with further examples of rhetoric that moves between the dominant narrative and a subtext. In 2014 he explained that if women get close to *Añá* “it causes destruction and it brings problems for the [male] drummers, for the drum and for her as well, problems!” (pers. comm., 26/08/2014). In 2015, however, he asserted that women can touch *fundamento* but cannot play them (pers. comm., 4/08/2015), undermining his previous declaration.

Further examples of sub-texts disturbing the notion of a fixed dominant narrative are evidenced later in Chapter 3 by a small group of women who played *fundamento* in Santiago. The dominant narrative of this group espoused greater autonomy for women within the religion and female emancipation from *Añá*’s menstrual proscriptions. However, in order to conduct their campaign, in which they played *fundamento*, arranged the audio-visual recording of the event, spoke to researchers, and formally presented at a conference, they felt the need to seek

permission from a man. This disjuncture between the dominant narrative (i.e., resistance and radical action) and its sub-text (where male authority was sought), I suggest, exposes a tension between conscious desire and unconscious *habitus* (Bourdieu 1972), which in this case normalises and legitimises religious decision-making pertaining to Añá as a primarily male prerogative. Finally, following the untimely death of one of the three female drummers, the dominant narrative critiquing menstrual taboos and male hegemony was eventually overpowered by sub-texts that positioned men as decision-makers and spiritual protectors. Ultimately, the radical action of the men and women involved neither led to women's entry into a cult that has historically excluded them, nor to the sustainable empowerment of women who play *batá*. Instead, their campaign regressed when one of the members attributed ultimate responsibility for their bad fortune to the *babalawo*, therefore reinforcing his relative authority over the women.

In Chapter 4, the dominant narrative generated by Obini Batá and the popular press and academics that wrote about the group was that their *batá* performance challenges male religious hegemony (The Farber Foundation 2009; Castellanos 2014; Rodríguez 2014; Hagedorn 2015; Martí Noticias 2016). Although this seemed to be a viable future possibility at the time when they and other all-female groups began performing publicly in the early 1990s, this has yet to come to pass. Instead, I argue, their choice to self-segregate and employ tropes and rhetoric that reinforce concepts of heterosexual femininity has revealed subtexts that conform to rather than contest heteronationalist ideas of womanhood. There is a stark difference between the mission (i.e., dominant narrative) of the group of women in Santiago who played Añá and that of Obini Batá. The latter claim to promote women's greater access to play *batá* in secular settings while the women in Santiago campaigned for women's greater access

to play Añá. Nonetheless, the paradox revealed by the “group patterns of behaviour” (Lorber 1993:571) of these female drummers– who have taken radical action and pushed against social expectations and religious taboos–is that they do so while inadvertently relying upon male power.

In Chapter 4, a dominant narrative of Obini Batá is that their performances represent “the most traditional way” and “give a touch of femininity” to female batá performance (pers. comm., 30/8/2014). It is worth considering that their success may, in part, be connected to their ability to respect male power and conform to gender norms (Wood 1980:295). In Chapter 5, the dominant narrative of male initiation rites is the expectation that they enhance notions of *hombría* and brotherhood. However, subtexts reveal that practices which enhance hyper-masculinity or femininity, for both men and women, are also informed by a fear of being associated with homoerotic behaviour. Also revealed is an underlying need for some batá drummers to be seen to conform to sacro-socio-political heteronormative ideals. Ultimately, the core issues that unite both men and women place heteronormative and homosexual identities within the dialectic. These oppositional forces drive gender and sexuality taboos in batá performance. As my enquiry illustrates, sub-texts move beyond specific gender categories and are derived from patterns of behaviour that emerge when antiquated or novel practices and ideologies are mapped onto shifting contemporary landscapes.

Processes of Change

As dominant narratives and sub-texts push and pull against each other, change concerning gender and batá is continually being affected and the results embedded into contemporary practice. The apex of these transformations was the news that

women had played *fundamento* in Santiago for what is thought to be the first time. However, when I talked to several prominent batá drummers about this event, none was surprised and some commented that they knew it would happen. That they anticipated this news suggests a paradigm shift regarding female proscriptions and Añá long before three women from Santiago reached for the consecrated batá in 2015, an example of ‘*Tambor Reverberations*’ resonating in contemporary settings. This stands in stark contrast to two decades earlier, when some ritual drummers believed “women should not even talk about Añá” (Villarreal quoted in Hagedorn 2001:91).

When I asked Socarras why she thought the taboo preventing women playing Añá had been transgressed at this time (in 2015) she replied, “I think this was the moment, the time [...] It is like a musical cycle, this thing about batá drums and women, it had to happen.” (pers. comm., 18/07/2015). My research suggests that incremental societal transformations, which accumulate over time, can lead to dramatic and continual variations in practice (see Fig 6.1). Processes of change are partly to do to with the effects of communities being continually and progressively exposed to imported, novel or radical ideas. This can lead to a tolerance of notions that may previously have been inconceivable. The acceptance of women playing secular batá is one example. Prior to the 1970s such practice was unheard of but has since become widely accepted.

