

# The Influence of Yoruba Religion and Gastronomy on the Yoruba Diaspora of Cuba and Brazil: A Transnational Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The forced integration of the Yoruba into the Atlantic World has led to gastronomic and religious influences on the diaspora in Cuba and Brazil. Both nations are linguistically different but the combined diaspora of Cuba and Brazil have been influenced by the cultural preservation of Yoruba norms transposed in Latin America via the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The implication of this assertion is that Yoruba influence is not limited by borders; rather, the influence of the Yoruba ethnic group is transnational. The cultural manifestation of the Yoruba is found in the religious and gastronomic practices of their diaspora in Cuba and Brazil.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Ọwọ ọmọdé ò tó pepe, tàgbàlagbà ò wọ akèrègbè*

A child's hand can't reach the shelf as an elder's can't enter a gourd.

-Yoruba Proverb

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Omoniyi Afolabi, and my second reader, Dr. Michael R. Anderson for providing me with their endless support, patience, and guidance throughout this thesis writing process. Thank you both for being part of this journey.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It has been more than a century since the last remaining pocket of legal slavery was extinguished in 1888. The study of the largest forced migration in history, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, is still unveiling new information from one of the darkest periods in history. The lucrative and morally incomprehensible trade that spanned generations begs closer examination in order to better understand the impact that still resonates in the status quo. Historians have traditionally examined the trans-Atlantic slave trade through a broad lens, without sufficient focus on individual European-directed transatlantic forced migration. This issue begs for more qualitative analysis in order to understand how specific ethnic groups and their diaspora are still shaping the countries they were forcibly brought to.

This thesis argues that the forced integration of the Yoruba into the Atlantic World has led to gastronomic and religious influences on the diaspora in Cuba and Brazil. Both respective nations were influenced by the cultural preservation of Yoruba norms transposed in Latin America through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The implication of this assertion is that the influence of the Yoruba ethnic group from West Africa is not limited by borders; rather, it is a transnational influence due to the religious and gastronomic practices found in Cuba and Brazil.

In regards to the wider literature available on the subject of the Yoruba, my thesis aims to expand on existing information on the Yoruba diaspora by connecting two aspects (religion and gastronomy) and examining the long-term implications in the New World. The manifestation of religion and gastronomy has been significant in shaping the national identities of the Yoruba diaspora in Cuba and Brazil.

One of the biggest and most influential groups forced away from Western Africa during the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the Yoruba. Their diaspora can be found in various Latin American countries that were part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade such as Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, etc. A closer examination of the exploitation, kidnapping and forced migration of the Yoruba provides insights as to how Yoruba culture was carefully preserved upon arrival in the Americas.

The percentage of the Yoruba population that were enslaved and arrived to the shores of Latin America was not as high as other ethnic groups but they have had a long-standing impact within the region. The Yoruba had a “complex level of social organization,” “had developed urban settlements and military forces,” and “their political and ritual structures were highly developed and complex”<sup>1</sup> prior to being forcibly removed from their homeland in Western Africa. In addition to the aforementioned attributes, the sophisticated oral tradition of the Yoruba allowed for their culture vis-à-vis religion and food to be carefully preserved in the Americas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The use of documentary analysis was employed in order to conduct research for my thesis. I was able to obtain sufficient data about my research content by analyzing primary and secondary literature sources. The use of books as well as articles found within the University of Texas (UT) databases such as Academic Search Complete and JSTOR enabled me to be able to successfully find the necessary information pertaining to my thesis work. In addition to literature, my supervising professor, Dr. Omoniyi Afolabi, holds a PhD in Portuguese and Africana Studies and he has conducted substantial research on Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil—with

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Attah Agbali. “Ritualizing Identity, Santería, and Globalization: Yoruba Imageries and Creole Paradigms.” *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, edited by Toyin Falola and Genova Ann, (Trenton, NJ. Africa World), 2005, p. 274.

a closer look at the city of Salvador da Bahia situated in the Northeastern Region of Brazil. His background in the study of Yoruba religion in addition to his field research conducted in Brazil has been extremely helpful in addressing my thesis questions.

In my thesis, I will address the following thesis questions: Did the forced migration of the Yoruba influence the religion and gastronomy within Cuba and Brazil? How much of the West African Yoruba diaspora can be found in Cuban Lucumí and Brazilian Candomblé? Did Roman Catholic syncretism or parallel worship occur in Lucumí and Candomblé as a means of cultural preservation under slavery? Has the Yoruba Diaspora had any impact on the diasporic gastronomy? If so, to what extent? Have the names of the foods been preserved in Spanish and Portuguese language variants? Or has the original Yoruba pronunciation been preserved? What are the implications of the influence of the Yoruba within the Atlantic World?

## **CONTENT OF MY RESEARCH**

The first chapter provides an ethnogenesis of the Yoruba as well as the historical context of their forced enslavement into the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The second chapter details the Yoruba religion by examining the concept of creationism, the spiritual hierarchy, and the Yoruba pantheon of gods called the Òrìṣà.<sup>2</sup> The manifestation of Yoruba Religion in Cuba and Brazil will be further examined and the existence of Catholic elements within the groups of practitioners will be analyzed. The last chapter examines the relationship between Yoruba gastronomy and divination systems. This is necessary in order to understand the connection between gastronomy and Yoruba spirituality. Food and religion is inextricably linked in Yoruba

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the linguistic transformation of Yoruba language in the Americas, spurn by Spanish and Portuguese influences, the spelling and pronunciation of Òrìṣà changes depending on the regional context of specific groups. I will interchangeably use Òrìṣà, Orixá, Orisha, and Orisa in this thesis but they all refer to the Yoruba pantheon of gods.



culture and foods used as offerings to the deities have now become a staple part of some of the diets of Yoruba diaspora in Cuba and Brazil. The conclusion examines the implications of the transnational influence of the Yoruba in the Atlantic World.

## The Ethnogenesis and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade of the Yoruba

According to scholars, the name Yoruba originated from the Hausa ethnic group of Western Africa. *Yarabawa* was used to denote Yoruba people and it was first observed in the writings of Ahmed Baba in 1613.<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Andrew Apter argue that the descriptive term of the Yoruba originated from either a Hausa or even a Fulani term referencing the great Oyo Empire that encompassed modern day Western Nigeria and Eastern Benin.<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Galloti Mamigonian and José João Reis also posit that the term comes from the Hausa term, *Yarriba*, to denote the Oyo Empire.<sup>5</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy argues that those terms used among the Hausa were in existence before the establishment of the Oyo Empire and is thus not a direct reference to a political state but is more in line with the structure of a country.<sup>6</sup> The name Yoruba is a relatively recent term and although various scholars disagree as to the origin of the name, they do not disagree as to how influential the Yoruba people have been in Western Africa and in the Americas.

The survival of Yoruba religious traditions has been linked to the fact that they were part of the last ethnic groups that arrived in the Americas due to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The concentration of large groups of Yoruba in urban areas such as Bahia in northeastern Brazil led, they were able to maintain their religious traditions. Thus, the late arrival of the Yoruba contributed significantly to their cultural survival.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade." *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Falola and Childs, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis from Within," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55.02 (2013): 356–387. Cambridge Journals Online. Web.

<sup>5</sup> Beatriz Galloti Mamigonian and João José Reis, "Nagô and Mina: The Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil," In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Lovejoy, p. 41.

The majority of Yoruba slave departures towards the New World occurred between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but initial movement of slaves began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of Portuguese in Western Africa. This late arrival is reminiscent of regular or forced migration as the late arrivals tend to assimilate faster and retain their traditions depending on their locations. Examples in the United States include Cuban, Brazilian, and Chinese migrations. The late Yoruba arrival was brought about by European expansion and the increased demand for slave labor required to accommodate the technological advances of the industrial revolution. Portugal was thus one of the first western nations to establish trading colonies along the coasts of Western African. In 1444, a Portuguese company organized by Lancarote de Frietas led a trade expedition to Lagos, a town situated in the western Algarve of Portugal, to hand over human cargo that consisted of over 200 slaves. The first wave of slaves that were moved were captives and thus were not purchased from any kingdom. Gold was to be the primary commodity acquired from expeditions to the West African coasts, but the capture of slaves proved to be a more profitable venture for Prince Henry and other Portuguese business leaders.<sup>7</sup> In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Bight of Benin, which was one of the slave coasts located in Western Africa, had the largest number of slave departures from Africa to the Americas. The Portuguese were the leading exporters of human cargo in the Bight of Benin from the 1690s and onwards.<sup>8</sup> This would later result in Brazil having the largest groups of afro-descendants within Latin America.

In order to understand why the Bight of Benin forcibly exported the majority of slaves, the Oyo Empire and her Alaafin (ruler) must be closely examined between the time period of the late 1700s and the early 1800s. Alaafin Abiodun Adegorolu came to the throne during a period

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 166.

of prosperity in the 1780s but this dissolved with Awole, his cousin's succession to the throne in 1789. His rule lasted less than a decade and it was plagued with problems. After Awole committed ritual suicide in 1786, there was chaos within the Empire and this contributed to a large percentage of Yoruba being forced into the slave trade.<sup>9</sup> The collapse of the Empire led to more slaves being distributed around the various slave ports. This made Yorubaland a large slave-exporting region which is evident in the spread of Yoruba influence in countries such as modern day Brazil and Cuba.<sup>10</sup> The supply of slaves did not cease due to warfare in and around areas of Yorubaland. Yoruba speakers were captured through kidnappings, raids, and the aforementioned warfare. The establishment of the slaving port of Lagos in the 1760s was used to accommodate the influx of slaves from the interior. The port grew in importance in the 1790s when the Kingdom of Dahomey, located in the present-day country of Benin, put more pressure on her ports and neighboring ports as a means of "monopolizing" the slave trade and other international trade relations. These strict measures pushed European traders to move eastwards towards Lagos which increased the export of slaves, especially those from Yorubaland towards the Atlantic world.<sup>11</sup> This eastward shift was also a result of the larger supply of slaves that were acquired through captivity during warfare.