Change, however, does not happen in isolation. Some of the driving forces impacting gender and sexuality narratives in Cuban traditional practices today are a result of larger social and political factors. Among the most influential have been the implementation of Marxist feminist ideologies at an institutional level since 1959; Cuba’s economic collapse during the *período especial* in the 1990s; the subsequent exponential growth and atomisation of Regla de Ocha practice following a boom in

religious tourism since the 1990s; and the growth of Nigerian-Ocha-Ifá since 2000.

Fig 6.1 identifies key moments of significant and progressive change to gender narratives and batá performance over the last forty years and illustrates the cumulative effect of these important steps in initiating paradigm shifts.

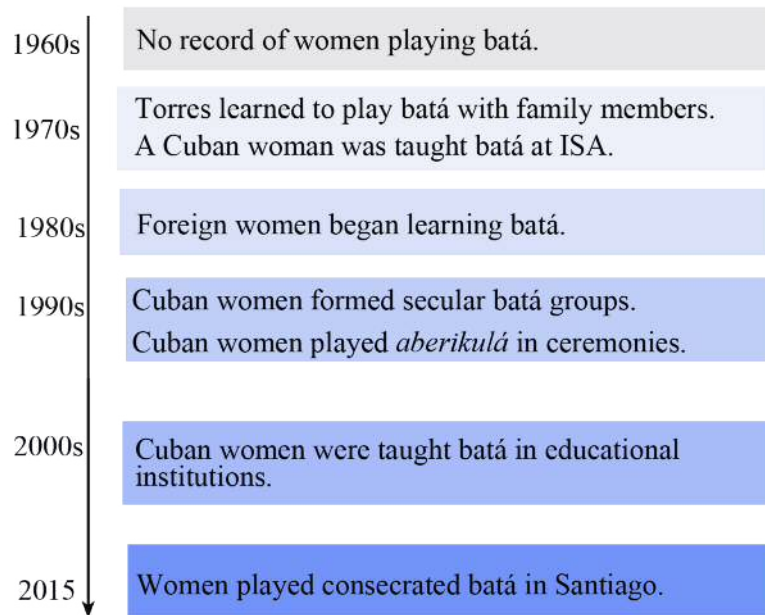


Figure 6.1: Timeline illustrating significant change in women's batá performance.

Pouymiró's own musical journey mirrors the process and the timeline presented in Fig. 6.1. She began learning popular percussion as a member of the state-funded Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente in the 1980s. She then moved to learning batá from the director of the Conjunto, Buenaventura Bell in 1981 (pers. comm., 4/07/2015). In the 1990s, Pouymiró began performing on batá in secular artistic settings. Collectively these experiences led her to seek the opportunity to play

consecrated batá, which she received in 2015. On the one hand, women's greater access to secular batá has allowed them to move closer to sacred performance and ultimately consecrated batá. On the other hand, as was demonstrated by the unfolding event in Santiago, change is prone to atrophy. In addition, whether modifications are perceived as progressive or regressive depends on one's standpoint at any given time.

Further evidence of the changing perceptions of batá gender narratives is reflected in academic literature. Flores, for example, claimed in early 2000 that Cuban women accept "the limits imposed on their status within religious practice as something that should not be questioned" (2001:60). Twenty years on my data reveals that this is not true for all women in the religion. Many of the female drummers I spoke with—quite a lot of whom are *santeras* and born into religious musical families—openly contested what they considered to be their subordinate position to men within religious-musical and social spheres. While Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the striking changes that have taken place since Flores' research was published seventeen years ago, the important point here is that although the women agitating for change are still very much in the minority in 2018, they are now speaking out and being heard.

In order to assess how change is affecting access rights to Añá I have drawn on Hagedorn's (2015:185) diagram (Fig. 6.3) which demonstrates relational access to Añá at the time of her research. By reworking her diagram (Fig. 6.2) and integrating my recent observations I am able to offer a comparative analysis which illustrates how boundaries and perceptions have altered over time.

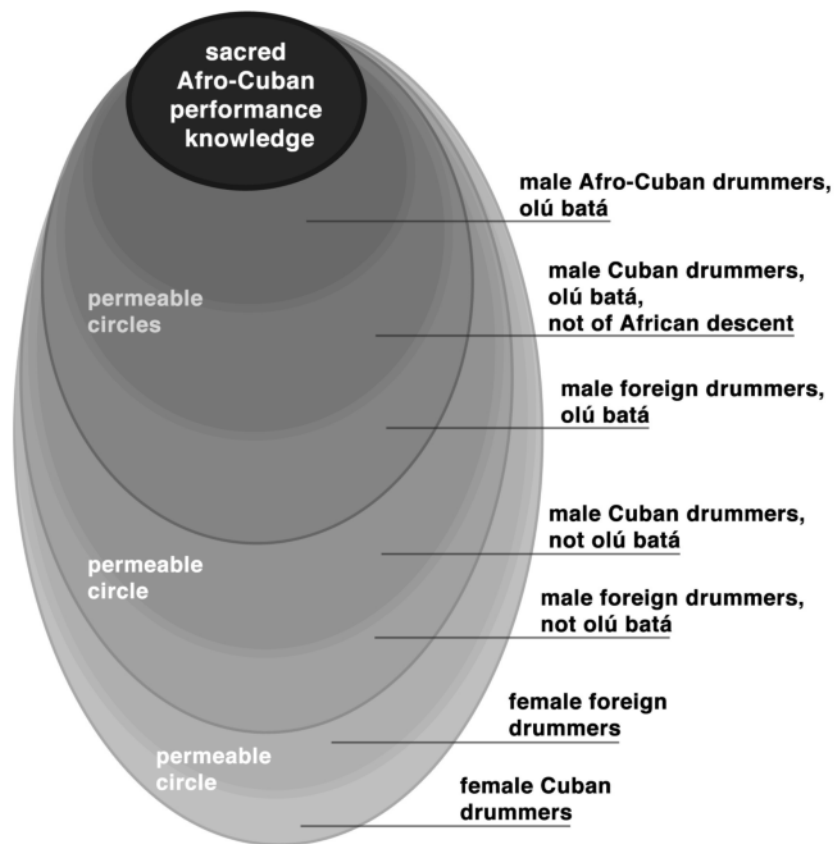


Figure 6.2. Relational access to Añá and batá drumming in the 2000s (Hagedorn 2015:185).