Coastal towns such as Lagos were then important slave trade areas that allowed for Euro-Americans to establish "efficient" systems for mass movement from the interior of Yorubaland and other regions to the slave-receiving destinations via port towns. The strategic maritime location of Lagos location was also significant in that the town had an efficient Lagoon

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<sup>9</sup> Toyin Falola. *African Diaspora*, edited by Toyin Falola, Boydell & Brewer, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utxa/detail.action?docID=1206894>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ojo Olatunji, *The Organization of The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yorubaland, Ca.1777 to Ca.1856*. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41.1 (2008): 77-100. Academic Search Complete. Web.

system that allowed for slaves to be bought and moved quickly; this system allowed for slave trade to endure in the Bight of Benin.<sup>12</sup> Slaves were then carefully examined here by foreign slavers indoors which was a deterrent to prevent the slaves from escaping. After the foreign slavers chose their human ‘commodities,’ they embarked on the harrowing journey towards the Atlantic World. The transported population of the Yoruba or Yoruba identifying people from the region was close to a million individuals according to David Eltis. After the Yoruba-speaking people were shackled on board the slave transport vessels, these captured slaves would then embark on the treacherous journey across the Atlantic called the Middle Passage.

The triangular slave trade consisted of numerous direct voyages between Africa and numerous colonies in the Americas.<sup>13</sup> In the early stages of the slave trade, the Portuguese would employ vessels capable of handling over 50 tons of burden and could thus carry over 150 slaves within a voyage. The industrial revolution helped enable vessels to carry heavier burdens such as a typical European ship capable of carrying over a hundred tons.<sup>14</sup> The trans-Atlantic slave trade was headed by European entities that merely viewed Africans as profitable business prospects and a means to an end. The notable European powers in this case were the Portuguese and the Spaniards. With the latter overseeing the forced migration of Yoruba slaves from West Africa to Cuba and the former overseeing the forced migration of Yoruba slaves from West Africa to Brazil. The journey from Africa to the Americas was treacherous and some of the slaves were known to commit suicide by going overboard rather than risk arriving to their unknown destinations. Death was preferable over a lifetime of forced labor, rape, and torture. The fear also experienced by the slaves was compounded by a unique attribute thought to occur by the white

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). p. 290-330.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

overseers. Rumors of cannibalism helped exacerbate that fear in that some slaves thought the white colonials were holding them as captives to kill as well as consume.<sup>15</sup> To classify the journey to the Atlantic world as harrowing and terrifying would be an understatement, in that the lives of the Yoruba as well as other ethnic groups were made to suffer inhumane fates aboard those carrier vessels for months on ends.

Recent scholarly studies have estimated that 2 million enslaved Africans lost their lives during the Middle Passage. Branding, beating, shackling, psychological abuses, and horrific living conditions of slaves on ships caused most of the deaths...The most infamous treatment of slaves included the practice of throwing slaves in the ocean or poisoning them if they had infectious diseases or if there were shortages of necessities on ships. The French, Portuguese, and Spanish were reportedly the main perpetrators of such cruelty.<sup>16</sup>

Death on the crossing was due to a variety of causes. The biggest killers were gastrointestinal disorders, which were often related to the quality of food and water available on the trip, and fevers. Bouts of dysentery were common, and the “bloody flux” could break out in epidemic proportions.<sup>17</sup>

The arrival of the enslaved groups in countries such as Cuba and Brazil created a need for groups such as the Yoruba diaspora to preserve their history and culture.

The ethnogenesis of the Yoruba in the diaspora developed when there was a need to identify the different Yoruba-speaking groups under one umbrella. There was not an overarching identity to bring together the Yoruba from kingdoms such as Oyo, Ijesha, Ijenu, Ondo, Ekiti,

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<sup>15</sup> Toyin Falola and Amanda Warnock, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2007). p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Amos J. Beyan. "Middle Passage." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*. Ed. F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Web.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert S. Klein. "Middle Passage." *A Historical Guide to World Slavery*, edited by Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Web.

Ilesha.<sup>18</sup> This unified identification occurred in heavily populated countries that had a significant percentage of the populace Yoruba or Yoruba descendants such as Cuba and Brazil. The name Lucumí appeared in Cuban Spanish to denote slaves that either self-identified as Yoruba or those that arrived from the slave coast of the Bight of Benin. Similarly, the name Nagô in Brazilian Portuguese denoted all of the Yoruba migrant groups.<sup>19</sup>

One of the historical connections between West Africa and the Atlantic World was the trans-Atlantic trade route between the Bight of Benin and destination ports along the coasts of Brazil. Over two million individuals were taken from their homes in Western African and forced into slave labor in the northeastern province of Bahia in Brazil.<sup>20</sup> In the ethnic designation of slaves in Bahia in the later 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Bight of Benin exported over 44.3% of the slaves and a significant portion of the groups were the Yoruba (Nagô).<sup>21</sup> The Yoruba speakers in Brazil were numerous in comparison to those found in Cuba and Saint Domingue, but overall the Yoruba were still a minority despite their large influence observed in various cultural facets such as religion and language. The volume of the Brazilian slave trade made Bahia, a town in the northeast region of Brazil, one of the most densely populated area of Yoruba-speaking people. Nagô was a term that used after the early eighteenth century and originated from Fon and Allada terminology to denote all Yoruba speaking people.<sup>22</sup> Nagô was

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis from Within," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55.02 (2013): 356–387. Cambridge Journals Online. Web.

<sup>19</sup> David Eltis, "The Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers, 1650-1865: Dimensions and Implications," *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, "Introduction", edited by Mann Kristin and Edna G. Bay, *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Inês Cortês de Oliveira, "Retrouver une Identité: Jeux Sociaux des Africains de Bahia: (vers 1750 - vers 1890)" (Ph.D. L'Université de Paris Sorbonne, 1992), p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 40-55.

mainly used in the north of Brazil—specifically Bahia while a Mina was a term used Southern Brazil to refer to the collective identity of the Yoruba diaspora.<sup>23</sup>

The Brazilian province of Bahia was home to one of the largest sugar plantations—*engenhos*—in Brazil which led to a more densely populated region. The local economy continued to expand which increased the demand for the import of slave populations as a means to sustain labor. After the mid-1800s, the Yoruba population represented 79 percent of African-born slaves in Bahia and Nagôs were also densely populated in other cities such as El Salvador.<sup>24</sup> The transatlantic identity of the Yoruba in Brazil was then formed vis-à-vis the Nagô. This was a means to unite the Yoruba that were forcibly removed from their homes in Western Africa. A uniform identity was born through the pluricentric Yoruba language in addition to the religious and cultural traditions of the Yoruba. A transnational religious identity formed between the Bight of Benin and Brazil due to the constant movement of human cargo. The religious beliefs were then transposed and spread throughout the New World.<sup>25</sup> The religious identity will be examined in the next chapter but this chapter will explain the formation of the Nagô identity through means such as rites, organizations, and beliefs.

According to trade records, the majority of the Yoruba-speaking slaves in Bahia were forcibly taken from the Oyo Empire and they consequently played an important part in identity formation.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in the Oyo Empire, facial scarification or *abaja* was used as a means to signify cultural identity and Bahian Nagô would also undergo this process as part of the Yoruba

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<sup>23</sup> Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, and José João Reis, “Nagô and Mina: The Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil,” In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 77-110.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 80

<sup>25</sup> Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds. *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil*. London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, and José João, Reis, “Nagô and Mina: The Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil,” In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 77-110.



diaspora. The process was a means of further integrating with the community, and this form of mutilation was then an aspect of cultural identity meticulously preserved and passed down to the future generations of Bahia. The sale of African slaves from Bahia to other regions such as Rio de Janeiro accounts for the spread of Yoruba cultural practices to the diaspora of Brazil. The creation of the Nagô identity endured and more slaves were preserving their cultural practices by working together in the same plantations, kitchens, markets and being part of a larger slave network in bigger cities. This was possible because slave masters would often allow slaves to work within the house as well as on the street. This allowed for some slaves to acquire occupations such as tailors, barbers, carpenters. For instance, some Nagô were able to preserve their culture through the selling of fabric that arrived from the Western coast of Africa by freed slaves.<sup>27</sup> The Nagô of Brazil and the Lucumí of Cuba has been very influential in the Atlantic World. Between 1826 and 1850, there were 65,600 Yoruba-speaking captives in the Spanish Caribbean and 116,200 Yoruba-speaking captives in Bahia.<sup>28</sup>

Cuba had long been an important slave destination point in the Caribbean especially for the Yoruba. Records show that nine out of ten people captured and taken from the Bight of Benin and moved to Havana after 1800 were Yoruba.<sup>29</sup> The Yoruba arrived in larger numbers towards the latter end of the slave trade as opposed to other groups due to the fall of the Oyo Empire. This fact paired with strong Yoruba oral traditions, religious rituals, and the ascent of Cuba within the Caribbean allowed for stronger survival in Cuba.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 85

<sup>28</sup> Michele Reid. "The Yoruba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations." *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Toyin Falola and Matt Childs, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> David Eltis, "The Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers, 1650-1865: Dimensions and Implications," In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p.17-39.

Groups possessing strong and complex social and political institutions, urban features, far ranging interethnic and commercial interactions, and strong military traditions prior to their enslavement possessed a greater probability in revitalizing their culture pathways.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the Yoruba being considered part of the aforementioned groups prior to enslavement, the rise of Cuba within the context of the sugar plantations led to more Yoruba slaves arriving within the shores of this island country. The 1791 Haitian Revolution led to Haiti declining in its exportation of sugar which allowed for Spanish controlled Cuba and opportunity to supersede its production and become one of the largest sugar producing colonies in the world.<sup>31</sup> Across the ocean, the great Oyo Empire was imploding and its people were not scattered due to its fall. The combination of the increase of slave exports from the Bight of Benin as well as the increased need for forced labor on the sugar plantations in Cuba led to more Yoruba slaves arriving in the Caribbean.

The cultural survival of the Yoruba would later manifest itself in the Lucumí. Lucumí was a term that has been in use since the sixteenth Century to refer to groups and sub groups<sup>32</sup> of the Yoruba in Cuba. The Yoruba and their descendants (Lucumí) have helped shaped not only the African diaspora in Cuba but also shaped Cuba as a whole through religion<sup>33</sup> and food.

In order to fully grasp how influential the Yoruba have been on the African diaspora in the Americas, it is critical to understand the religious praxis of the Yoruba. Yoruba spirituality

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Attah Agbali. "Ritualizing Identity, Santeria, and Globalization: Yoruba imageries and Creole Paradigms." *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, edited by Toyin Falola and Genova Ann, (Trenton, NJ. Africa World), 2005, p. 275.