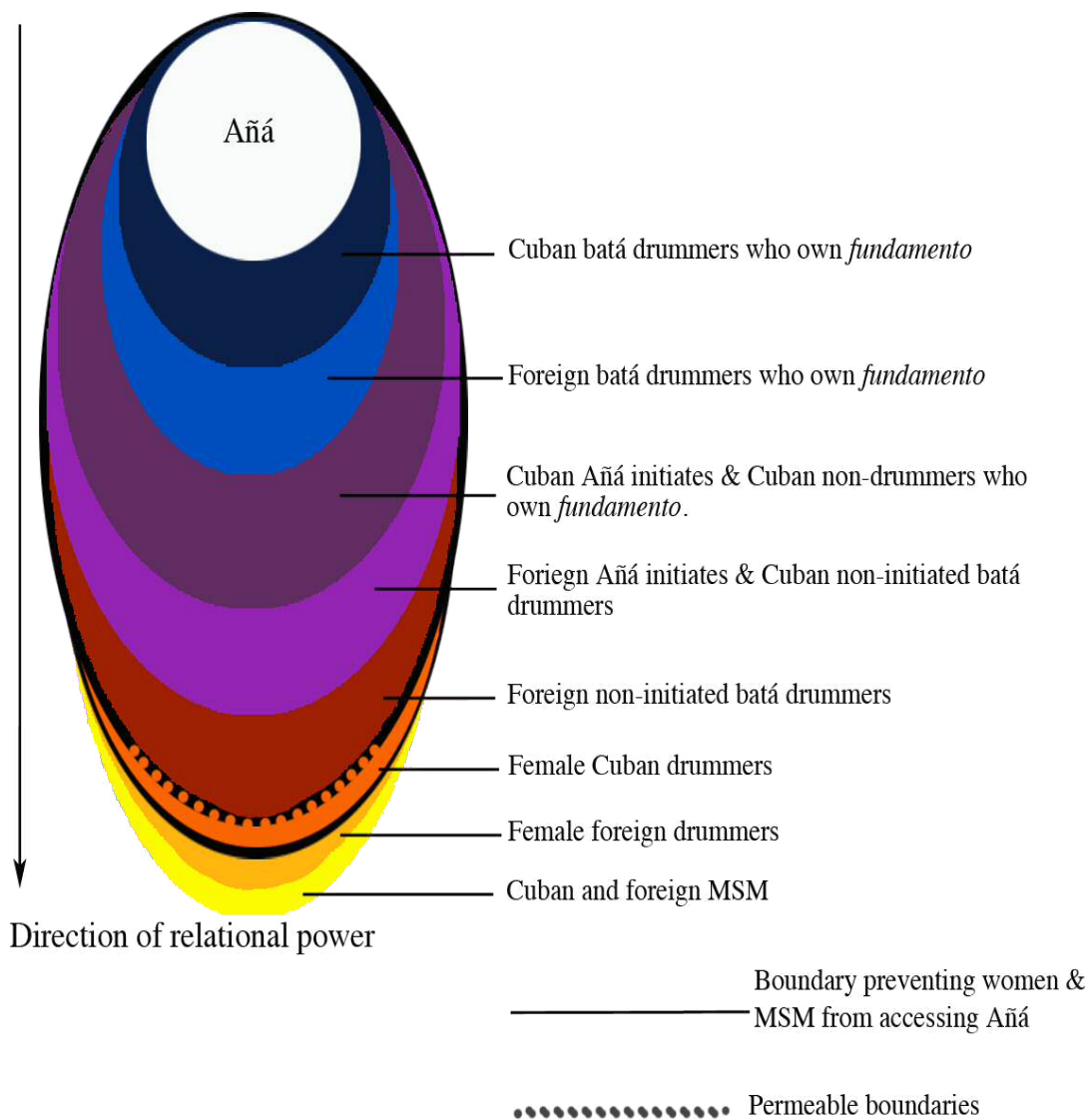


Figure 6.3: Relational access to Añá and batá drumming in 2018 (the author).

Several differences illustrated in Fig. 6.2 and Fig. 6.3 came into focus in my recent study. For example, I am not aware of a solid barrier preventing male foreign and Cuban non-initiated drummers from playing Añá. The recent event of Cuban women

playing *fundamento* has resulted in them exchanging places with female foreign drummers (i.e., Cuban women have moved up the hierarchy), suggesting that the absolute barrier that previously prevented Cuban women from accessing Añá is now permeable. Finally, my research offers a somewhat limited presentation of empirical data which contradicts the dominant discourse about the ideologies and taboos restricting gay men from accessing sacred batá drums.¹ To reflect this small minority and what I hope to be a growing area of research enquiry, I have included Cuban and foreign MSM as a new category, which appears to have been previously ignored. By refining the categories and monitoring their relative positions over time, one can see patterns of significant change in relation to batá gender narratives.

Although it may appear that the women themselves are the driving force behind their greater access to the batá, it is also the male custodians of the tradition who have relaxed the rules by teaching, encouraging and giving women permission to play. These men are in many ways the main curators of significant gender transformations in batá drumming and the wider religious sphere. As things stand, the female drummers who are ready and willing to step into any small space that is made available to them remain respectful and subservient to the will of initiated Añá brothers. As Koskoff (pers. comm., 7/09/2018) succinctly points out, this power structure suggests a “positive form of ‘cultural collaboration.’” However, it is men who continue to be both the gatekeepers of tradition and the architects of change.

¹ See also Morad (2014:167) and Villepastour (2006:190).

Post Ph.D. and Future Research

There have been many personal and professional rewards from working on this Ph.D., but one above all others is the way it has enabled me to deepen my understanding of the complexity of singular ideas. I have learnt that nothing is bolted down and there are no absolutes. The opportunity to study in depth the power and gender implications of playing drums in a culture outside of my own has resolved questions that I have carried about gender and drumming here in the UK. The answers, however, are also not fixed but are always relative to the place and moment. Although I am not aware of any direct changes to the way I play or participate in my musical community, I have become an astute observer of gender and other social power dynamics and how they might impact my own playing and that of others. My intention is to take this research beyond the confines of an academic audience as a way of making my findings more accessible to a wider public.

The cross-disciplinary methodology I have employed, which includes mainstream ethnomusicology, feminist ethnomusicology and performance studies, has been essential for the diverse nature of this research. The “messy” reflexive approach (Marcus 1998:392) to ethnography employed throughout this research has allowed me to consider and navigate my complex insider-outsider status, layers of privilege and bias regarding the subject area.

However, the difficulty in this broad disciplinary approach has been the lack of time available for obtaining in depths resources from any one discipline. As covering the core literature of each subject has been unrealistic within the confines of this project, no doubt essential literature still awaits my attention. Therefore, I see this thesis as a small contribution to the larger discourse on gender and music rather than a comprehensive study. Nonetheless, to my knowledge, this study is the most extensive

so far on issues of gender and sexuality within the specialised area of Cuban batá drumming. My hope is that scholars from a range of disciplines will continue this research as the tradition moves into a period of escalating change.

It is very likely that by the time my Ph.D. research is available to the religious community, the landscape in Cuba may have changed so much that my thesis will represent practices of the recent past. This body of work only provides snapshots from various angles within a particular time frame. Even though more than fifty Cuban practitioners contributed to my research, the thesis nevertheless only represents a limited sample of views and practices in batá drumming specifically and Santería generally. Hence, the opinions expressed here were subjects of a narrow research focus, so do not necessarily represent a larger movement at this point in time. However, there is the potential for this Cuban minority aspiring to change to gather momentum and become a movement in the future.

The opinions presented in this study are, therefore, very specific and do not attempt to articulate conceptions of Cuban Regla de Ocha or the batá community as a whole. Although I have primarily focused on the voices of female drummers, limited time and a tight research focus have resulted in a lack of conservative female voices from outside the professional musical sphere, such as religious devotees whose ritual duties require them to work around Añá and especially in the role of *madrina del tambor*. In addition, there has been a lack of contributions to this study from non-cisgender people working in or around batá performance, especially that of queer women. Further research might establish how female and MSM Regla de Ocha practitioners perceive their relationship to Añá and its prohibitions in order to provide a much broader social terrain for analysing gender batá narratives.

When I began this study, my plan was to focus only on women's secular batá drumming. It soon became obvious, however, that as heterosexual male-only sacred batá drumming is at the core of all batá performance, it became imperative to explore the larger trajectory of batá practice as it is rather than what it might become. As a result, my attention broadened beyond the exclusive study of Cuban women's batá performance. Although this research goes some way to offsetting the asymmetry in the representations of male and female practice by including the thoughts and lived experiences of several Cuban female batá players, presentation of the rich material collected from female musicians was constrained by the limitations of my research focus and a tight word count. My time with some all-female groups such as Obini Oñi from Cárdenas and Obini Ache from Cienfuegos, for example, was very brief but promised a fertile research field. Further research in female musical arenas also has the potential to give insight into how Cuban women balance their professional career-development with domestic roles such as motherhood.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the batá's '*tambor* reverberations' are no longer limited to Cuba; they can now be felt further afield as Añá is establishing itself throughout the globe. In August 2016, for example, a video of Obini Batá was posted to the Women Only Orisha Facebook Group, a closed group with three and a half thousand members. Immediately a lengthy, and at times heated, debate regarding female prohibitions and batá drums began. What was significant about this debate was that it was happening only among women. As the thread developed people shared their wide-ranging beliefs and knowledge about the topic. After three weeks it had attracted over four hundred comments and the enthusiasm for the subject showed no signs of abating. However, on 7/09/2017 a *santera* and drummer with years of religious and drumming experience (she shall

remain anonymous), made some radical suggestions for those women who “feel the need for a consecrated drum that women are sworn to” (pers. comm., 7/09/2017). She made several recommendations for achieving consecration for drums that women could play including seeking a female *fundamento* in Africa or conducting a ‘women only’ consecration of batá. A few hours later, without any notification or explanation, the moderators turned off commenting for this post. When I enquired via private message as to why this was done, I was told, “We closed the threads because it was going in circles and the Elders had spoken” (pers. comm., 13/09/2017).

This social media debate demonstrated the wide range of opinions and knowledge which women, with various levels of affiliation with batá and Regla de Ocha have regarding gender prohibitions and Añá. It also established that within this particular group conservative opinions were prevalent. I expect it was no coincidence that commenting was turned off soon after several radical suggestions had been made by one of its members. The level of response and the eventual silencing of this debate is, I believe, an indication of the discursive and sensitive nature of this topic in Western *oricha* communities. Meanwhile, Añá ceremonies are proliferating in new sites such as Russia (pers. comm., 7/07/2018 Olga Baglay) and Sydney, Australia (pers. comm., Arcari 10/06/2018). My intended future research direction will include exploring how Añá’s gender prohibitions are being mapped onto transnational communities, whose gender and sexuality values are distinct from those of Cuba. Conversely, I will track the extent to which burgeoning globalised practices are folding back into and impacting local Cuban tradition.

The transnational expansion of the batá tradition is a further indication of its continued ability to dynamically adapt to new and changing environments. My exploration has focussed on the interplay between the retention and reinvention of

practices and ideologies and their gendered implications. Ultimately, it is the batá traditions of the past, innovations of the present, and the push-and-pull between the two that is the life-force driving this social, musical and spiritual matrix forward.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Fieldwork Statistics 2014 -2017