<sup>31</sup> Reid, p. 114

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 115. Reid notes subgroups such as Lucumi-Adó, Lucumi-Egbá, Lucumi-Oyo, Lucumi-Yebú from López Valdés' work: "Notas para el estudio etno-histórico de los esclavos lucumí de Cuba," p. 72-73; Castellanos and Castellanos, *Cultura Afro-Cubana: El negro en Cuba*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

has been one of the most enduring legacies in Cuba and Brazil and the clear connection between food and gastronomy will also beg for closer examination.

## Chapter 2: Yoruba Religion

“The religion of the Yoruba covers the whole period of life from the cradle to the grave. Rites and ceremonies are performed at each stage of existence and as circumstances require. The frequency of these rites and ceremonies clearly show the strength of the belief that men are in active touch with the unseen world and that right relationship with the unseen powers is a prerequisite for human happiness.”<sup>34</sup>

The Yoruba slaves were forcibly removed from their lands and later displaced in the Atlantic World. Alongside the pain and suffering that they carried with them on the horrific trade route, the slaves also carried and protected their rich culture and history. This fact is most visible and manifests itself within Yoruba religion. The Yoruba as well as other West African ethnic groups that were brought to Latin America had their traditional beliefs scrutinized and deemed as occult and witchcraft by the colonial masters. The reason was due not only to the ignorance of colonial authorities but also due to lack of research and inherent racism. The ethnogenesis of the Yoruba people would not be complete without a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs and spiritual rites of the Yoruba. In order to completely understand how Yoruba traditional worship was successfully transplanted in the Atlantic, the pantheon of deities that exists within Yoruba traditional religion needs to be properly examined.

The concept of creationism in Yoruba religion differs from that of Islamic and Christian perspectives, in that the Yoruba believe that *Olodumare* was the supreme being that created the heavens and the earth as well as the entire universe. He also has other names such as *Olorun* (ruler of the heavens) as well as *Eledumare* (the creator) which serve to further emphasize his

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<sup>34</sup> J. Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (Lagos, Nigeria: CMS Bookshop, 1948), p. 71.

power and solidify his high hierarchical status within Yoruba religion. According to Yoruba belief, he is the starting point of all that exists in the universe and on him rests the superstructure of Yoruba spirituality.<sup>35</sup> In reference to the hierarchical state, Olodumare is at the top while the lesser gods directly beneath him are collectively referred to as Òrìṣàs and each respective divinity had orders delegated to them through Olodumare.<sup>36</sup> The force that then connects everything in existence between Olodumare and the entire universe is referred to as ase. Ase represents a force of nature that links the individual levels within the hierarchy pictured below. In order to full understand this concept, the notion of the universe and its conception needs to be elaborated on.

Before the creation of the universe, primordial deities existed such as the chief female divinity, Oduduwa, alongside her husband, Obatala. Olodumare gave the responsibility of earth's creation to Obatala but he succumbed to the temptation of palm wine<sup>37</sup> which later left him inebriated and unable to complete the task.<sup>38</sup> Oduduwa was later sent to complete the unfinished task and she thereby created the earth while Obatala later returned to serve as a sculptor divinity and create humans.

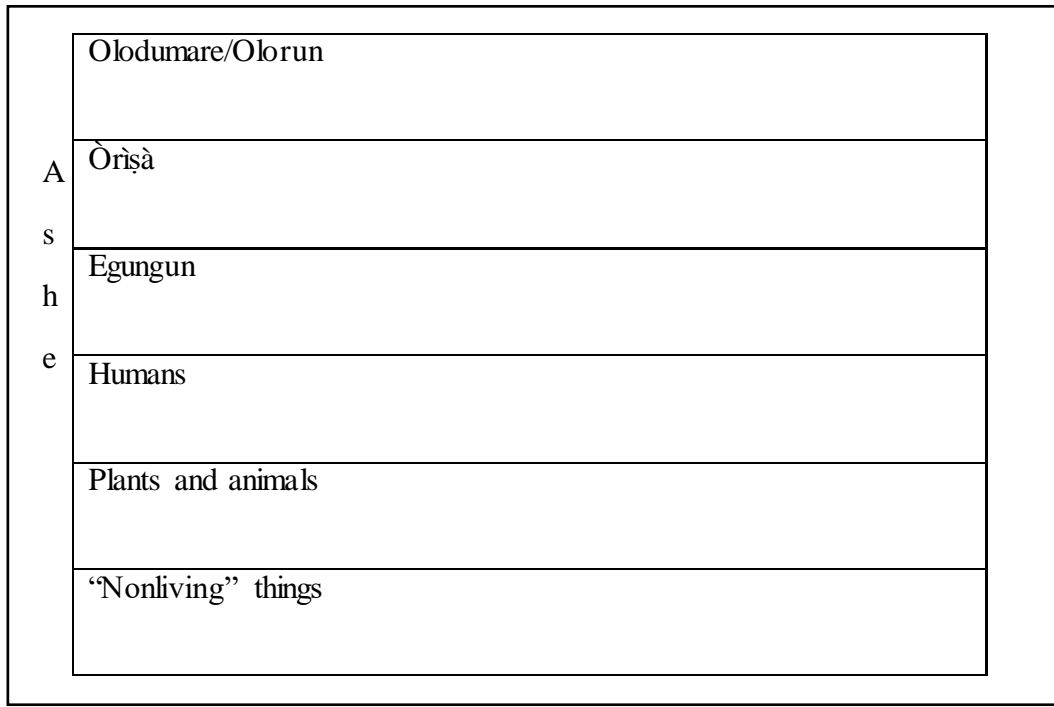
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<sup>35</sup> Bolaji E. Idowu, *Olódùmaré: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Nelson Olabanji Fashina, "God," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo, eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Web.

<sup>37</sup> An alcoholic drink created from palm trees.

<sup>38</sup> Harold Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Mythmaker as Storyteller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 196.



**Figure 1. Spiritual Hierarchy in Yoruba Religion.**<sup>39</sup>

The pantheon of Òrìṣàs originated through Olodumare and he created all of divinities as a means to carry out specific duties for him because he does not directly interact with mankind due to their inherent corrupt nature. In addition to the existence of Obatala and Oduduwa, other primordial deities that existed before the creation of earth are Orunmila and Esu. These divinities represent divination and the divine messenger respectively. Orunmila is the god of wisdom and he is in charge of speaking on behalf of the divinities and directly relaying the requests of Olodumare through Ifa.<sup>40</sup> Ifa refers to one of the systems of divination and it allows for the connection between orishas and human beings. A close connection to Orunmila and Ifa is the divine messenger called Esu. Esu is the messenger between Olodumare in the heavens as well as

<sup>39</sup> George Brandon, *Santería from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Omoṣade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 23.

the deities and men on earth. In addition to being a messenger god, Esu is also known for his mischievousness and his trickster traits. Esu is not considered to be explicitly male or female. More importantly, Esu is the primordial deity who receives ebo (offering) and delivers it to Olodumare or the respective Òrìṣà.<sup>41</sup> Esu is closely tied to Orunmila because Orunmila prescribes the type of offering or sacrifice necessary while Esu receives the sacrifice. In addition to receiving ebo, this deity is also responsible for enforcing Olodumare's will by punishing those who refute the messages sent to them by the Òrìṣàs.<sup>42</sup>

Deciphering the messages of the Òrìṣàs will require help from an intermediary who is known as a Babalawo. A Babalawo is a divination high priest that communicates with Orunmila in order to seek knowledge as well as relay information that Orunmila was sent to provide on behalf of Olodumare. Practitioners of Yoruba traditional religion often seek out a Babalawo in order to understand their fates as well as communicate with the divinities. Due to the importance of a Babalawo, the initiation process to become a Babalawo is very lengthy. The person must slowly and successfully master the skills necessary in order to be able to relate the knowledge provided to him by the pantheon of deities. The level of spirituality that one attains through the initiation process is what will allow the individual to achieve success and eventually become a diviner (Babalawo).

There are multiple systems used in divination such as the Dida Obi, Erindinlogun, Opele and Ifa.<sup>43</sup> All of the methods are frequently employed during divination but the Ifa system is principally used between priests and practitioners. On the contrary, the erindinlogun system is

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<sup>41</sup> William Russell Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.79.

<sup>42</sup> Omoṣade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. (London: Longman, 1979), p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 122-123

used more often by the Yoruba diaspora in Latin America<sup>44</sup> especially in Cuba and Brazil. While each system is significant, two of these systems will be expounded on in order to understand the complexity of what it means to communicate with the divinities.

The Ifa and Opele systems are different in that the former is complicated as it employs multiple objects to use while the Opele system employs the use of a chain. The chain measures about three to four feet in length and it consists of eight half-pods that have an equal distance from each other. While half seeds are typically used for the divining chain, a variety of smaller objects can also be used such as wood or metal.<sup>45</sup> Due to the concave and convex shapes of the objects on the chain, the way the objects fall after the casting of the chain by the Babalawo relates to the message that an Òrìṣà wants to get across. Prior to casting of the divining chain, the Babalawo invokes Orunmila due to his great wisdom then the Babalawo proceeds to touch the opele and interpret the messages that resulted from the casting of the opele onto a divining tray.<sup>46</sup> While this divination form is utilized more due to its simplicity, the Ifa system is seen as a more complex method that yields more precise results for the diviner.

In the Ifa divination system, Orunmila's will is manifested through sixteen sacred palm tree nuts called the ikin.<sup>47</sup> The ikin are used by the Babalawo to communicate with Orunmila by spreading the selected palm tree nuts on the opon ifa (circular/rectangular) wooden divining tray along with other items such cowrie shells, pottery piece as well as a variety of other items. The irofa is also used in this process and it is a divination tapper that is struck against the divining

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<sup>44</sup> Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005), p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Simon Ottenberg, *African Religious Groups and Beliefs: Papers in Honor of William R. Bascom* (Meerut, India: Archana Publications for Folklore Institute, 1982), p. 194.

<sup>46</sup> J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 123.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 123.



tray as a means to invoke Ifa.<sup>48</sup> In addition to having the necessary items to prophesize, the Babalawo must be well versed in the literary corpus known as Odu Ifa. The Odu of the Ifa divination system represents 16 volumes of the literary corpus and those aforementioned volumes collectively add up to 256 individual chapters.<sup>49</sup> The chapters as well as the verses contained within them are passed on through oral tradition as a way to preserve the knowledge and mystery of Orunmila.

Practitioners of Yoruba tradition find it necessary to seek the assistance of the Babalawo in order to interpret their fates through divination. Only high priests such as the Babalawo are able to interpret Orunmila's will because they possess the knowledge to invoke him through worship. Before the Babalawo proceeds to start the divination process with the sixteen sacred nuts, he must first recite and sing the praises of Orunmila as a form of invoking his spirit. These songs of praises are known as Oriki in Yoruba and in Omosade's work on *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, he gives an example of an Oriki to be used for Orunmila with a translation<sup>50</sup>:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 124. The English translation for this Oriki has been corrected under the supervision of Dr. Afolabi in order for it to read better in contemporary English.

<i>Ifá Olókun,</i>	<i>The diviner for the Olókun (the sea god)</i>
<i>A – sorò – dayò,</i>	<i>The one who prospers affairs!</i>
<i>Elérin-ìpin,</i>	<i>The witness to individual's fate,</i>
<i>Ibìkejì Èdùmarè.</i>	<i>Deputy to Olódùmarè!</i>
<i>Ká mò ó ka là,</i>	<i>Whom to know is to be saved,</i>
<i>Ká mò ó ká má tètè kú,</i>	<i>Whom to know is not to die early;</i>
<i>Amòlà Ifè owòdáyé.</i>	<i>The savior of Ifè from the pristine time;</i>
<i>Okùnrin dúdú òkè Ìgèti;</i>	<i>The Black Man of Ìgèti Hill;</i>
<i>Olúwà mi à- jí- kí,</i>	<i>My lord who is saluted first thing in the morning</i>
<i>Olúmàmi Òkítìbìrí.</i>	<i>My lord, the averter.</i>
<i>Tí npojó ikú dà;</i>	<i>Who changes the pre-determined date of death;</i>
<i>Olúwà mi àmò – imò – tán,</i>	<i>My lord that cannot be fully comprehended</i>
<i>A kò mò ó tán iba se;</i>	<i>Not to have full knowledge of you is to fail,</i>
<i>A bá mò ó tán Iba se.</i>	<i>But to have full knowledge of you, is to be successful.</i>

After the spirit of Orunmila has been invoked by the Babalawo, he must then proceed to moving the sixteen sacred nuts in the palm of his hands and the resulting pattern is spread out and interpreted on the divining tray. The pattern on the tray correlates to one of the sixteen principal Odu (Ifa literary corpus) and the chapters contained within the Odu are made up of verses/poems called *ese*.<sup>51</sup> The Babalawo recites these verses in a poetic form and interprets the divination to practitioner. The *ese* then becomes a form of prescription that the Babalawo uses to instruct and provide guidance to the individuals. While Ifa as well as other divination systems are significant within Yoruba traditional religion, the existence of other lesser Òrìṣàs in addition to the aforementioned primordial deities and Olodumare are vital to the understanding of the religion in Africa as well as within the diaspora.

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<sup>51</sup> Harold Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Mythmaker as Storyteller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 48.

Despite the existence of the pantheon of gods in Yoruba spirituality, the religion is still classified as monotheistic because there is a single omnipotent creator. The primordial deities and the lesser gods primarily exist to carry out the orders of Olodumare. Due to Olodumare's extensive orders, the pantheon of Òrìṣàs are fundamental in bringing forth his will. The Yoruba deities in existence are over 400 with some figures showing 1,700.<sup>52</sup> The full figure can only be estimated because while some of the deities such as Orunmila are worshipped by the majority of Yoruba religion adherents, others are worshipped on a specific regional basis. Furthermore, a practitioner usually worships the deity that his/her family has historically worshipped which makes the tradition of Òrìṣà worship connected to one's lineage. It is important to note that although the deities are individually worshipped, they are still intermediaries between earth and the heavens as represented by Olodumare.

An Òrìṣà that serves as a strong connection between the heavens and the earth due to her important position in the hierarchy of deities is known as Yemoja. She is a widely celebrated goddess whose name means the mother whose children are the fish and she represents the Òrìṣà of the Ogun river. Yemoja's not only embraces the strength and power of female divinities, she is also the maternal goddess of the major Òrìṣàs that exist within Yoruba divinity.<sup>53</sup> It would be difficult to address all of her Òrìṣà offspring in pressing details, but four will be examined due to their importance within the Yoruba Spiritual realm.

Ogun is a widely known Òrìṣà and his worship is not limited by regions due to his universal and well-revered nature among the Yoruba and the diaspora. Ogun is the god of war and iron who is often described as deified ancestor due to having lived on earth and transforming

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<sup>52</sup> J. Omoṣade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. London: Longman, 1979, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Diedre L. Badejo, "Yemoja," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo, eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). p. 196.

into an esteemed Òrìṣà upon his death. Due to his powers with iron, Ogun chose the machete as his weapon. Ogun's reverence by other deities is also attributed to his immense strength in addition to his skill as a great warrior. This weapon proved useful at the beginning of time when the deities were grateful that Ogun cleared their path when they encountered a thicket.<sup>54</sup> Due to that event, he is worshipped whenever a practitioner is in need of having their path cleared in order to remove physical or mental obstacles. Another Òrìṣà that is also regarded for his strength as well as his deification is Sango.

Sango, the god of lightning, has various legends attributed to his origin, name, and also to the unique process which resulted in him becoming one of the divinities. He originally lived as a human being as the fourth Alaafin (king) of Oyo and was deified due to his exceptional power and leadership. When lightning strikes, his high priests invoke his name and lay out offerings on his shrine as a way to honor him. The practitioners that have Sango as their Òrìṣà are predominantly found in Oyo and across the diaspora Cuba and Brazil despite him being regarded more of a local deity. The three deities—Osun, Oya, and Oba—are not only attributed to the maternal goddess, Yemoja, but they also represent the three wives of Sango.

Osun is the female Orisha of the Osun River and she is admired for her beauty as well as her ability to help with fertility. On the contrary, Oya is the female Òrìṣà of the Niger river her and while not as beautiful as Osun, she was Sango's first and favorite wife.<sup>55</sup> Oya is characterized as a manifestation of the wind and she is powerful to uproot trees and displace dwellings. Her electric connection with Sango is characterized as the strong wind that comes before or after the thunderstorm that results in the strike of lightning. Oba is Sango's first wife

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<sup>54</sup> William Russell Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> Awolalu J. Omoṣade, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 46.

as well as the the female Òrìṣà of the Oba River. She is well known for being tricked by Osun to cut off her ear and add it to a soup as a means to earn Sango's favor and love. This ultimately back fired and Sango banished her and she was forced to live her days in shame.<sup>56</sup> Yemoja, Osun, Oya, and Oba and the abilities they possess have been preserved in oral tradition. All of the Òrìṣàs within the Yoruba pantheon of deities have had a significant influence on Yoruba culture through the form of spirituality. That spirituality has been carefully preserved for many generations and it was the preservation of culture that led to the manifestation of Yoruba religion in the Americas.

### **The Manifestation of Yoruba Religion in the Americas**

From Ile-Ife in current day Nigeria to Cuban cities such as Havana or even Brazilian cities such Bahia, it is evident that Yoruba spirituality was carefully preserved in the Americas. Although the Yoruba were uprooted from their lands in the Bight of Benin and forced into slave labor upon their arrival, they still firmly set their old roots in the New World.

#### **Cuba**

Yoruba traditional religion became popularly known as Santeria (Way of the Saints) in Cuba due to Spanish colonial powers finding it necessary to name the religion practiced by the Yoruba in the diaspora. The Òrìṣàs were interpreted as saints which led to the formation of Santeria as a concept. Another name used to refer to Yoruba traditional religion is "Regla de Ocha" which means the rule/law of the Orisha. In actuality, practitioners of Yoruba traditional religion in Cuba refer to themselves as Lucumí. The origin of this name can be traced back to a Yoruba phrase "oluku mi" which is interpreted as my friend. The Yoruba slaves that were

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<sup>56</sup> "Obá," *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*. Edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Web. <<http://www.oxfordaasc.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/article/opr/t0002/e2975>>.

brought to Cuba from the fallen Oyo Empire were then widely regarded as Lucumí.<sup>57</sup> The *cabildos de nación*, or *cabildos*, were ethnic grouping of African slaves in Cuba.

When Orisha devotees began to reestablish their traditional practices in colonial Cuba, they were not able to set up the kinds of communities they had known in Africa. Instead, they used the societal forms available to them. Without the foundation of multigenerational lineage groups living together in compounds...Unable to develop their own towns governed by and *oba* and his ministers, they used the *cabildo* system to form their own cultural systems.<sup>58</sup>

The Lucumí *cabildo* as well as their Yoruba traditional religion was able to thrive due to the strong cultural foundation within the group. The Lucumí preserved a significant portion of Yoruba spirituality but the arrival in the New World also led to small but noteworthy adaptations of the original religion.

The noticeable changes that occurred within the diaspora related to the pantheon of gods in Yoruba traditional religion. Spanish colonial authorities were primary Catholics and sought to convert all of the slaves in Cuba to Catholicism as well. The Spanish authorities also imposed baptisms on the slaves and forced them to convert to Catholicism. This was highly problematic in that the Colonials attempted to erase their identities in addition to further subjugating the slaves. This made it even more difficult to publicly practice Lucumí due to the risk of being reprehended by the colonial figures. The Lucumí established private spaces out of the view of their masters to be used as a unifying point to worship and invoke the deities. Although there was a prevalence of shrines in Yorubaland, the Lucumí could not do the same in the New World due to their religion being viewed as a type of fetishism. The Yoruba in Cuba then sought to combat

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 155.

this by establishing Ojubo (place of worship) or Ile Òrìṣà (house of the Òrìṣà) in which certain slave quarters were designated as places of worship. That concept still exists in modern day Cuba because a house can be maintained by several families of practicing Lucumí. This was a shift from traditional Yoruba religion that was practiced in the sacred places of worship such as temples and shrines.