Research respondents

Female Drummers	Male Drummer / Omo Añá	Male Drummers/ Babalawos/ Drum Owners
Adairis Mesa González	Justo Pelladito/ Babalawo	Ahmed Díaz
Adonay de Armas Hactor	Joan Arguelles Gonzáles	Irian “Chinito” López
Aleida Torres Nani/ Santera		Javier Campos Martínez
Anais López Rubio/ Iyanifá/ Santera		Octavio Rodríguez
Balbara Perez Canpo/ Santera		
Caridad Rubio Fonseca/ Iyanifá/ Santera		
Dagmarías Hechavarría Despaigne/ Santera	Male Drummers/ Drum Owners	Non-Playing Drum Owners/ Babalawos
Deborah Carmen Mendy Frontela/ Santera	Ángel Pedro ‘Bolaños’ Corrales	Enrique Orosco Rubio
Dayami Pelladito/ Santera	Milián Galí Riverí	Ernesto Acosta
Diunis Valdés O’Farrill	Beuna Ventura Bell	Frank Cabrera
Elizabeth Oguando Otero		Victor Betancourt
Eneida Pelladito		
Eva Despaigne/ Santera		
Iris Pelladito	Babalawos/ Iyanifás	Akpónes
Miriam Martínez Verderó/ Santera	Nuriam Acosta / Iyanifá	Javier Piña/Babalawo/ Omo Añá
Nagybe Madariaga Pouymiró	Julio Batencourt	Juana Yayma Pimental Machado
Regla Mesa	José Manuel Pérez Andino YA President	Micheal Guerrero/ Oba Oríate
Regla Palacio/ Santera		Nievi Angarica
Tami Pelladito		Tanganica
Taylin Duperey Ferez/ Santera		Ruben Bulnes/Drummer/ Omo Añá
Yaima Pelladiro/ Santera	Santeros	
Yenli Martínez Jordán	Annet Sanchez/ Translator	
Yipsi Naajarro Tartabull	Tomás Fernandez Robafina / Academic	
Yordanka Najarro Alvaiez	Ocha Inle	
Yoko Fong Matos	Maralys Zayes/ Director Muchachas Revista	

<u>Description</u>	<u>No. People</u>	<u>No. Interviews</u>
<i>Babalawos</i> only	2	2
Director of CFNC	1	1
Drummers/drum owners	3	4
Female <i>akpónes</i>	2	2
Female drummers	25	28
Female folkloric dancers	4	4
Female bata drummer/ <i>iyanífás</i>	2	2
<i>Iyanifá</i>	1	1
Male <i>akpónes</i>	3	4
Male drummers/ <i>babalawos</i> /drum owners	4	11
Non-playing drum owners/ <i>babalawos</i>	4	6
<i>Santeros</i>	4	4
Total	55	69

Ceremonies attended with batá

Batá Transmission	4
<i>Tambor</i> with <i>bembé</i> drums	1
<i>El Velorio</i> (part of funeral rites)	1
<i>El Enterero</i> (part of funeral rites)	1
<i>La Novena</i> (part of funeral rites)	1
Other <i>Tambores</i>	16
Total	24

Other Regla de Ocha ceremonies attended

<i>Ikofa</i> (my own)	1
<i>Apetebi</i> ceremony	1
<i>Güiro</i>	4
Total	6

Ceremonies in which I performed

<i>El Dia del Medio</i> (batá)	1
<i>Cumpleaños de Santo</i> (batá)	1
<i>Tambores</i> where I led chants	6
Totals	8

Secular performances/rehearsals with batá attended

All-female ensembles	14
Mixed-gender ensembles	4
All-male ensembles	4
Total	22

Provinces visited in Cuba	4
Towns visited	6

Appendix II: My Cuban Batá and Oricha Song Teachers.

	2004	2005	2006	2008	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2017
Batá Drummers										
Octavio Rodríguez	■	■								
Jesús Lorenzo Peñalver 'Cusito'			■							
Michael Herrera Pérez				■						
Irian 'Chinito' López					■	■		■	■	■
Ahmed Díaz									■	
Ángel Pedro 'Bolaños' Corrales							■	■	■	
Javier Campos Martínez									■	
Odelkis Nani								■		
Joan Argüelles Gonzáles									■	
<i>Akpónes</i>										
Martha 'Martica' Galarraga	■	■	■							
Jesus Lorenzo Peñalver 'Cusito'			■							
Rubén Bulnes									■	
Nievi Angarica									■	
Tanganica									■	
Javier Piña Marquis						■	■	■		■
Michael Aguilar Guerrero										■

Appendix III: Glossary of foreign words

The source language of foreign terms is designated by (S) for Spanish, (L) for Lucumí, (Y) for Yoruba and (K) for Kongo. Where a word or sentence has been formed with Spanish and Lucumí I use (S/L) or (L/S) in accordance with the syllable or word order.

Abakuá	A Cuban spiritual and musical practice said to derive from the old Calabar region, which today lies between western Cameroon and southern eastern Nigeria.
Abbatá (L)	Oricha associated with sexual and gender diversity.
<i>aberikulá (L)</i>	Unconsecrated batá drums.
<i>aché (L)</i>	Life force or spiritual energy.
<i>adodí (L)</i>	Someone who has anal sex.
<i>aflojarse (S)</i>	To loosen. Batá skins are said to loosen because of contamination with a woman or gay man.
<i>afowobo</i>	Lit: "the secret." The consecrated packet that contains Añá.
<i>akpón (L)</i>	Ritual singer who leads chants.
<i>alakuata (L)</i>	Lesbian.
<i>aláña/olúña (L)</i>	Owners of consecrated batá drums who do not drum.
<i>Añá (L)</i>	The deity who resides inside the batá drum.
Arará	A spiritual and musical practice said to derive from the Dahomey region.
<i>aro (L)</i>	The metal ring attached to consecrated batá.
<i>atrevida (S)</i>	Impudent, bold, brash.
Àyàṅ (Y)	The Yoruba deity of drumming.
<i>baba Fururu (L)</i>	A common Cuban batá rhythm.