Lucumí then becomes more personalized in which some individuals would not only worship the Òrìṣàs in their home, but would also be independent of intermediaries such as Babalawos. This shift also led to more practitioners having their houses dedicated to the worship of Òrìṣàs as opposed to a shrine in Yorubaland representing one deity for the entire village.<sup>59</sup> In the Lucumí cabildos, more than one and even up to seven different Òrìṣàs were venerated underneath the same roof with offerings being offered for the deities in the same place as well. From the traditional shift of the establishment of shrines in addition to the multiple deities invoked in the Òrìṣà houses, it would be easy to view the Lucumí as shifting away from the traditions of the Yorubaland. That was certainly not the case in that culture can change due to the circumstances surrounding individuals. “The flexibility of the Yoruba-speaking peoples in Cuba enables them to make the changes necessary to continue their worship of the Orisha in a new and oppressive culture environment.”<sup>60</sup> The Yoruba in the New World did not have the freedom to freely practice as they did in Yorubaland.

Although the Ifa divination coupled with the Opele divination method were seen as primary forms of invoking Orunmila and acquiring information, there began to be a stronger shift towards the Erindinlogun system. The erindinlogun, or the diloggún, as it is colloquially known in Cuba is a system that employs sixteen cowrie shells as opposed to the Ifa divination

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<sup>59</sup> J. Omoṣade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Ann Clark. *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), p. 155.

system that used sixteen sacred palm nuts. Although sixteen shells are actually cast during the divination process, there are actually eighteen to twenty-one shells in the whole set due to different Òrìṣàs requiring different amounts of shells. The priest<sup>61</sup> holds the shells in his hands before proceeding to ask the divinity questions for his clients. After the priest asks the questions, he throws the shell onto a divining tray and the number of shells facing up correlates to an Odu which can then be interpreted by the priest.<sup>62</sup> The popularity of the erindinlogun over the Ifa divination system could be attributed to the fact that invoking Orunmila through Ifa can only be done by male high priests. Women are barred from becoming Babalawos in the Ifa divination system as opposed to the erindinlogun system that can be employed by both male and female high priests. The diloggún system is also used principally by certain divinities to communicate with the priests such as Changó (Sango), Yemayá (Yemoja), and Ochún (Osun).<sup>63</sup> These divinities are also more popular in the Americas which another reason why one divination system is preferred over the other. Invoking the power of the deities would not be possible without understanding how the arrival of the Lucumí to the New World slowly shifted how certain Òrìṣàs are viewed.

While the names of the Yoruba pantheon of Gods have been transformed in Cuba due to the influence of the Spanish language, influence of Yoruba culture was never erased despite incorporating new elements into the religion. The Spanish Conquistadors and colonial authorities did not allow African slaves to freely practice their religion as Catholicism was seen as the official and only path towards God. This made it difficult for the Lucumí slaves to freely and openly practice their religion without being persecuted. Instead of abandoning their roots in the

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<sup>61</sup> The priest described here is an Olorisha (also known as a Santería or Santería) as opposed to the Babalawo in the Ifa divination system. An Olorisha is the practitioner of Orisha.

<sup>62</sup>Eugenio Matibag, *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience: Cultural Reflections in Narrative* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 75.



New World, the slaves decided to subvert the orders of the colonial authorities by practicing both religions simultaneously.

It has been argued that the Lucumí spirituality was forced to be religiously syncretic with Catholicism as a means for the slaves to survive. Although syncretism can be defined as the combination of different beliefs<sup>64</sup>, the early Cuban Yoruba did not necessarily combine Yoruba traditional religion with Catholicism. A new religion was not created in Colonial Cuba, instead the influence of the Yoruba allowed for preservation of religion while allowing the slaves to practice the Catholicism that was forced onto them by the Spanish colonial authorities. David Lindelfeld described the simultaneous practice of Yoruba religion and Catholicism as well as the extent to which the former did not become the latter during slavery in Colonial Cuba:

It is popular for the African-derived religion retained its integrity. The corresponding saints are there almost as an afterthought: the reasons for their inclusion have less to do with their significance within Catholicism than with their association to a significant Yoruba belief or myth.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps against this background have scholars<sup>66</sup> have elected to categorize Lucumí as a form of religious syncretism to that occurred in the Caribbean but it would be a misnomer to identify it that way. The influence of the Yoruba was not diminished by the existence of Catholicism; rather, it thrived through careful preservation of Yoruba religion through oral tradition in the Cuban *cabildos*. The coexistence of the forced practice of Catholicism as well as the worshipping of the Yoruba pantheon of Gods can be found in the association of Catholic saints to Orishas in the Lucumí religion in Cuba. The identities of saints with Òrìṣàs was not

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<sup>64</sup> “Syncretism.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d.

<sup>65</sup> David Lindelfeld, “Syncretism,” *World History Connected* 4.1 (2006): 16 pars. 8 Nov. 2016 <<http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/4.1/lindenfeld.html>>.

<sup>66</sup> An example of this occurrence can be found in Michael R. Hall, “Santería.” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*. F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo, eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Web.

necessarily chosen for the close characteristics between deities and saints, but they were chosen due to the iconography.<sup>67</sup> The specific colors used to represent the saints in the Catholic Church had to correspond to the colors that were worn by the Òrìṣàs and certain details such as the instruments the saint is carrying could correspond to the materials used by a specific divinity. The gender of the saints did not have to match the gender of the Òrìṣà because exact physical characteristics were not as important as iconographic elements.<sup>68</sup> This will further be examined by a few Òrìṣà examples that are popularly venerated in Cuban Lucumí.

Although iconography could be interpreted as a significant influence of Catholicism in the association of Catholic saints to Lucumí, it would be false to state that. The influence of the Yoruba in the New World was very strong and the forced Catholicism on the Yoruba slaves did not result in the desertion of their traditional religion. It only resulted in the masking of their religion by using venerated Catholic saints, process known as religious syncretism. The knowledge about the pantheon of Òrìṣàs was well preserved through oral tradition in the Americas.

Adherents to Lucumí as opposed to practitioners of Yoruba traditional religion in the Bight of Benin do not venerate all of the deities. In Yorubaland, over 400 deities are worshipped in their specific village and town but the Lucumí worship less than fifty of those deities in Cuba. This is due to the fact that there were stronger associations with popular deities such as Changó, Elegguá, Oshún, or Yemayá. There have been transformations of certain characteristics and functions of the Òrìṣàs within Cuban Lucumí.

For example, one of the primordial deities, Esu, was the messenger god between Olodumare and the priests and he also helped deliver ebo to the other gods. In Lucumí, Esu is

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<sup>67</sup> Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), p. 148.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

sometimes interpreted as two separate deities—Esu and Eleggua. This separation does not appear in Yoruba land but the practitioners of Lucumí associated Eleggua with a higher status on the hierarchical levels within the Yoruba pantheon. Esu is viewed as a more erratic and intimidating Òrìṣà while Eleggua is seen as the owner of crossroads and door who possesses the key to change an individual's fate. For the most part, Esu is just interpreted as a singular entity, Eleggua, in the New World. As with other Òrìṣàs in the world, Esu is also identified with Catholic saints. His Catholic saint corresponds to Niña de Atocha<sup>69</sup> and his corresponding colors are red, black, and white<sup>70</sup> are they directly relate to his patron saint iconography.

Other examples of transformations from Yorubaland to Cuban Lucumí can be seen in Yemoja (Yemayá) and Osun (Oshún). Oshún is no longer the Òrìṣà of the Osun River but she is now the Òrìṣà of all fresh water in Cuba. She is identified with Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre and her corresponding color is yellow.<sup>71</sup> Her attributes of beauty and love and greatly emphasized in Lucumí and she has gathered a significant following within practitioners. Yemajá characteristics were also transformed. Yemajá is no longer associated with rivers in the Lucumí interpretation of Yoruba spirituality; instead, her attributes were modified to be the maternal Òrìṣà goddess of the seas.<sup>72</sup> Although some attributes of the Òrìṣàs changed over time since the Yoruba arrived in the New World, Yoruba spirituality was nevertheless well preserved Cuba as well as Brazil

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<sup>69</sup> George Brandon, *Santería from Africa to the New World* (Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 77.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> Christine Ayorinde. "Santería in Cuba," In Falola and Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 209-230.

## Brazil

Yoruba slaves that were forcibly displaced in Brazil had to navigate their new identities in the New World. They were collectively referred to as Nagô in the state of Bahia as well as surrounding states.<sup>73</sup> The manifestation of Yoruba religion among the Nagô resulted in the formation of Candomblé in the state of Bahia. The word Candomblé means “to dance in honor of the gods” and it is a direct reference to the worship of the Yoruba Òrìṣàs that predominantly occurred in the state of Bahia. Due to the importance of Bahia in the transatlantic slave trade, the city has been attributed to helping preserve Yoruba identity in the New World due to the sheer volume of slaves that arrived from the Bight of Benin to Bahia.

In relations to the cabildos that were formed in Cuba as a way of grouping the arriving slaves by ethnic groups, the nações (nations) in Brazil also employed a similar concept. Candomblé spread throughout the colonies and was divided into three primary nations which were the Nagô, Jeje and Angola.<sup>74</sup> The Yoruba diaspora identified more with the Yoruba influenced Candomblé Nagô during the Brazilian colonial period as well as in the present. The Nagô nation was further subdivide into specific groups such as Nagô-Ketu, Nagô-Ijexá and Efon.<sup>75</sup> These subgroups were influential in the interpretation of dance styles in spiritual worship and the possession of a priest through a specific Òrìṣà (Orixá in Brazilian Portuguese). The preservation of Yoruba culture vis-à-vis religion was very pronounced in Bahia though oral tradition in conjunction with the centralized Candomblé Nagô groups.

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<sup>73</sup> Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, and João José Reis, “Nagô and Mina: The Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil,” In Falola and Childs, *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> Luis Nicolau Parés, “The Nagôization Process in Bahian Candomblé,” In Falola and Childs, *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 204.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The first religious spaces dedicated to Orixá worship were found in Bahia and these spaces (*terreiros*) were headed by babalorixá or ialorixá who are male and female priests respectively.<sup>76</sup> Spaces like the terreiros served as points of cultural and religious resistance against the imposing ideologies of Portuguese colonial authorities. Terreiros were sacred spaces used to communally worship the deities and they also served as temples and areas to be used for divination. Divination systems such as the Erindinlogun (cowrie shell system) survived in Brazil and would often be referred to as jogo de búzios in Portuguese. The preservation of these elements enabled the survival of Yoruba traditional religion in Brazil. In order to freely practice their religion, the Brazilian Nagô had to incorporate elements of the patron saints into Candomblé Nagô. This incorporation was similar to identification of saints with Orixás in Cuban Lucumí.