<i>babalawo (Y,L)</i>	An Ifá priest.
<i>bandele/bantá (L)</i>	Beaded aprons attached to consecrated batá during rituals.
<i>batá (L)</i>	Three hour-glass membranophones used in oricha worship.
<i>batalero/a (L/S)</i>	Batá player.
<i>bembe (L)</i>	Ceremony using bembe drums.
<i>boca (S)</i>	Lit:"Mouth." Larger head of each batá drum.
<i>buggaron (S)</i>	A pejorative word meaning insertive partners in male-male sex.
<i>caja (S)</i>	Largest batá drum.
<i>cajon de muerto (S)</i>	Ritual music associated with Espiritismo.
<i>camino (S)</i>	Lit:"pathway." Spiritual path or aspect of an oricha.
<i>casa templo (S)</i>	Lit: "house temple." Religious house.
<i>chachá (L)</i>	Small head of each batá drum.
<i>chachalokfun (L)</i>	A common Cuban batá rhythm.
Changó (Y)	Male Oricha of thunder, owner of batá drums.
<i>chaworó (L)</i>	Brass bells attached to the largest batá drum during rituals.
<i>Chekeré</i>	Beaded gourd instrument.
<i>cuarto de Añá (L/S)</i>	The room where Añá is manifest and where part of the batá consecration process takes place.

<i>cubanidad (S)</i>	Cuban national identity.
<i>culata (S)</i>	Small head of each batá drum.
<i>cumpleaños del santo (S)</i>	Lit: "birthday of the saint." The initiation birthday of a Regla de Ocha devotee.
<i>cumpleaños del tambor (S)</i>	Lit: "birthday of the drum." The consecration birthday of batá drums.
<i>derecho (S)</i>	Lit: "entitlement." Payment for religious services.
<i>dia del medio (S)</i>	Lit: "middle day." Second day of the 7-day initiation ceremony of an oricha priest.
<i>diloggun (L)</i>	Sixteen cowrie shells used for divination.
<i>dùndún</i>	"Talking drum" from contemporary Yorubaland.
<i>dùndún (Y)</i>	Talking drum from contemporary Yorùbáland.
<i>ebó (L)</i>	Sacrificial offering
Echú (L)	The oricha of the crossroads between heaven and earth. Eleguá is an aspect of Echú.
<i>Egbé (L)</i>	Religious house or temple.
Egun (L)	Ancestral Spirits
<i>Egungun (Y)</i>	A mask which represents a masquerade.
<i>el secreto (S)</i>	Lit: "the secret." The consecrated packet that contains Añá.
Eleguá (L)	A dimension of Echu.
<i>elekoto (L)</i>	A consecrated batá drum that is not played.

<i>enú (L)</i>	Lit:"Mouth." Larger head of each batá drum.
<i>espiritismo (S)</i>	A religious practice with an interest in manifestations of the deceased ancestors.
<i>fundamento (L)</i>	Consecrated batá drums. Also a term used to describe deities in material form and traditional rhythms.
<i>güiro (L)</i>	Lit:"gourd." A ceremony using beaded gourds called shekere
<i>hombria (S)</i>	Manhood
<i>Ifá (L)</i>	Divination cult.
<i>Ifá-Criollo (L/S)</i>	Cuban Ifá practice which draws on Cuba Ifá practice.
<i>ikofá (L)</i>	An entry level initiation given to women in Regla de Ocha.
<i>Inlé (L)</i>	Oricha associated with sexual and gender diversity.
<i>itá (L)</i>	Lifetime divination in drum consecration or human initiation ceremony.
<i>itótele (L)</i>	The middle-sized batá drum.
<i>iyá (L)</i>	Largest batá drum
<i>iyaniḡá (L)</i>	Priestess of Ifá.
<i>iyawó (L)</i>	A new initiate OF Regla de Ocha.
<i>Iyesá (L)</i>	A spiritual and musical practice from Yorubaland present day Nigeria.
<i>jineterismo (S)</i>	The the exchange of sex for money with tourists.
<i>judío (S)</i>	Unconsecrated batá drums.

<i>juramento (S)</i>	Lit: "swearing." Añá initiation ceremony.
<i>la carga (S)</i>	Lit: "the load." The consecrated packet that contains Añá.
<i>La Linea Africana (S)</i>	Cuban Ifá practice which draws on contemporary Yoruba Ifá practice
<i>Los guerreros (S)</i>	The first three warrior orichas Eleguá, Ogun and Oshosi played for in the <i>oru seco</i> . Also a term for the three orichas ritually received.
<i>madrina/padrino (S)</i>	Spiritual Godmother/Godfather.
<i>mano de Orula (S/L)</i>	Lit: "hand of Orula." An entry-level initiation in Regla de Ocha.
<i>maricon (S)</i>	A pejorative word for gay men meaning "faggot."
<i>Mayordomo</i>	Second in command of religious authority in the religion of Palo Monte
<i>mesa de Añá (S/L)</i>	Lit: "Añá table." Ritual table where food is served to omo Añá before a drumming ceremony.
<i>montado (S)</i>	Lit: "to be mounted." To be mounted by an deity.
<i>mulato/a (S)</i>	A sexualised biracial male or female type.
<i>ñongo (L)</i>	A common Cuban batá rhythm.
<i>Obá oriates (L)</i>	A highly trained male diviner of cowrie shells.
<i>Obatalá (L)</i>	Oricha of creativity.
<i>obí (L)</i>	Four pieces of coconut used for divination.
<i>Ochún (L)</i>	Female oricha of the river and fresh water, fertility and sexuality.

<i>odu (L)</i>	Sacred divination texts.
<i>Odu (L)</i>	Female oricha connected to the Ifá cult.
<i>Ogún (L)</i>	Male warrior oricha of hunting and iron.
<i>okónkolo/omele (L)</i>	Smallest batá drum.
<i>Olofin (L)</i>	The law maker oricha.
<i>oloricha (L)</i>	Regla de Ocha initiate.
<i>olúbatá (L)</i>	An omo Añá who has spent many years in the tradition, owns fundamento and who knows the entire musical canon, drum-making, and consecration process.
<i>Oludumaré/Olorun (L)</i>	Supreme being in Regla de Ocha.
<i>omiero (L)</i>	Herbal purifying liquid.
<i>omo Añá (L)</i>	Añá initiate.
<i>oricha/ochao (L)</i>	Main kinds of deity in Regla de Ocha.
<i>òrìṣà (Y)</i>	Kind of Yoruba deity (transliterated to Lucumí oricha).
<i>oru cantado (L/S)</i>	A sung segment multiple orichas in a tambor.
<i>oru seco (L/S)</i>	The first drum only phase of a tambor.
<i>Orula/Orumila (L)</i>	Oricha/deity of the divination cult, Ifá.
<i>Osáin (L)</i>	Oricha/deity of herbs and medicine.
<i>osainista (L)</i>	Priest who works with herbs and fauna.

Oshosi/ Ochosi/ Oshossi (L)	Male hunter Oricha and part of los guerreros.
<i>owafaka (L)</i>	An entry level initiation given to men in Regla de Ocha.
Palo Monte	A spiritual and musical practice said to derive from from Central Africa.
<i>pataki (L)</i>	Religious stories or creation myths.
<i>penitencia (L)</i>	Lit:"penitence." A part of Añá initiation that can involve enduring physical pain or ritual humiliation.
<i>período especial (S)</i>	Lit:"special period." The period of ensuing economic hardship in Cuba following the collapse of the Soviet Union.
<i>piquete (S)</i>	Ensemble of drummers.
<i>presentación</i>	Lit:"presentation." A drumming ceremony where initiates are presented to Añá as part of the initiation into Regal de Ocha.
<i>rama (S)</i>	Lit:"branch." Religious Linage.
Regla de Ocha/Santería/ Santería (L)	Cuban oricha worship.
<i>santero/a (S)</i>	Oricha devotee.
<i>segundo (S)</i>	The middle-sized batá drum.
<i>shekere (S)</i>	Beaded gourd instrument.
<i>sucio (S)</i>	Lit:"dirty." Spiritually contaminated.
<i>tambolero/ tamborero (S)</i>	Ritual drummer.
<i>tambor (S)</i>	Lit "drum." Drum ceremony.
<i>tambor de fundamento (S)</i>	Ceremony using consecrated batá drums.

<i>tata ngangá (P)</i>	The highest religious authority in the religion Palo Monte.
<i>toque (S)</i>	Lit: "touch." Batá rhythms.
<i>transmisión (S)</i>	Lit: "tranmission." Consecration process of batá drums.
<i>tumbadora/conga (S)</i>	Barrel-shaped single-headed drum.
<i>yakota (L)</i>	A common Cuban batá rhythm.
<i>Yayi (P)</i>	"Godmother." in the religion of Palo Monte.
<i>Yemayá (Y)</i>	Female oricha of the sea connected to motherhood.