The pai de santo or mãe de santo denote the father of the saint and mother of the saint respectively in Portuguese and these terms are used to signify priests within Candomblé. This shift towards associating designations of patron saints with that of Yoruba pantheon of gods was tied to the repression of Yoruba traditional religion in Brazil. Cuban Lucumí and Brazilian Nagô were often accosted and severely reprimanded by their colonial authorities. This occurred due to false accusations and beliefs that African traditional religions were steeped in witchcraft and the worship of the devil. Although cultural preservation was made more difficult by the imposition of Catholicism on the Nagô, they only served as barriers that the Nagô had to circumvent in order to continuously practice their Yoruba traditional religion. The identification of patron saints with Orixás also occurred in Brazilian Candomblé as it did with Lucumí.

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<sup>76</sup> Asron Myers, "Candomblé," *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Web.

The pantheon of Yoruba gods survived in the Atlantic world but not all of the deities were venerated in Bahia. For instance, Òrìṣà-oko was the deity of agriculture within Yoruba practitioners in West Africa due to a reliance on agriculture as a mainstay for the economy, but her power was no longer necessary due to the arrival of the Yoruba within Brazil. Prayers and devotion towards this deity was no longer widespread because of the exploitative slave labor in plantation systems.<sup>77</sup> Orixás that directly had power and control over certain regions or landmasses in Yorubaland had shifting power designations upon arrival in Brazil. Additionally, Catholic Saint iconography was important in identifying a particular saint with a deity. This was necessary in order for the Nagô to shroud their veneration of the Orixás by seemingly worshipping the patron saints.

Yemoja, known as Iemanjá due to the influence of Portuguese, was no longer only associated with the Ogun river. In Candomblé, she still preserved her status as a maternal goddess but she was now generally associated with the ocean. Her saint identification is Nossa Senhora de Conceição who is the Virgin Mary and she is one of the most widely venerated Òrìṣà in Brazil.<sup>78</sup> Her maternal wisdom and energy is called upon by fishermen and seafarers in order to protect them as they navigate the ocean. Osun, known as Oxum in Candomblé is no longer solely associated with the Osun River located in modern day Nigeria. Due to the geographical change the Nagô had to become accustomed to, the Nagô chose to label Oxum as the goddess of all freshwaters instead of one specific river. She was also identified with Nossa Senhora das Candeias.<sup>79</sup> Oya is known as Iansã and although she rules over the River Niger, in Brazilian Candomble, she is more strongly identified as a ruler of tempests and cemeteries than a specific

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<sup>77</sup> Kasey Qynn Dolin, "Yoruban Religious Survival in Brazilian Candomblé," *MACLAS Latin American Essays* (2001): 69+. Literature Resource Center. Web. p. 73.

<sup>78</sup> Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005), p. 149.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148.

river.<sup>80</sup> She is the embodiment of the fierce wind and she strikes right before the lightning that manifests itself through her husband Xangô (Sango). Santa Barbara is identified with Iansã.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 2. Oxum (Osun) doll sold on the streets of Bahia and illustration of Oxum (Osun) etched in a cloth.**

Interesting to note is the fact that Santa Barbara is the patron saint who is invoked by Catholic adherents as a means to seek protection from lightning storms. The new elements incorporated into Candomblé was not limited to patron saint identification with Orixás, but there was also a slight shift in regards to gender roles.

Analogous to Lucumí, Candomblé also had shifting gender roles in regards to the divination system. The Ifa divination system that invokes the wisdom of Orunmila<sup>82</sup> (Orula in Brazilian Candomblé) is strictly limited to Babalaôs<sup>83</sup> (male high priests) but that limitation

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> This Orisa of wisdom is regarded as Orumilá in Portuguese instead of Orunmila with an “n.”

<sup>83</sup> Babalawos are referred to as Babalaôs in Brazilian Portuguese.

shifted in Bahia. Women were given increasing roles within Yoruba religion and a significant portion of the practitioners and initiates were women as well.<sup>84</sup> Leadership within

Candomblé Nagô was not limited to a specific gender in that women were also capable of invoking the power of the Òrìṣàs. It was not surprising to encounter terreiros headed by female priests. The female priestesses were regarded as Iyanifas (mother of Ifa) and they capable of calling upon Orunla and Esu on behalf of other practitioners. Communal worship was emphasized within the Nagô which not only allowed for shifting gender roles within Brazil, but also allowed for the veneration of multiple Orixás. This led to individuals having a connection to more than one deity; this phenomenon also occurred within Cuban Lucumí.

While the influence of Yoruba religion in Cuban Lucumí and Brazilian Candomblé are evident, it is also apparent that food and the preparation of food are closely tied to Yoruba spirituality. The manifestation of Yoruba culture in the Americas is visible in the gastronomic practices of the Yoruba diasporic cultures in Cuba and Brazil.

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<sup>84</sup> Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (Portland, OR; London; F. Cass, 2001), p. 120.



### **Chapter 3: Yoruba Gastronomy**

*Olóúnjẹ- tó-ó bá kú*

[Translation]: Someone

who has food is worth

dying with.<sup>85</sup>

The Nagô of Brazil and Lucumí of Cuba were robbed of their livelihoods and taken away from their homeland in Western African. The New World was filled with torture and harrowing stories of slave masters abusing slaves through forced hard labor and subjecting the bodies of slaves to torture such as beatings and rape. In spite of the suffering that the Nagô and Lucumí were subjected to, they were still able to carry with them the memories and culture of their homeland. Food and the process of preparing food can be sacred as can be seen within the Yoruba and their diaspora in Cuba and Brazil. Gastronomy is a necessary part of understanding the Yoruba because food is linked to Yoruba traditional religion. The religious characteristics of the Yoruba coupled with the specific types of foods unique to the Yoruba, allows for a clearer picture that explains why Yoruba culture persisted in the Nagô and Lucumí communities. The preservation of tradition through oral communication has made it possible for the Yoruba to be influential in the gastronomic realms within the two countries respectively.

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<sup>85</sup> Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). eBook Collection (EBSCOhost). Web. 2 Nov. 2016, p. 134.

## Divination Systems and Sacrifice

Divination systems are central to Yoruba traditional religion because the deities have to be invoked in order for the Babalawo to be able to provide guidance to the practitioners. In *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* by Awolalu, he described the importance and centrality of divination to sacrifice:

By means of divination, man knows what the gods desire; and almost always, divination ends in the prescription of sacrifice...If the situations are unpleasant, men will be required to offer sacrifice to change things for the better; and if they are pleasant, sacrifice will still be offered to retain and improve upon the good fortune.<sup>86</sup>

Sacrifice within the context of Yoruba spirituality is referred to as ebo. Ebo is an offering or sacrifice used to appease as well as continuously venerate the gods. Adimu is a form of ebo that typically consists of prepared foods that directly correlate to a specific deity. Ebo does not have to be food as it can consist of clothing and other miscellaneous items desired by the deities. Only the context of food will be examined in order to establish the influence of Yoruba food within the Americas.

Divination is the first process that occurs before the diviner provides guidance to the client and/or practitioner. Through the Erindinlogun, Dida Obi, Opele and Ifa system, a Yoruba priest is able to employ and seek the help of the god of divination—Orunmila. Practitioners approach the diviner in order to consult the help of the Orisas. Due to the fact that the Orisas ultimately exist to serve Olodumare, they must be offered the correct and appropriate ebo or adimu. If the practitioner ignores the orders from the diviner and ultimately Orunmila, the

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<sup>86</sup> Omoşade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 126.

Yoruba practitioner would have to face consequences. Sacrifice can then be viewed as a means of celebrating the Orisas as well as a means to mollify the Orisas during times of hardship.

Rírú ebo ní ígbeni,      Offering sacrifice brings blessing to the offerer,

Àìrú kì ìgbé ènìyàn      Refusing to do so spells disaster<sup>87</sup>

This further stresses the fact that food is inextricably linked to the Orisas vis-à-vis the worship of the divinities. Oral tradition was careful in preserving how certain foods would be used in preparing ebo for the Orishas. This careful food preparation manifested itself in the Americas when the Yoruba arrived in Cuba and Brazil. Gastronomy has then played a central part in understanding how the Yoruba have been greatly influential in the cuisines that can now be found within both countries. First and foremost is the need to examine what foods corresponding to which Orisa and if the foods had to be slightly modified due to the availability of resources within different geographic regions. Secondly, there is also a need to understand how Yoruba culture was preserved within the diaspora through the power of food.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 131.

Òrìṣàs	Traditional 'Tastes'
Ogun (god of iron)	Dogs, palm-wine, roasted yams, oil, snails
Orunmila (god of divination)	Rats and mudfish
Obatala (Arch-divinity)	Snails, shea-butter, white kola nut, cooked white maize
Sango (god of thunder)	Ram and bitter-kola nut
Osun (goddess of Osun river)	Èfo-Yánrin and goats
Esu (messenger god)	Black fowls, palm oil, and cowries

Figure 3. Orisas and their traditional 'tastes'.<sup>88</sup>

### Yoruba Gastronomy in Cuba and Brazil

The Lucumí *cabildos de nación* in Cuba dedicated altars to specific Orisas in order to venerate them. From Sango (Shangó in Santería) to Yemoja (Yemayá), the individual tastes of the Orisas are well known by the priests in addition to information on how to carefully prepare the food in order to cater to those tastes.<sup>89</sup> The information passed down by generations in Cuba has been retained in the respective religious spheres but it has also been adapted to fit the geographical climate. The same process occurred in the Brazilian *nações* (nations). The Candomblé Nagô adapted similar modes of preparation of sacrificial foods within their *terreiros* (sacred centers of worship).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 163. Awolalu's detailed book on *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* contained the information for the above listed Òrìṣàs. The title of Chapter 9 is "Elements of Sacrificial Rites."

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

For instance, the kola nut (*obí*) is integral in the casting of the kola nut divination system and it is also viewed as a symbol of understanding between people. The kola nut is also viewed as a form of reconciliation with as well as protection from the deities.<sup>90</sup> The properties of the nut also contain caffeine which provided some energy to those that ingested it. Although its significance within Yoruba traditional religion is evident, the kola nut did not exist and was not cultivated in Cuba. The Lucumí upon arrival to the Cuban shores realized that they could no longer use the kola nut in regards to divination as well as offerings to the gods. The Lucumí slowly incorporated the use of coconut into the divination system because of the abundance of coconut. The divination using coconuts employed four cut pieces of coconut instead in order to answer the “yes” or “no” questions. The coconut was viewed as part of the items to be used within the divination system and *obi* which translates to kola nut from Yoruba was now used to refer to coconut in Lucumí deity worship. The diaspora in Cuba then went on to incorporate the coconut in the invocation of deities, as well as in the preparation of food.

Although there was a widespread use of coconut in Cuba, it is important to note that the kola nut is still employed in Ifa divination due to the importation of kola nut to Cuba and Brazil in the nineteenth century. Groves of kola nut were cultivated in states such as Bahia in northeastern Brazil.<sup>91</sup> The kola nut was viewed as a significant commodity not only for its religious aspects, such as invoking Orunmila (god of divination), but it was also useful for its caffeine content that was used for ailments. The kola nut was also incorporated into snacks in addition to the preparation of various kola nut beverages. An example of this process would be the crushing of the kola nut to yield a powder. This powder could then be mixed and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.168.

<sup>91</sup> Robert A. Voeks. *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 26.

incorporated into different drinks. Although the prominence of kola nut in Cuba slowly declined due to initial inaccessibility of the nut, the opposite effect happened in Brazil due to the preference of the cowrie shell divination system over the casting of the kola nut divination system. The use of coconuts within Nagô communities existed but they were not as inextricably linked to religion and gastronomy as was the case for the Cuban Lucumí.

The coconut also attained prominence in Yoruba gastronomy because it was also seen as possessing medicinal properties as was the kola nut in Yoruba land. The water within the coconut was viewed as a cure for colds, as well as a supplement to help those affected by anemia. The priests within Lucumí would often prescribe the usage of coconut water in addition to coconut meat as a cure for various ailments.<sup>92</sup> This led to the incorporation of coconut vis-à-vis Yoruba traditional religion into the foods of the Yoruba diaspora in Cuba. While coconut products such as coconut oil were considered for their properties, another type of oil was widely valued.

Epo is the Yoruba word for palm oil which was a quintessential ingredient for various adimu prepared for the Orisas. The palm oil is native to Western Africa and was widely cultivated by the Yoruba for religious and food purposes. The shipment of palm oil to the Americas was prominent due to trade that occurred in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to regions such as Bahia.<sup>93</sup> The Yoruba view the oil as an ingredient to appease the deities, such as the Orisas that are naturally prone to violence. The oil is typically used during the invocation of the orisas by pouring the oil on the offerings or on the floor around the offerings.<sup>94</sup> The oil is also used in preparation of different types of obè (stew) based on the tastes of the Orisa. The use of

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<sup>92</sup> *The Power of the Coconut and the Yoruba religion*. (n.d.): n. Pag. Web. <<http://www.dominicci.net/7135431-the-power-of-the-coconut.pdf>>.

<sup>93</sup> Robert A. Voeks, *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> Omoşade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. London: Longman, 1979, p. 169.

palm oil was popular because of its unique taste as well as the reddish color that it gave to food. The incorporation of *aceite de palma / azeite de dendê* (palm oil) in Lucumí and Nagô cuisines can be traced back to the native lands of the Yoruba. For example, the Yoruba food called *adún* is created using ground corn flour that is roasted and mixed with palm oil.<sup>95</sup> This food was offered to cater to the tastes of Osun (the Osun River goddess). The Lucumí were able to preserve the preparation of this food through oral tradition passed down by generations. *Aceite de palma* is the preferred oil used by the Lucumí in the preparation of other foods such as *ikuete* (yuca and palm oil).<sup>96</sup> It is also the preferred oil used by the Nagô in meals such as *caruru* (okra and dried shrimp stew).<sup>97</sup>

While palm oil, kola nut, and coconuts can be considered central parts of ebo within Lucumi and Candomblé worship, grains that were made of corn, beans, rice, and even beans were also prominent in the preparation of foods. The grains processed from black eyed peas (*frijol peco negro*) were used in various *adimu* for the Orisas such as *oleku*, *olelo*, *ewadalú*, *èkurú-aro* and *akara*. *Akara* is considered a type of bean cake, bean fritter or even a bean croquette made from black eyed peas.<sup>98</sup> These black-eyed peas are prepared by soaking the beans in water overnight, removing the skin of the beans, and then grinding the beans into a paste. After the paste has been seasoned, the paste is dipped into hot vegetable oil in order to fry it and achieve the crispy shell of a bean fritter.<sup>99</sup> The Yoruba preparation of *akara* that employs the use of vegetable oil is still visible in Cuba by the Lucumí and it is now popularly referred to as *bollitos de frijoles de carita* (or *bollitos de carita*).

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<sup>95</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santeria* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012), p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>97</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), p. 22.

<sup>98</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santeria* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012), p. 27.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

In Brazil, akara became acarajé which is derived from two Yoruba words: akara and je. Je means to eat in Yoruba and when coupled with akara, both words could be interpreted as “come and eat akara.” Akara also means a “ball of fire” and combined with “je” yields the phrase: “come and eat a ball of fire.”<sup>100</sup> The distinction between the Nagô akarajé and the Lucumí akara lies in the fact that the former uses azeite de dendê (palm oil) instead of vegetable oil.<sup>101</sup> This distinction also represents a shift from the way akara was prepared within the Bight of Benin using vegetable oil rather than palm oil. Acarajé also differs from the traditional akara in that the fritter is often split open and filled with other foods such as shrimp. Although the modification of akara by the Nagô slightly changed the taste of akara, the religious connotation of akara remained the same. Akara or acarajé is considered an adimu offered to Xangô (Sango) and one of his wives, Iansã (Yemoja). Acarajé within the context of Candomblé is notably one of the most popular offerings to the Orixá and it is central to Baiana culture in northeastern Brazil. Street vendors line the streets of Salvador and sell these popular bean cake fritters. The fritters are typically prepared by serving them alongside various Yoruba influenced meals such as vatapá (sauce mixture consisting of ingredients such as shrimp, coconut milk and dendê), caruru (okra stew), and camarão (shrimp).<sup>102</sup> The association of Candomblé with acarajé is evident in that a majority of the female street vendors wear traditional clothing unique to Candomblé practitioners. The influence of this Yoruba food on the diaspora is also apparent in Brazilian music. *A Preta do Acarajé*, was a well-known Brazilian song performed by popular Carmen Miranda<sup>103</sup> and composed by Dorival Caymmi<sup>104</sup> which praised the Baiana women selling these

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<sup>100</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), p. 43.

<sup>101</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santeria* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012). Print, p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Fassil Demissie, *African Diaspora in Brazil: History, Culture and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 94.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 33.



bean cake fritters across Bahia. Parts of the lyrics also praised other Yoruba influenced foods such as abará.

**A Preta do Acarajé (The Black Woman Seller of Acarajé)**

Dez horas da noite	Ten O'clock at night
Na rua deserta	On the abandoned street
A preta mercando	The acarajé seller marketing
Parece um lamento	Sounds like a painful cry
(Iê o abará)	(Buy your Moin-Moin)
Na sua gamela	In its usual beauty
Tem molho e cheiroso	Well sauced and flavored
Pimenta da costa	With African pepper
Tem acarajé	Buy your acarajé
(Ô acarajé é có	(Here is your acarajé
olalai ó-	Same age-old one
Vem benzê-ê-em,	Come and have a taste,
tá quentinho)	It is hot and ready)

Nagô abará and Lucumí olelé and èkurú-aro are both manifestations of Yoruba cuisine in Brazil and Cuba respectively. They were both derived from Yoruba oolẹ, popularly known as moin moin, which is a type of black eyed bean pudding. The Lucumí derivative, olelé, is traditionally prepared the same way as akara but the difference between both foods lies in the fact that the bean paste is not fried. Rather, the paste is placed into a banana leaf and steamed with the vapor of hot water. In èkurú-aro, the bean paste is dyed with indigo before it's steamed which results in a light blue color.<sup>105</sup> The Orisha of the depths of the ocean is considered Olokun<sup>106</sup> and èkurú-aro is considered one of the preferred tastes of Olokun and the resulting blue color is due to blue being one of this Orisas color. Abará found in Nagô cuisine is prepared the same way as Lucumí olelé. The difference between both foods is the addition of azeite de

<sup>104</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), p. 43.

<sup>105</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santería* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012). Print, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007), p. 63.

dendê (palm oil) to the bean paste in Nagô cuisine which results in the reddish color of the finish food product.<sup>107</sup> Although black eyes beans were used in the preparation of various adimu in Cuba and Brazil, the grains acquired from corn were also a popular choice.

The gastronomy of the Lucumí and Nagô was not limited to the grains of the black-eyed peas because grains acquired from maize (corn) were also used in the offerings to the Orisas.

Corn was greatly valued as part of the diet of the Yoruba in the Bight of Benin as was expressed in the Yoruba proverb: *Igba dodo li agbado igbani* (corn is the true support of the people).<sup>108</sup>

The Lucumi incorporated corn in the production of adimu within their Orisa worship as a way to continue the traditions of Yoruba culture and the preparation of offerings. Corn flour (*harina de maíz*) is the main ingredient in the creation of eko (*ekó* in Spanish).<sup>109</sup> Eko is a type of food created with corn flour and the consistency is similar to that of gelatin. It is presented as part of the adimu used to venerate various orisas. This food is prepared by dissolving the corn flour in water in order to create a smooth consistency. Boiling water is subsequently added to the mixture and the resulting paste is then placed on banana leaves and left to cool. This adimu is often used within the context of Lucumi religious ceremonies.<sup>110</sup> The Nagô interpretation of the Yoruba eko involves the addition of *cocos secos ralados* (dried grated coconut) and *açúcar* (sugar) and it is called *acaçá* in Brazilian Portuguese.<sup>111</sup> This ebo is also used in Candomblé ceremonies such as initiation rituals and festivals held in honor of the orisas.

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<sup>107</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), pp. 29.

<sup>108</sup> William R. Basom, "Yoruba Food." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 21.1 (1951): 41-53. [www.jstor.org/stable/1156157](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1156157), p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santeria* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012). Print, p. 37.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), p. 132.

Corn flour can also be found in the preparation of funche. Funche originated from the Yoruba fufu but the Lucumi preparation differed from that of the Yoruba in Western Africa. Funche was not based on cassava; instead, it was based on corn flour. It is prepared by cooking the corn flour, adding water and continuously stirring the mixture in order to achieve a firm starchy consistency. The significant influence of fufu can also be seen in foods such as fufú de plátano pintón (or fufú de platano) which use plantains instead. The prominence of plantains was not only limited to fufu because various ebo of the orisas required plantains in the preparation of the offering.



**Figure 4. Ripe plantains (ogede/oguede).**

The Yoruba and Lucumí word for plantains are respectively known as ogede and ogedede. Plantains were widely eaten by the Yoruba and considered to be a huge part of their diet.<sup>112</sup> Plantains can be manipulated in different ways such as boiling it, mashing it (as was done in order to create the aforementioned fufu), and frying it. In the context of Yoruba spirituality in Cuba, ogedede was fundamental in the offerings to appease the god of thunder—Shangó.<sup>113</sup> The

<sup>112</sup> William R. Bascom, “Yoruba Food.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 21.1 (1951): 41–53. [www.jstor.org/stable/1156157](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1156157), p. 45.

<sup>113</sup> Shangó is the Spanish interpretation of the Yoruba deity name—Sango. Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santería* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012), p. 46.

oguede is placed in a position that renders it hanging and the customary prayers are subsequently recited.<sup>114</sup> The oguede also suits the taste of Yemayá in that she preferred to have the plantains fried and offered as adimu towards her by her followers<sup>115</sup>.The influence of the Yoruba has manifested itself in various foods prepared by the diaspora in Cuba. For example, tostones are fried plantains that are essentially fried twice. This meal is prepared by cutting the skinned plantain into even sections then processing to fry the plantain for a couple of minutes. The plantain is later removed and pressed in order to flatten it. After that step, the plantain is once again fried to result in the finished product of tostones. This product is similar to that of the Yoruba dodo from Western Africa. The preparation was different in that tostones are fried twice but dodo and tostones are quite similar. Mariquitas also come from oguede and they are considered fried plantain chips and are also used as ebo for various Orisas such as Olokun and Yemayá. While fruits such as the plantains were popular, vegetables were also essential parts of offerings to the gods.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Yemayá is the Spanish interpretation of the Yoruba deity name—Yemoja. Ibid., 38.



**Figure 5. African White Yam**  
(ñame/inhame)

Edible tubers such as mandioca (eng/yor: cassava/gbaguda), ñame (eng/yor: white yam/isu), malanga (eng/yor: cocoyam/isu koko) are often presented as offerings to the Orisa. The tubers are also processed into flour such as elubo (yam flour), lafun (cassava flour). Interesting to note is the fact that cassava was originally introduced to the Bight of Benin by Portuguese traders but it was later made into a significant part of Yoruba culture through diet. Although cassava is used in various dishes, yams are actually considered one of the more popular starchy tubers and its flour is used in the creation of amala and obe ila. Amala is the Yoruba word for yam flour that has been cooked and obe ila are the Yoruba words for okra stew. Okra was introduced along with the pairing of both of these foods leads to the creation of an ebo for Shangó (Sango).<sup>116</sup> This ebo known by the Lucumi as amalá-ailá was considered a favorite offering to Shangó and it was offered when a Yoruba/Lucumi practitioner sought help from the powerful god.<sup>117</sup> The name of this dish as well as its central ingredient (yam flour) has transformed over time. The dish is now colloquially regarded as amalá con quimbombó in several parts of Cuba and the yam flour has

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<sup>116</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santeria* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012), p. 24.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

been replaced by cornmeal.<sup>118</sup> Although the ingredient changed, this meal is still widely regarded as ebo within the cabildo context in Cuban Lucumí. Variations of this Yoruba meal can be seen in the diaspora in foods such as arroz con quimbombó (rice with okra) or even plátanos con quimbombo (plantains with okra).

The Candomblé Nagô of Brazil also incorporated inhame (yam) into the offerings to the orisas. The Nago interpretation of amalá differs from the amalá served to the god of thunder. The amalá prepared as ebo in Candomblé does not incorporate olubô (yam flour) but incorporates carne macia (tender meat) and quiabo (okra) instead.<sup>119</sup> The mixture of okra, meat, and dried shrimp created a powerful adimu to be offered to orisas such as Xangô, Iansã and Obá in order to appease and venerate these deities within Candomblé worship. Amalá is often paired with farofa de dendê<sup>120</sup> Farofa made from cassava flour and other ingredients such as onions, garlic, palm oil and butter and it is considered a favorite of exu (esu).<sup>121</sup> The rich yellow color of this toasted cassava flour is a result of the added azeite de dendê (palm oil). Although yam flour is widely used in a variety of offerings to the orisas, there are also other ways to prepare offerings to the gods using yams.

Some of the adimu that is offered to the god of iron, Oggún (Ogun), consists of fried yams and epo (palm oil) due to the full-bodied taste created. Boiled yams were also prominent in the offering towards the god of divination—Orulá (Orunmila). The Lucumi were influenced by

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<sup>118</sup> Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 232.

<sup>119</sup> Josmara Fregonese, Marlene Jesus da Costa and Nancy de Souza, *Cozinhando História: Receitas, Histórias e Mitos de Pratos Afro-Brasileiros* (Fundação Pierre Verger (FPV), 2015), p. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Robert A. Voeks. *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p.77.

iyán which is the Yoruba word for pounded yam. They created their own version of this ebo by boiling the yams, making it into a puree and adding other ingredients such as oil and spices.<sup>122</sup>

From plantains to grains and tubers, it is fundamental to understand how the manipulation of these foods was necessary to advance the worship of the Orisas in the Bight of Benin as well as in the Lucumí cabildos in Cuba and the Nagô nações of Brazil. The Lucumí and Nagô not only preserved the traditional rites within Yoruba religion but they also preserved the cuisines of their ancestors from Western Africa. Oral tradition enabled the preservation of gastronomy within Cuba and Brazil despite the length of time between the arrival of the Yoruba and the formation of modern houses of worship in Cuban Lucumí and Brazilian Candomblé Nagô. The influence of the Yoruba extended beyond the transatlantic slave trade and it has helped shaped the diaspora within Brazil and the island nation of Cuba.

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<sup>122</sup> Marcelo E. Madan, *Food and Adimu of the Cuban's Santería* (Caracas: Orunmila Edition Publishing, 2012), p. 27.

## CONCLUSION

The implications of the cultural influence of the Yoruba is significant because it has not only affected the lives of the diaspora in Cuba and Brazil, but it has also led to the formation of national identities within both nations. The religious praxis of the Yoruba in combination with their diet has allowed for the history and culture of this Western African group to be preserved in the Americas. The forced movement of the Yoruba that began during the trans-Atlantic slave trade was harrowing and led to their mistreatment once they arrived in Cuba and Brazil respectively.

The Yoruba diaspora to the Americas was rooted in the experiences of the slave trade, but the ongoing process of making and establishing connections with an ancestral homeland and continued long after the abolition of slavery. People of Yoruba descent made an ongoing and conscious effort to define themselves in both local and global terms of born of diasporic connections.<sup>123</sup>

The ongoing effort referenced can be traced to the Lucumí *cabildos de nación* in Cuba or even the Nagô *nações* in Brazil. Yorubaland in Western Africa was able to thrive due to the complex social traditions and it also thrived in the Americas because culture was not lost upon arrival in the Americas.

Religion was central to the Yoruba people due to its deep connection to culture. Although the imposition of Catholicism by Portuguese and Spanish Colonial authorities threatened the spirituality of the Yoruba, those authorities were not able to eliminate Yoruba faith.

Sociopolitical ties were intimately tied to the worship and veneration of the Orisas, which made it difficult for the slave overseers to fully convert the Lucumí and Nagô slaves. The Yoruba were

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<sup>123</sup> Matt D. Childs and Toyin Falola, "The Yoruba diaspora in the Atlantic World: Methodology and Research," edited by Matt D. Childs and Toyin Falola. *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, p. 1.



able to preserve their religious beliefs while incorporating aspects of Catholicism in order to evade persecution. Catholic saint iconography became emblematic in Candomblé and Santería as a means of self-preservation but the Yoruba slaves still held their beliefs by keeping the religion alive through communal worship. The involvement of the whole community strengthened the bonds of practitioners. Sophisticated literary corpus such as the *Odù Ifá* was passed down vis-à-vis oral tradition and enabled sacred religious texts to be preserved for generations. This allowed the Yoruba diaspora to be intimately connected to the world across the Atlantic that they were taken away from. The diet of the Yoruba continued this raw connection by allowing the Yoruba to venerate the deities through sacrifice and offerings. The offerings were not only limited to the spiritual realm but were also part of the everyday diet of the Yoruba and the Yoruba diaspora.

The sight or even scent of food can be powerful enough to invoke memories. The preparation and consumption of food can be emotional especially when it reminds the Yoruba of their previous lives in Western Africa. Food is not only served as part of worship but it also served to recreate the spaces that once existed for the *Lucumí* and *Nagô* prior to mass enslavement and departure from the slave coasts such as the Bight of Benin. These foods such as *akara* (*acarajé*) in Bahia have now become a staple part of the diet of Candomblé practitioners as well as tourists to the region.

There are still several questions that I would like to pursue in regards to the Yoruba diaspora. Although Cuba and Brazil had the most Yoruba slaves depart from the Bight of Benin, were there other countries that had significantly less Yoruba population but still had a strong Yoruba cultural impact? How can the problem of syncretism be addressed within *Lucumí* and Candomblé communities? Should current practitioners reject ties to Catholicism due the elimination of the historical need to hide Yoruba religion out of fear of persecution? These

questions cannot be easily answered but they can serve as a springboard to further the current discussions of Yoruba diasporic culture in the Americas.

The implication of this study is to understand that although the slave trade ended in the nineteenth century, the cultural influences of the Yoruba remained and are embedded within the national identities of Cuba and Brazil. These identities have also spread to the diaspora across the world which serves as a testament to how the influence of the Yoruba is transnational. Regional worship of Lucumí can be found within the United States in cities such as Miami due the proximity of Cuba and the US. The influence of the Yoruba on the gastronomy and religious practices of members of its diaspora and non-members alike are evident. The influences serve to further reinforce the notion that the transposition of culture does not dictate its demise. Instead, culture—such as that of the Yoruba—can be preserved over time and space due to the resilience and perseverance of the people within respective cultural groups.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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